

SAGE Frequently Asked Questions

WHAT DOES SAGE MEAN?

SAGE is an acronym for **Seniors' Action Group** of Elliot Lake.

WHAT IS SAGE ALL ABOUT?

Our Mission Statement is: To defend, advance and communicate the common interests of the Seniors and Retirees of Elliot Lake. Membership is open to anyone over the age of fifty, but everyone, regardless of age is welcome to attend our meetings as observers. We meet the first Friday of every month at 10:00 AM at the Renaissance Senior's Centre, 20 Veteran's Way, Elliot Lake.

HOW DID SAGE GET STARTED?

It was a dark and stormy night... Okay, it wasn't dark and stormy, but on the cold evening of April 12th, 2010 two-hundred seniors protested on the steps of City Hall over cuts to services and program discounts that affected our ranks. Later that night Elliot Lake Council unanimously rescinded their draconian measures, and those hardy souls realized they were a force to be reckoned with. A few months later a few dozen people gathered for an informal meeting at the Renaissance Seniors' Centre, and SAGE was born.

ISN'T SAGE JUST ANOTHER SENIORS' SOCIAL CLUB?

We feel there are a number of excellent social organizations in Elliot Lake for seniors, but SAGE concentrates on advocacy. Although seniors are the majority demographic, SAGE recognizes that this town isn't just about seniors, and that a great number of younger people have also chosen to live and work here. We hope to use the varied skill-sets that we have brought to Elliot Lake from our former occupations to make sure the town, and all its inhabitants, continues to prosper.

WHY DOES SAGE EXIST?

Simply put, every member of SAGE loves living in Elliot Lake – The Jewell of the Wilderness! But we are concerned that there are a number of problems that could, if not adequately addressed, cause the eventual demise of our beautiful town. We can't just sit idly by and watch this happen, so we have banded together to try to find workable solutions to ensure Elliot Lake will survive and flourish for many generations to come.

IS SAGE ATTEMPTING TO BRING DOWN CITY COUNCIL?

Absolutely not! We prefer to work with the various committee's of council to affect positive change in Elliot Lake. Our members try to attend every committee and council meeting and report back to members on what transpired and the implications these decisions could have on the future of Elliot Lake.

WHO DOES SAGE BLAME FOR THE CURRENT \$2 MILLION DEFICIT THAT ELLIOT LAKE IS EXPERIENCING?

While many folks in town are starting to realize that the huge residential tax cut provided by the former council in 2010 may be responsible for much of the debt problems the city is facing, SAGE prefers to focus on the future and help council come up with reasonable and realistic solutions to fix the problems.

WHO ACTUALLY RUNS THIS TOWN?

We are not 100% sure, but in an article last year in the *KITIMAT SENTINEL*, in which our current mayor didn't even receive one word of mention, there was an interesting comment from a former mayor: "You need at least four councillors on the municipal council who can work together. Pay no attention to the others." So, is the dog wagging the tail or vice versa?

HAS RETIREMENT LIVING RUINED THIS TOWN?

Elliot Lake Retirement Living was a brilliant experimental concept, conceived in 1991 by the late visionary Claire Dimmock, formerly the head of housing for Denison Mines, and several other leaders in the community... "To provide and operate affordable housing units, with or without any public space, recreational facilities, and commercial space or buildings appropriate thereto, primarily for senior citizens of low or modest income in a manner that provides improved quality of life and that supports the economic base of the City of Elliot Lake."

There's no doubt Retirement Living saved the town from the bulldozers. But lately SAGE feels that they have not adequately addressed the needs of its close to 1,500 tenants. While several of its apartment buildings have received long-overdue cosmetic upgrades, no attention has been paid to providing insulation or better heating devices for the individual units. At the same time the cost of hydro has risen dramatically with more rate increases forecast for the future. And while tenants are faced with higher heating costs, Retirement Living, a not-for-profit corporation, used the excess (read – profits) from tenant's rental payments to build a brand new presentation centre and a multi-million dollar Hampton Inn. There's no doubt that both buildings are a welcome addition to the Elliot Lake cityscape. But what about the tenants who are struggling to survive?

WHY IS RETIREMENT LIVING SO SECRETIVE?

We don't know! But what we do know is that they no longer allow tenants or townspeople to elect members to the Retirement Living Board of Directors, even though that was a key aspect of the charter they received from the provincial government some twenty years ago... "Three shall be approved by a secret ballot held at a duly announced public meeting of all retirement living program

participants;” And, “Two shall be approved by a majority vote of those persons present at an annual meeting of the Community at large called for that purpose.”

This process was suspended in 2011, and board members are now appointed by Retirement Living. Only “yes-men” or “yes women” need apply. So much for democracy!

Additionally the citizens of Elliot Lake have never seen a balance sheet from Retirement Living. Has it been a resounding success or an abject failure. Is it prospering or struggling? SAGE, and many citizens of Elliot Lake would like to know.

IS THE COTTAGE LOT PROGRAM A SUCCESS OR FAILURE?

Hard to figure out! There’s no doubt the concept of selling cottage lots on pristine lakes within the city limits of Elliot Lake was another brilliant idea. It promised to bring in substantial residential taxes over the long run, provide lots of employment to build and service the cottages, and thus provide an additional and much-needed economic base for the city. When it was officially launched it was an instant success – buyers lined up with wrist bands in front of the Pearson Centre sales office as if they were going to a rock concert. The first phases sold out almost instantly.

Then the recession hit in 2008. Some buyers lost their jobs while others feared they might not make it through the recession. Their priorities changed. Things slowed down considerably. The original covenant, that the buyers had to build within three years, was extended. However, some buyers are still facing tough financial times.

Unfortunately the Elliot Lake Residential Development Commission (ELRDC) has never indicated how many of these lots are in jeopardy of being returned to the city for defaulting on the terms of the sales agreement. So we have no idea what’s going on!

Instead the ELRDC has decided to stumble forward and purchase more lakefront property from the Ontario government on more lakes just as many international economists predict we are headed into yet another recession due to the debt crisis in Europe.

WHAT DOES SAGE EXPECT TO LEARN FROM THE FREEDOM OF INFORMATION REQUESTS WE ARE MAKING AT CITY HALL?

A number of old-timers, people who have lived and worked in Elliot Lake, some since its humble beginnings in the 1950's, have approached members of SAGE with their concerns over several of the dealings between the city and Retirement Living. SAGE has been conducting extensive research into these dealings and we have doubts as to whether many of them were in the best interests of the citizens of Elliot Lake.

We are concerned about the cost overruns for the expansion of the golf course; how the Spine Road property was transferred to Retirement Living to build condos; how Dennison House was sold by the city for one dollar to Retirement Living who then resold it for a million. We sincerely hope we won't find anything untoward and that everything was done above board. Are we out for blood? Definitely not, but if mistakes were made we hope to learn from them.