

WHY IS IT SO DIFFICULT TO FIND A LANDLORD WILLING TO HELP THE HOMELESS?

By Margaret Eskins

Executive Director DARS — Dedicated Advocacy Resource Support

A community that talks about compassion must also be willing to make room for it. I have a question that I genuinely struggle to understand: Why is it so difficult for DARS, to rent commercial space in Pickering? At DARS (Dedicated Advocacy Resource Support), we have been actively searching for suitable rental space to expand our services and better support individuals experiencing homelessness, food insecurity and housing instability throughout Durham Region since last April. We are not looking for a handout. We are not asking for free space, discounted rent or special treatment. We are prepared to pay fair market rent, meet our lease obligations and be responsible tenants. Yet, time and time again, we encounter the same frustrating experience. A landlord is happy to show us a property. The conversations are positive. There is interest in our organization, our ability to pay rent and our plans for the space. Everything appears to be moving in the right direction. Then we explain one important part of our operation: from December through March, we intend to operate a warming space overnight. NOT a shelter but a space that saves lives. Suddenly when a landlord hears the words homeless and overnight, the enthusiasm disappears. Conversations change. Concerns emerge. The willingness to move forward seems to evaporate. What initially appeared to be a promising rental opportunity becomes another closed door.

I have to ask: Why? What is it about providing a warm, safe place for someone to spend a freezing winter night that makes us an undesirable tenant? DARS is so much more than a warming space. Our organization provides a range of services that address the very real and interconnected challenges faced by people experiencing homelessness. We work with individuals to access housing, connect with community resources, obtain essential goods, improve their circumstances and regain stability. We provide meals, outreach, support services and opportunities for individuals to move forward. Our work is not simply about providing somewhere to sleep. It is about helping people rebuild their lives. We have demonstrated that this approach works. Our transitional farmhouse has become a functioning home for seven individuals who are being supported through a continuum of care. Eighteen individuals have regulated and managed to make positive changes in their lives. We have helped individuals transition from homelessness into more stable housing situations. We have seen people regain confidence, develop routines and begin imagining a future that once seemed impossible. These are the outcomes we should be celebrating as a community. Instead, we find ourselves struggling to secure a commercial lease. We now have less than a month.

I recognize that landlords have legitimate concerns. They have properties to protect, businesses to operate and responsibilities to their other tenants. We understand that operating an overnight warming space requires appropriate planning, security, staffing, insurance and clearly established operating procedures. We are prepared to address those responsibilities. We are willing to document expectations, establish appropriate safeguards and work collaboratively with property owners. Heck, we will even accept a probationary timeframe.

But there is a difference between asking reasonable operational questions and simply deciding that people experiencing homelessness are not welcome. That distinction matters. Pickering is a growing community. We regularly hear about the importance of inclusion, community safety, affordable housing and supporting those who are struggling. Municipalities, service organizations and residents all speak about the need to address homelessness and for the most part are very positive. Businesses also saw this as a huge issue during the very recent Municipal Election. Yet when an organization attempts to put practical solutions into action, where is support from the very entities that want change? It is easy to support homelessness initiatives in principle. It is considerably harder to support them when they involve sharing a commercial property, welcoming vulnerable individuals into a building or acknowledging that homelessness exists in our very own neighbourhoods.

Perhaps that is the uncomfortable truth we need to discuss. Homelessness is not an abstract social issue. It is happening on our streets, in our parks, in vehicles and in places where people are trying to survive another night. During the winter months, the consequences can be devastating. A warming space is not a luxury or an optional community amenity. For someone without shelter, it can be the difference between surviving the night and suffering serious injury or death. We are not asking landlords to solve homelessness. We are asking them not to stand in the way of organizations that are actively working to address it. To the business community in Pickering, I would ask you to consider what kind of community you want to be part of. One that welcomes organizations doing difficult but necessary work, or one that supports those initiatives only as long as they happen somewhere else? DARS is willing to be a good tenant. We are willing to pay market rent. We are willing to work with landlords, address concerns and establish clear expectations. All we are asking for is an opportunity. There is something profoundly discouraging about being told, through actions rather than words, that the work we do is welcome until the people we serve become part of the picture. Our most vulnerable residents deserve better. They deserve dignity, compassion and a community that recognizes their humanity. And perhaps it is time for some landlords to ask themselves a question: If not here, then where? Winter is coming. The temperatures will drop, and people will once again be forced to find somewhere, anywhere, to escape the cold. Some will survive another winter night. Others may not. While landlords continue to weigh the inconvenience or perceived risks of having a warming space in their building, the people we are trying to help are weighing something far more serious: where they will sleep tonight, whether they will stay warm and whether they will make it through until morning. DARS has done the work. We have built the programs, developed the partnerships, demonstrated the outcomes and put ourselves in a position to pay our own way. We are not asking anyone to carry us. We are simply asking for the opportunity to do what our community so desperately needs. At some point, we have to stop talking about compassion and start demonstrating it. Because a business community that welcomes a charity but rejects the people that charity serves is not a particularly compassionate one. And to those landlords who have turned us away, I would ask one final question: When you lock your doors at night, do you ever think about the people who have nowhere to knock? We do. Every single night.



Don't leave your home security to chance

By Tom Reimer

As Christmas approaches, city streets brighten with decorations, shopping bags fill hallways, and families prepare to celebrate. Behind those welcoming front doors, however, security deserves serious attention. A home invasion can shatter more than property: it can destroy the feeling of safety that makes a house a home.

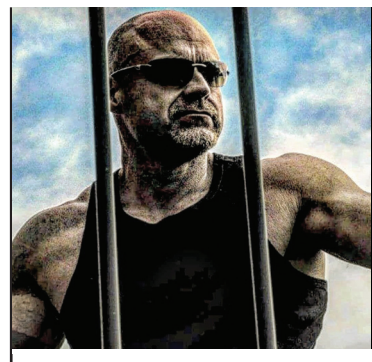
Imagine an ordinary December evening. Dinner is cooking, children are watching television, and someone knocks. The visitor claims to have a delivery requiring a signature. Opening the door without checking may seem harmless, but that moment deserves caution. Speak through the locked door, verify unexpected visitors independently, and teach children to call an adult.

Prevention starts with the entrances people use every day. Keep exterior doors locked, even when everyone is home. Strong doors, quality deadbolts, reinforced frames, and properly installed security strike plates can make forced entry more difficult. Remember the door connecting the garage to the house. A strong lock needs a strong frame behind it.

Windows, patio doors, and basement openings also need attention. Repair damaged locks and secure sliding doors with suitable locking devices. Consider professionally installed security screens or other protective glazing where appropriate. Any protective installation must preserve required emergency escape routes. Walk around the property and look for overlooked access points. Make it harder for someone to approach unseen. Illuminate entrances, pathways, and driveways. Trim shrubs that conceal doors or windows, lock gates, and secure ladders and tools. Cameras and monitored alarms can add useful layers of protection, but equipment needs maintenance, working notifications, and consistent use. Technology cannot replace everyday habits. Christmas preparations deserve their own security routine. Keep gifts and expensive purchases away from street-facing windows. Break down electronics packaging before recycling it. Arrange prompt collection of deliveries. When travelling, have a trusted neighbour collect mail, check the property, and arrange snow clearing. Use lighting timers and share holiday photographs after returning.

In apartments and condominiums, protecting the building entrance matters too. Never buzz in an unknown visitor simply because they mention another resident. Report broken entrance locks and doors that fail to close. Avoid letting unfamiliar people follow you through secured entrances, and involve building management when access controls need attention.

Neighbours can help without putting themselves in danger. Notice unusual activity, share practical concerns, and report suspicious behaviour rather than confronting anyone. Discuss a household emergency plan before an incident occurs. If someone attempts entry or threatens your family, call 911 as soon as safely possible. Prioritize escape and personal safety over possessions. No precaution guarantees that a home invasion will never happen, and responsibility always belongs to the offender. Nor should a seasonal increase in crime be assumed without local evidence. Nevertheless, Christmas is a sensible deadline for addressing weaknesses that already exist. Check the locks tonight. Review who can access your home. Talk with your family. Arrange qualified advice where improvements are needed. The goal is practical: reduce opportunities for intrusion and give everyone inside a better chance of staying safe. Peace of mind starts with consistent, thoughtful preparation.



THE Mr. X Files

By John Mutton

CENTRAL EXCLUSIVE

Karmageddon

DURHAM'S NEW POWER ALLEY

By Mr. 'X' ~ John Mutton, Former Mayor of Clarington

Three Mayors, Three Nuclear Communities and 55% of the Region

The political landscape of Durham Region is changing. And if Queen's Park pursues further reforms to regional governance, the balance of power could shift dramatically.

For decades, Durham Region has operated under a political structure that often places its eight municipalities in competition for infrastructure dollars, servicing priorities, transportation investment and economic development opportunities.

But something significant is happening. The 2026 municipal election has produced new leadership, and three municipalities in particular deserve attention: Oshawa, Clarington and Pickering.

Together, they represent approximately 55% of Durham Region's population. They also form the heart of Ontario's nuclear energy economy. That combination could make them a particularly influential alliance over the next four years.

THE NUMBERS DON'T LIE

Durham Region's December 2025 population estimates place its population at approximately 815,105 residents. Oshawa, with 213,265 residents, represents 26.16%; Pickering, with 120,770, represents 14.82%; and Clarington, with 114,600, represents 14.06%.

Together, those three municipalities account for 448,635 residents, or approximately 55.04% of Durham's population. That is more than the other five municipalities combined.

Now imagine a Regional Council where each municipality's voting strength is allocated exactly according to its share of the population. Under that hypothetical arrangement, the mayors of Oshawa, Pickering and Clarington could collectively command a simple majority. Three mayors. Eight municipalities. More than half the population. That is a political equation worth examining.

THE GOVERNANCE QUESTION

Ontario has shown a willingness to reconsider how regional governments operate, including the roles of regional chairs and the possibility of weighted voting. That opens an important conversation about representation and accountability.

Let's be clear: Durham does not currently operate under the mayors-only, population-weighted system illustrated in the accompanying graphic. The 55.04% figure describes a hypothetical model, not the legal voting strength of those mayors today.

But if the province moves further toward streamlined regional decision-making, Durham should be part of the conversation. And in a population-based model, the arithmetic would be impossible to ignore.

THE NUCLEAR POWER ALLEY

I have long argued that Durham's nuclear industry represents one of the greatest economic development opportunities in Canada.

Pickering hosts the Pickering Nuclear Generating Station. Clarington is home to Darlington Nuclear Generating Station and the development of Ontario's first grid-scale small modular reactors. Oshawa hosts Ontario Power Generation's corporate headquarters.

These are not simply three neighbouring municipalities. They are three communities whose economic futures are closely connected to nuclear energy, skilled trades, engineering, manufacturing, infrastructure and major capital investment.

Think about what coordinated leadership could achieve: better transportation links, water and wastewater infrastructure, housing for skilled workers, industrial development, and stronger post-secondary education and technical training. A unified voice at Queen's Park and in Ottawa could help turn that potential into action. This is where economic geography meets political geography.

THREE MAYORS AND A HISTORIC OPPORTUNITY

The election of Tito-Dante Marimpietri as Mayor of Oshawa and Tom Dingwall as Mayor of Clarington, alongside Kevin Ashe in Pickering, creates an interesting political dynamic.

Each mayor has different local priorities. Yet all three lead communities with direct ties to Ontario Power Generation and the broader nuclear economy. Their ability to cooperate could become enormously important. Imagine what could be accomplished if these municipalities approached major regional issues with a common agenda—not to exclude Whitby, Ajax or the northern municipalities, but to strengthen Durham as a whole. A stronger nuclear economy benefits the entire region through jobs, procurement, housing demand and investment.

WHAT ABOUT THE REST OF DURHAM?

Whitby and Ajax together represent approximately 37.36% of Durham's population. Both remain essential partners, facing their own pressing housing, transportation and servicing challenges.

Scugog, Uxbridge and Brock bring equally important concerns involving agriculture, rural roads, environmental protection and responsible development. No governance model should diminish those interests. But representation and voting power are not necessarily the same thing. Under the illustrative weighted-voting scenario, Oshawa, Pickering and Clarington would be a decisive bloc on simple-majority questions—assuming their mayors voted together and no special voting thresholds applied.

THE REGIONAL CHAIR FACTOR

Durham's next Regional Chair will have an important responsibility to build consensus among municipalities while advancing regional priorities. With enormous infrastructure needs, housing pressures and economic opportunities ahead, the region cannot afford to be distracted by old divisions. The real question is whether Durham's leadership will continue operating through traditional municipal rivalries or recognize the advantages of greater cooperation.

THE REAL POWER IS ECONOMIC

Political voting strength is one thing. Economic influence is another. And this is where the nuclear communities have an even greater advantage. Ontario's electricity expansion, Darlington's new nuclear development, the future of Pickering and the broader supply chain represent investment opportunities measured in billions of dollars. These projects will influence where people live, where businesses locate, where roads are built and where municipal services must expand. Durham has an extraordinary opportunity to position itself as the centre of Canada's nuclear renaissance. But that requires leadership that looks beyond municipal boundaries and treats infrastructure and economic development as connected priorities.

MR. X'S FINAL WORD

I spent years around municipal and regional council tables, and I learned something important: political power is rarely determined by population alone. It is determined by relationships, leadership, preparation and the ability to bring people together around common objectives. But numbers matter. When three municipalities represent more than half a region's population, their potential influence cannot be ignored. The mayors of Oshawa, Clarington and Pickering have an opportunity to establish a powerful working relationship—not simply because of politics, but because their communities share an economic future If Durham ever adopted a mayors-only, population-weighted voting model, those three municipalities could collectively hold approximately 55% of the vote using these population estimates. That is a hypothetical scenario, not today's voting law. But the economic alliance is available right now. And that may ultimately be far more important. The power alley is no longer just about where Ontario generates its electricity. It may also be about where Durham's political influence is heading.