

**SENIORS RESIDENCE EVALUATION MATRIX:  
DEFINING CRITICAL DISTANCE AND QUALITY MEASURES**

By

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A report submitted to the School of Urban and Regional Planning in conformity with the  
requirements for the degree of Masters of Planning

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Kingston, Ontario, Canada  
April 2003

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## **ABSTRACT**

This report develops an evaluation matrix for the location of seniors residences. The matrix enables the evaluation of location elements that directly affect the independence and well-being of seniors. The matrix is a powerful diagnostic tool that may be used to justify the location of a seniors residence. Accessibility, proximity to shops and services, the makeup of the local community and safety, are all factors that must be taken into consideration when choosing the location of a home, if we are to have a vibrant, healthy senior population. Of significant importance to the well-being of seniors is the residence's proximity to amenities and the physical accessibility of these. This paper presents an accessible and effective tool that can help seniors, municipal planners, developers and other stakeholders to choose the most appropriate location for a seniors residence (retirement home rather than nursing home). The matrix is a tool whose method is justified from synthesis of research on the physical and social needs of seniors.

Due to the expected boom in Canada's seniors' population within the next 30 years, extensive studies are being carried out to identify key issues that will need to be addressed for serving this age cohort's needs. From this work, there are numerous anticipatory and realized policy initiatives at all levels of government that will attempt to accommodate this surge. The programs flowing out of these policies address the health, economic and social elements that will and do affect the well-being and independence of seniors. Access to financing for retrofits that encourage aging in place, education on income security programs, meals on wheels and home health service delivery are all examples of programs stemming from a broadening awareness of seniors needs.

Municipal planners are not to be excluded in the group of professionals and stakeholders who have inadequate or poor knowledge of best practices in the field specific to locating seniors residences. Experience has shown that the location of these have been heavily determined through evaluation of economic rates of return rather than thorough consideration of what is best for supporting this population's independence and well-being. Rudimentary elements that are essential to meeting senior's needs, such as proximity and accessibility to grocery stores or pharmacies, are often unconsidered by decision makers and therefore are not given necessary consideration when locating a home.

This matrix that results from the research for this paper establishes one tool that is useful as part of a location analysis. Location of a their residence will be an important element for seniors, and is part of the broader question of accessibility to services and the community. In Canada, due to our harsh winter climate, proximity to services is less important. Of the latter will be delivered in a seniors residence or seniors will be picked up and brought to another centre. Accessibility to services will arguably be the most determining factor for a seniors well-being. Here, we wish only to establish a more comprehensive tool for measuring critical distance and quality of the surrounding neighbourhood as regards a senior's need. The matrix is based on in-depth research of measurement criteria that are essential for meeting senior's physical and social needs. It is divided in four main sections:

- Accessibility & Transportation: proximity to public transit, site design and safety infrastructure;
- Proximity of Amenities: grocery store, pharmacy, recreation, post office, shopping centres;
- Community Design and Profile: land use and zoning, safety and security, demographics, noise pollution; and
- Health Services: proximity to hospital, doctors, health professionals and support services.

Each of these sections has up to 10 criterion that are each given measurable sub-criteria each with designated weights. The sub-criteria is measured and multiplied by the weight to give total scores for the broad criterion. Once potential sites have been thus evaluated, they may be compared for their potential in meeting seniors' needs. Using this evaluation matrix to decide upon the location of a future home will ensure that a primary role is played by objective and measurable criteria. The matrix is an essential tool to be used in location analysis. It does not assume perfect knowledge or scientific accuracy yet the measurement criteria and weights give enough scrutiny while keeping the whole matrix accessible and effective.

Three seniors residences in Gatineau, Québec were used to test the matrix for effectiveness and accuracy. The community was deemed appropriate for testing due to its size, demography and economic make-up. Three of the largest seniors' homes in the community were evaluated. Results showed a wide range of scores for each of the residences in each criteria group and sub-groups. The matrix revealed the strengths and limits of the homes and confirmed its effectiveness as an effective diagnostic tool.

The location of a seniors residence may have a significant impact on the inhabitants' quality of life. It may affect their independence and their physical health. For example, the proximity of amenities can support their involvement with their community and encourage their participation in a wider social sphere at an age when limits to their means of transportation may be severely limited. We remind the reader that accessibility issues, such as the quality of snow removal around the site, will greatly affect ideal distance measures. This matrix then is to be used flexibly as a checklist and guide to critical distances. Use of this matrix will enhance the capacity of decision makers to meet the needs of Canada's growing population of seniors.