

# News | Canada

## Church group pushes for gay-friendly seniors' complex

By SHEENA GOODYEAR, QMI AGENCY

Last Updated: October 20, 2010 2:11pm

Story

Comments

Email Story | Print | Size **A A A** | Report Typo

Share:       +



An artist's rendering of what Spirit Place, a proposed LBGT seniors home in Halifax, will look like. (HANDOUT)

When Hugo Dann's elderly mother faced homophobic slurs about her son from a caregiver, he started to seriously worry about his own retirement and what would happen if he ended up in the care of someone like that.

"I imagined how truly frightening that would be," said Dann, executive director of the Nova Scotia Rainbow Action Project (NSRAP). "I'm advancing in my middle years and looking at going into retirement."

But if one church congregation gets its way, Halifax will soon house a retirement home that is welcoming and inclusive to gay, lesbian, bisexual and transgendered seniors.

The St. John's United Church has been vacant for two years, and the congregation -- which uses rented space and a church house for its activities -- has been working on a proposal to turn it into an affordable LBGT seniors' complex called Spirit Place.

"We are celebrating the diversity of our neighbourhood and excited that our building will reflect the character of the local area," said Louisa Horne, who sits on the redevelopment committee,

St. John's United is an affirmative church, meaning they accept LBGT membership and perform same-sex marriages and baptisms for same-sex couples.

"There's quite a strong outreach program at the church and (the

congregation) felt that they wanted to something that would fit in with that theology and philosophy," said Brian Jay, team leader of the redevelopment project.

While the home will be LBGT-friendly, it won't be LBGT exclusive. Just like the church itself, all are welcome, said Horne.

The plan has been in the works for years, but the committee has recently applied to the City of Halifax for permission to go ahead with the project.

The review process is expected to take about a year.

LBGT seniors in Canada have faced discrimination in elderly homes, with some people reporting getting evicted or being separated from their partners.

Dann said a lot of LBGT seniors "express a fear of having to go back into the closet" when they get older. "These people all came of age before homosexuality was decriminalized and so they have received an additional layer oppression and discrimination," he said.

What's more, many of their families tried to "cure" them of their homosexuality through psychology or even painful procedures like electric shock.

"Those people have a particular apprehension about medical institutions," he said.

While St. John's United works to get Spirit Place up and running, NSRAP is using a \$10,000 government grant to work with existing seniors' homes to make them into more LBGT-positive spaces -- an initiative he says is going very well.

"It's a big issue. Nova Scotia has one of the oldest populations in the country and we are getting older," Dann said. "And I think we have a very large LBGT population as well."

Spirit Place, if approved, will be the first of its kind in Atlantic Canada.

Toronto, Montreal and Vancouver all have retirement homes geared to the LBGT community.

In 2009, the Quebec government spent half a million dollars on an education campaign to improve the lives of LBGT seniors.