

# Old University Neighbourhood Residents' Association



**Stay Engaged in our Old University Neighbourhood  
OUNRA General Meeting  
November 7, 2023 at 7 pm  
Harcourt United Church, 87 Dean Ave, Guelph**

**Guest Speaker: M.P.P. Mike Schreiner on  
"Housing: the Challenge for our Neighbourhood, City and Province"**

**Also present will be Ward Five Councillors Cathy Downer and Leanne Caron**  
They will convene their customary Councillors' Corner and respond to residents' questions.

## ***President's Message***

Hardly a day goes by when someone I meet does not raise the topic of the housing crisis and the shortage of affordable housing. We worry about it for our adult children, grandkids or, perhaps, for ourselves.

Mayor Cam Guthrie, in speaking at our last OUNRA (Old University Neighbourhood Residents' Association) General Meeting in May, laid out the problem and the challenge with great clarity and directness. Urban sprawl and the eating up of the farmland that feeds us are not solutions to the housing crisis. We need to intensify within city boundaries, and this includes our Old University Neighbourhood.

Your OUNRA Executive believes in intensification but, at the same time, supports holding onto the wonderful character of our neighbourhood. Our goal this year and last is to foster conversations about how to do it well and with equity.

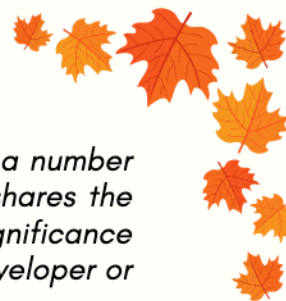
The City and the Province are both involved in shaping housing policy and so we are following up our conversation with the Mayor by inviting our Member of Provincial Parliament, Mike Schreiner, to our next General meeting on Tuesday, 7 November 2023. (See details above)

Sometimes it is easy to fall into the blame game. To blame politicians, NIMBY neighbours, or developers. We believe in hearing all voices – the voices of our neighbours. Your voices. And so, in this newsletter, we will share the thoughts about this problem of one housing developer who has built or renovated many houses in our neighbourhood, and who also has deep roots in the Old University Neighbourhood. We trust you will find them interesting.

We hope you can become part of the conversation on this important subject that affects each one of us and our neighbourhood. Please join us at our next meeting on Tuesday, 7 November at Harcourt Memorial United Church at 7 pm where you will also have an opportunity to ask your questions and have your say.

~ John Lawson, OUNRA President





## **An Interview with Zachary Fischer**

*Zach Fischer is the Founder and CEO of Mezcon Construction, which has developed a number of properties throughout the Old University Neighbourhood in recent years. OUNRA shares the following interview primarily because of Zach's personal history in the OUN and the significance of these issues for all of us. OUNRA does not recommend or endorse any particular developer or business. This interview has been edited for brevity and clarity.*

**OUNRA:** You have a long history with the OUN. Tell us about that.

**Zach:** I was born in the neighborhood. I was actually born at 84 James, which I then ended up putting a second story addition on for the current homeowners. We even found pictures of my cousins during demolition that had fallen between the cabinets and the wall. I have been part of the neighbourhood my entire life.

**OUNRA:** After some years in the industry, you began building on your own. How long have you been building with Mezcon?

**Zach:** I went on my own when I was 25. So, it has been nearly 8 years now.

**OUNRA:** You do projects in the region around Guelph and even in the Muskokas. But the OUN has been a significant focus of your work. How did you choose our neighbourhood?

**Zach:** I didn't really choose the OUN. It kind of chose me to be honest. It started from being born in the area. Some of the older people that knew me from childhood knew I was trying to buy houses and get into that. They gave me the opportunity. The first one I ever did was actually one of my friends from high school. One of his grandparents passed away, and his surviving grandparent was going to move in with their family. They helped me to buy it from them so I could develop the property. In a sense, I didn't specifically pick the neighborhood. It kind of picked me and evolved from there.

**OUNRA:** What sort of development projects do you think are most important or appropriate for the OUN?

**Zach:** I think it's specific to the street because the OUN goes beyond the immediate University area. On Janefield Ave I'm building a project that's more directed towards students. On Forest Street I have a project that's directed towards single family dwellings. It's very specific, I would say, to the street, and what is happening on that street versus the neighborhood. I usually drive down the street and notice features from five different houses, and then think about the kind of modern-day current expectations of new houses. You can't build a 70s bungalow and expect it's going to sell. It's like you're trying to pull features from the older houses that are nearby, but then put a modern spin on them.

**OUNRA:** How about in terms of selection of materials and the look of the property?

**Zach:** My partner Karla does that; interior design is her department. But it depends on whether it is our project. For example, 61 Dean was not our decision. We did what the customer wanted. Where at 75 Forest I designed the structure of the house and what I wanted it to look like. And then she designed the interior and exterior. She has an eye for that. It's bit of a team effort.

**OUNRA:** Under the new zoning bylaw, up to three townhouses can be built on a lot. Do you see that happening in the OUN?

**Zach:** The chances of somebody getting a lot and putting a row of townhouses is probably unlikely. That may not be the best use of the land there because of your initial purchase price. It's hard to make a recovery on that.

**OUNRA:** Are we likely to see more single-family houses in the OUN used for student houses?

**Zach:** I think it's going to happen, but probably more on the outskirts. Like along College. It just makes sense for the students as well, right? Put them on College. They're close to campus and those are the things that should be, in my opinion, supported because you're helping the students. You're keeping those developments to the perimeters, which is the closest proximity to the university. Then they stay out of the core.

