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# PERSONAL STATEMENT

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Young planners in developed nations throughout the Commonwealth are entering the planning field at a pivotal moment. In Canada, seniors represent the fastest growing segment of the population fueled by the aging baby boomer generation and people generally living longer and healthier lives. This population growth is creating an increased demand for senior care facilities that meet the needs of the boomer generation. As a result, communities are transitioning to a new era of senior care, one that is playing out with new and interesting care structures and development forms, which present young planners with a unique opportunity to enable sustainable senior care models that support an inclusive social fabric within our communities.

## A CITY IN TRANSITION

As a young planner, entering my third year in the profession within the private sector, I have already experienced first-hand the shift in senior care caused by the aging boomer population. I work in the Canadian prairie city of Calgary, with a city population of 1.16 million. The City is struggling to respond to the overwhelming growth in the population of its seniors (over the age of 65), which is expected to more than double over the next 25 years, from 138,400 to an anticipated population of 287,000. A recent proprietary development feasibility study found demand for 835 independent/assisted living units, and 142 memory care units to meet the current need alone within Calgary.

Calgary is also grappling with an outdated care model. Many of Calgary's existing senior facilities are located on the edge of the City on what was once farmland, which has since been absorbed by suburban sprawl. Seniors moving into care facilities are finding it difficult to secure accommodations within their own communities and many find themselves moving through different facilities as their level of care requirements change. These edge suburban areas suffer from poor walkability and transit options, and many of the facilities are built in a low density and disconnected manner, resulting in significant gaps in the built form and further reduced mobility. All of these factors lead to the physical and social isolation of their senior residents.

In response to the population growth, gap in available accommodations and outdated senior care facilities Calgary is experiencing a wave of non-profit and private development proposals. There is a growing movement among progressive senior care operators and developers in Calgary to embrace an "Aging in Place" model within senior facilities. This approach provides a range of services and unit types that support a continuum of care for seniors, allowing residents to stay within the same facility and community as their needs change. By going one step further and placing these residences in well-connected, desirable and central locations, these facilities can limit social isolation among seniors and enable integration within a greater multi-generational community, which can improve overall health and well-being.

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## **CONTINUUM OF CARE**

I have had the opportunity to be involved in Calgary's best example of the continuum of care model, the "Riverwalk Senior Living" project. While still early in development, the Riverwalk aspires to represent best practices within senior care building design and programming. The building is a private rental facility developed and operated by the Campion Property Group and Verve Senior Living. Designed to accommodate a range of care and mobility needs, it features Independent Supported Living, Assisted Living, and Memory Care Units so that seniors experience a continuum of care, staying within the same community and transitioning seamlessly as their needs change.

The continuum of care model relies on a building form that can accommodate the large areas required for healthcare, amenities, back of house and staff spaces, while also providing enough units to financially support this space. In the case of Riverwalk, the built form translates into a twelve-storey urban tower with only 112 units, alternatively, other operators within Calgary have proposed a continuum of care model development in the form of a multi-building campus or village.

## **URBAN SENIOR LIVING**

Riverwalk is strategically located in an urban setting, the desirable inner city neighbourhood of Mission. Placing senior facilities within established, central neighbourhoods has a range of health and wellness benefits. The walkability of inner city areas encourages seniors to enjoy the neighbourhood and interact with people outside of the care facility and it is much easier for them to access intergenerational social spaces and receive visitors. The central location will also provide a range transportation options to the residents who typically have a low car ownership rate. Public transportation is easily accessible by both residents and staff, and the facility will provide a shuttle service by appointment to support residents. Ride sharing and other new and developing models of transportation are also readily available within the inner city of Calgary. This increased level of mobility prevents seniors from being stranded at their care facilities and provides greater level of independence as they age.

## **YOUNG PLANNERS**

Young planners will be experiencing the impacts of the senior population boom for much of our careers. Through my personal experience with the development of Riverwalk Senior Living, I offer the following approaches to better enable senior care facilities to develop in an inclusive and feasible manner:

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- » **Listen to the Community:** Seniors and their caregivers are the most important stakeholders and know their needs best. For example, during the Riverwalk engagement process we heard from adult children that they often required temporary support as they care for their parents at home. As a result, to meet this need, the operators are considering temporary respite care together with a day care component, which will provide programming for seniors on a daily nine to five basis.
  - » **Provide a Business Rationale:** In the right development context the urban style continuum care model can be both financially feasible and profitable. With precedents of successful continuum of care models being developed around the world, Planners can make a strong business case for both private and non-profit operators. Within Calgary, there is a huge demand for senior care facilities at a range of price points. With Riverwalk the supply/demand ratio is measured at over 3.0, meaning that if three facilities of the same size and unit cost were built at the same location, there would still be an unmet need. On the non-profit side, the City has seen land rich, cash poor operators proposing creative funding initiatives to support their new developments, which has included a land swap program with private multi-family developers.
  - » **Support Unconventional Outcomes:** Senior care facilities have very different care needs than typical residential buildings and won't necessarily fit within an existing zoning bylaw. With Riverwalk we experienced difficulty in providing the necessary services and amenity spaces to meet the policies of the Calgary's current zoning bylaw stock districts. Municipal planners can support innovative care facilities by reviewing applications based on their programming and spatial needs, updating bylaws and policy to reflect the changing senior care model, and providing senior care specialists as liaisons to guide the municipal review team and facilitate the application process.

New approaches to senior care will continue to evolve and planners have the power to enable multi-generational communities that are inclusive and supportive of all members of society. As we transition to a new era of senior care, the responsibility falls to our new generation of young planners to address and understand the missteps of the past and develop a vision for a better future