

# Housing shortage stops hundreds from taking jobs in regions

By Ruby Pratkan  
Local Journalism Initiative

At least 700 young professionals across the province had to decline job offers outside of major cities in 2023 due to the ongoing housing crisis, according to a recent report by Quebec City-based, provincewide nonprofit Place aux Jeunes en région. The Estrie, Mauricie, Laurentides and Chaudière-Appalaches regions were the most affected.

Place aux Jeunes supports young professionals in a wide range of fields who live in Montreal, Quebec City, Gatineau or Sherbrooke and want to move to more rural parts of the province, explained director general Frédéric Raymond. "We work with everyone from vocational school graduates to people with graduate degrees. There are needs in every sector, including health, education and skilled trades," he said.

Raymond said the housing shortage was "starting to become a brake" on workers' mobility plans, resulting in "jobs that haven't been filled." An estimated 500 people cancelled their moves in 2022.

"Before the pandemic, we were starting to hear of some [cancellations] but it wasn't a generalized thing," Raymond said. He attributed the crisis to a multitude of factors – inflation, short-term rentals, an influx of newly arrived and temporary workers and rising house prices which lead people who would otherwise buy homes to rent longer. Inability to find a place to live sometimes forces families to put off major life decisions. "We hope they just pause their plans, but timing

is everything, especially with a couple who both find jobs at the same time – they might not have that timing ever again, or not for a long time. It has a major impact on the local economy – jobs are going unfilled and these people aren't spending money in the region either."

Marc-André Lacroix is the director general of the Chambre de commerce Brome-Missisquoi. "We know [housing] is a concern, and there is talent that's not coming into the region [because of it]. We don't know how deep the problem goes," he said.

He noted that some companies had solved the problem by allowing new hires to work remotely, at least temporarily. "If it's a web-based job, the person can work pretty much anywhere, but they don't know as much about the culture of the company and its impact in the community – there are intangibles that you lose. Factory workers can't work remotely. In the case of an engineer, who would need to come on site [occasionally], the company has to pay to put them in a hotel.

Nonprofits in the region have also been affected. Sutton Museum director general Charles Constantin hired a Sherbrooke-based curator. "We ended up giving him a transportation allocation for whenever he has to come here ... advance planning is the key."

Former Sutton councillor Patricia Lefèvre is the director general of the Parc d'environnement naturel de Sutton. She explained that in July 2022 the park hired an activities co-ordinator. "We said we would help her find housing, and at the beginning we were very confident, but we just kept

finding temporary solutions for a few months here and there. After a year and a half, she said it just wasn't going to work. We knew we were going to lose her." The co-ordinator ultimately stepped down and moved to Montreal. Lefèvre said the organization also "lost our chief landscaper" because he couldn't find a house in Sutton for his growing family. The park organization has already decided to shelve its popular day camp program this summer because of fears that out-of-town camp staff won't be able to find housing. "The people working here now are the ones that already have housing," she said.

Lefèvre suggested a variety of partial solutions, including employers "clubbing up" to rent out houses for staff, and cities providing tax incentives for landlords who choose to rent their properties to local workers instead of tourists, facilitating construction of social or affordable housing or group-owned housing trusts, and blunting the impact of galloping property values on taxpayers by applying the new values only to newly sold homes. She observed that municipal financing relies heavily on property taxes, which incentivizes municipalities to build more summer homes – "high-value properties which don't require a lot of services" – than homes for local workers. "Companies, municipalities and individuals can put little band-aids on the problem, but the real solutions will have to come from the federal government," she said.

"We can't destroy the habitat of the chorus frog, but we can destroy the habitat of the local worker – and that's what we're doing," she concluded.

## SADD retreat

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about themselves sharing with the group. Another activity celebrated journaling and each youth was gifted with a journal and encouraged to continue to use it at home once the retreat was over. The group followed a book with exercises on managing anxiety and dealing with emotions. These are just some of the workshops that were held.

"These are youth who choose, rather than spending their weekends at home on their devices or in front of their televisions, to work toward self-growth by putting in the time and effort with their peers to learn and share together," explained Ball.

The SADD group meets every Saturday at the youth centre from 9am to noon to plan activities and partake in meetings where they make decisions and discuss issues on a variety of topics of interest and concern to teens.

"The annual SADD retreat happen thanks to you, our supporters for making it possible with your donations and engagement," Ball acknowledges.

On Sunday as the Retreat wrapped up, Noah Kahan's "Stick Season" hit played and the youth gathered and belted out the words singing... "And I

love Vermont, but it's the season of the sticks..."

Ethan's final comment came on Sunday after the youth had left and the clean up was done. "A BIG thanks to Tess Coll Hostyn the Animator who assists me at the youth centre who was

crazy enough to spend the night with us!"

After working her first SADD retreat weekend Coll-Hostyn said, "It was great and I learned so much. I wish I had had a group like this to join when I was a kid, I would have loved it."



COURTESY

## Clarification

In last week's article, West Bolton property values skyrocket, it was reported that local Michelle Chartrand's property value had risen by 224 per cent.

BCN would like to clarify that the value of Chartrand's land did increase by 224 per cent, while the increase in value for her property as a whole was 98 per cent.

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