

Neighbours

OF KINGSTON SOUTHWEST

An exclusive community magazine serving the residents of Reddendale, Henderson Place, Auden Park, Lakeland Acres, and Old Front Road

LESLEY DONALD AND LIZ BIRD:
KINGSTON COHOUSING - A VISION
FOR INTENTIONAL COMMUNITY

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LESLEY DONALD AND LIZ BIRD: KINGSTON COHOUSING - A VISION FOR INTENTIONAL COMMUNITY

By Andrea Voorwinde | Photography by Bryce Murdoch, Bryce Murdoch Photography

This month, we spoke with Lesley Donald and Liz Bird, who shared the story behind **Kingston Cohousing**. This project aims to create an environmentally sustainable, multi-generational neighborhood of 20 to 30 private dwellings featuring shared indoor and outdoor spaces. Currently in talks to secure a land lease at Providence Village, the group hopes to be ready for occupancy by late 2028.

LESLEY'S STORY: FINDING A PATH FORWARD

Lesley moved to the Lakeside District with her family in 2005. Having both attended Queen's University, she and her husband, Joe, were already familiar with the area. They moved from Northern Ontario to be closer to family in Toronto and the United States. Kingston was the ideal choice.



Once their sons were grown, Lesley and Joe planned to downsize from their family home into a smaller, thoughtfully chosen space. “There was no Plan B because I could not foresee his impending death or having to choose on my own where to live out my senior years,” Lesley explains.

While for-profit retirement homes are a great option for some, the high costs are often prohibitive. “Many of us can expect to live into our nineties, so outliving our savings is a real concern,” says Lesley. Beyond the financial aspect, Lesley didn't feel suited for a traditional retirement home and began exploring other avenues.

THE SEARCH FOR THE RIGHT FIT

Traditional apartment living also had drawbacks. “It can be isolating if we find ourselves with incompatible neighbors,” Lesley notes. “And even in seniors' buildings, not all property managers will handle tasks like replacing burned-out ceiling bulbs, which can put frailer tenants at risk.” While living with adult children was a possibility, she recognized that family dynamics bring their own challenges. Lesley knew what she *didn't* want, but struggled to find the right alternative. Then she discovered cohousing.

WHAT IS COHOUSING?

Cohousing is a form of “**intentional community.**” Unlike standard neighborhoods, co-residents self-select based on shared values.

- **Privacy & Connection:** The community consists of individual or family units to ensure privacy, but the layout is designed to encourage daily interaction.
- **Shared Resources:** While each unit has its own kitchen, group meals are a regular occurrence.
- **Collective Support:** Members can choose to share expenses for things like groceries, housekeeping, and caregiver services.

In Canada, these communities are gaining momentum as a solution to the housing shortage. They typically follow one of two models: **seniors-only** or **inter-generational**. In inter-generational complexes, younger residents might assist with tech support or physical tasks, while older members may volunteer for childcare, homework help, or administration.

Kingston Cohousing will follow the inter-generational model. Since discovering the concept in 2022, Lesley has been heavily involved in bringing this vision to life in Kingston.

LIZ'S STORY: THE POWER OF CONNECTION

Liz Bird is equally eager to join the project. After living in Montreal for 25 years, she recently returned to Kingston. Widowed in 2018, Liz thought she had adjusted to solo life, but the pandemic changed her perspective. “That solitude was on a different order of magnitude,” she says. “It made me realize just how isolated I had become.” Liz realized that living alone indefinitely wasn't the healthiest path for her.

continued on page 8



Lesley Donald



Liz Bird



Her first experience with co-living happened when a friend moved in. “I had never lived with someone who wasn’t a romantic partner,” she says. Of course, there were some challenges, but through communication and mutual respect they were able to create a harmonious home. “Having another heartbeat in the house and someone to share the goings-on of daily life was well worth the effort!” Liz says. The experience highlighted not just the financial benefits of shared living, but the mental health perks as well.

BRIDGING THE GAP

Since returning to Kingston, Liz has been house-sitting for her sister while exploring the market. However, the search has been disheartening;



prices have skyrocketed, making solo living difficult. Liz is now looking for a like-minded person to share expenses and chores - a “bridge” until the Kingston Cohousing community is complete. She is hoping to stay in southwest Kingston. If anyone in the neighbourhood thinks sharing their space with another person would be a good way to improve the quality of daily life, both financially and emotionally, Liz would love to discuss the idea over coffee and tea!

TAKING CONTROL OF THE FUTURE

Both Lesley and Liz are adamant about maintaining agency over their futures. “The time to make these decisions is when you are young and healthy enough to do so,” Lesley says. Liz agrees: “If you wait too long, someone else will make the choice for you.”

By sharing their journey, they hope to let people know about cohousing as an alternative housing model. As Liz and Lesley believe, knowing your options is the first step toward making the right choice for yourself.

LEARN MORE:

- **Kingston Cohousing:** www.kingstoncohousing.ca
- **Canadian Cohousing Network:** www.cohousing.ca

We would like to thank Wendy Stephen for bringing the Kingston Cohousing project to our attention and connecting us with Lesley and Liz.