

All letters to the editor will be considered for publication providing they are signed and include the author's telephone number. All letters are subject to editing.

OPINION INQUIRIES: 3:

## EDITORIAL

# Victoria House sets a high bar for development

We'd like to direct your attention to a building on Laclie Street in Orillia. It's called Victoria House. The seniors retirement residence is in the final stages of construction.

It features a wrap-around porch, charming windows and a pair of turrets at one end, all of which give it a distinct Victorian feel.

We think it is one of the most interesting examples of architecture in the city right now, not because it is a radical design or a bold stroke of imagination, but because it fits the character of its surroundings, actually improving the neighbourhood, rather than detracting from it.

It is not a nasty four-corner block structure lacking all style, thrown up with little or no thought for aesthetics.

Those are the sorts of buildings Orillians and Ontario residents have come to expect from any new development. Disposable, forgettable buildings are the norm.

There is an occasional nod to style, but it is usually so token as to be worthless – a line or two of bricks in a pattern slightly different from the rest of a wall, or a ridiculous peak that pops out of the straight line of a flat roof like a spike on a hospital heart monitor.

The facade of Victoria House, on the other hand, is delightful.

It didn't just happen by accident.

It is a product in part of the city's new Official Plan, which requires new buildings to reflect the character of historic neighbourhoods in Orillia in a designated section which takes in the oldest parts of the community.

The city's director of planning and development, Terry Edwards, has used the designation to the fullest in this case, working with Julian Jacobs Architects Ltd. to come up with Victoria House.

The results are obvious.

On the other side of town, outside the designated heritage area, is another seniors residence – the Leacock Care Centre. It is the sort of building we have become more used to seeing.

It has the unfortunate look of a giant box plunked on an empty lot. It makes us lament that the heritage designation doesn't cover the whole city.

But in Victoria House we have a new standard for development inside that heritage area.

We congratulate the city's planning department for its direction and we encourage the city to continue driving the shape of development in Orillia along the lines of Victoria House.

It's a great start to 2002.