

Aurora calls for a long-term Federal plan to fix housing crunch?

By Brock Weir

Amid calls for more measures to help in last week's Federal budget for more support on affordable houses in towns, cities and regions, Aurora took a step forward.

Councillors last week approved a motion from Councillor Evelyn Buck to call on the Feds to develop a long-term plan to address the needs of young families, and supporting seniors and our most vulnerable citizens?, and attract new workers? to boot.

The high cost of housing is the most urgent financial issue facing Canadians with one in four people paying more than they can afford for housing, and mortgage debt held by Canadians now standing at just over \$1.1 trillion,? said Councillor Buck in her motion. Those who cannot afford to purchase a home rely on the short supply of rental units, which is driving up rental costs and making it hard to house workers in Regions experiencing strong economic activity.

An inadequate supply of subsidized housing for those in need is pushing some of the most vulnerable Canadians onto the street, while \$1.7 billion annually in Federal investments in social housing have begun to expire and the stakes are especially high for Ontario's municipal governments as housing responsibilities have already been downloaded.?

Speaking to her motion at Council last Tuesday evening, she highlighted Newmarket's success in making rental housing a reality through partnerships with the Region of York, where responsibility ultimately lies. Small parcels of land in and around town, she added, would be useful in smaller-scale developments of affordable housing.

I don't favour huge complexes, so if we pass the resolution, we can direct staff to dig up the inventory that was made during the election of all the parcels of land the Town has and the Town owns to see if there is something that would be suitable to offer the Region,? she said. We need it as badly as any other community does and we have done nothing. The province has taken itself out of the business as well.?

Councillor Wendy Gaertner also spoke in favour of the motion, although she said she was not in favour of everything within it but could support it because of the percentage of a person's income that goes towards adequate housing. Councillor John Abel too voiced his support, noting making the Feds aware of the affordable housing issue is something the Federation of Canadian Municipalities urges towns and cities to do at every opportunity.

There is a stigma as soon as we say 'affordable housing',? said Councillor Abel. It means social assistance housing and it connotes ghettos and that is not what it speaks to at all. We want our children to live in our community with us, and they can't afford. The alternative is to rent?and they are moving to cities where there is affordable housing and we're going to lose the opportunity for our young to seek careers in this area. We need to partner with the Federal government because we need them to steer it and create incentives.?