

Council looks at how to promote local needs in National Housing Strategy

By Brock Weir

The Federal Government's National Housing Strategy has established a pot worth more than \$13 billion intended to be invested in the repair and renewal of affordable rental housing, and Aurora is looking to see how they can get a piece of the action to address local needs.

Staff were tasked at last week's Council meeting with drafting a report on options available to the municipality as it concerns the National Housing Strategy.

The move was promoted by a motion from Councillor Wendy Gaertner who said the "principles of the Strategy include ensuring that more Canadians have access to housing they can afford, and empowering local communities to develop and implement local solutions to housing challenges."

Although affordable housing is generally under the Region's purview, Councillor Gaertner told her fellow lawmakers that this was worth a look.

"When I saw this, it just seemed to me a no-brainer and I would really look forward to what staff can find out about this," she said, citing a report from the Region of York discussing the lack of rental and affordable housing, as well as homelessness in the area.

"There are a lot of issues about housing and not having enough affordable or even middle income housing. My understanding is this is going to go over several years. The sooner you get something into that level of government the better, but it something that can be addressed by the new Council.

"It seems to me that this is an opportunity where we can put somebody else's money where our mouth is and try to take advantage of all the funds that can come down from the Federal government to our municipality to help some of our residents. It is true that this is a very rich municipality and a lot of people are not worried about having decent homes."

The importance of the National Housing Strategy was also underscored by Councillor Paul Pirri, who sat on the Board of the FCM - the Federation of Canadian Municipalities, noting an essential piece of the puzzle is municipalities like Aurora earmarking land for affordable housing purposes.

"I thought it was important to note this is something the FCM fought for for many years," he said. "It was announced in November of 2017. Minister Jean Yves Duclos, who was the Minister at the time, who had the portfolio, came and presented to the FCM Board. It was a great announcement for all municipalities across Canada but this type of development is typically taken on by Housing York. From a lower tier perspective, yes, us having land available and informing Housing York that the land is available would be the route to go."

Added Aurora CAO Doug Nadorozny: "Quite often the municipal governments are reluctant to be the first one to jump in on these opportunities because the position has generally been that this should be driven by the Federal and Provincial governments, first and foremost, with the understanding that the municipalities - Regional or county governments - will play a role, but they don't want to match funds with the Canadian government, they want to put in one third funds and get a third from the Province and a third from the Federal government. In my previous experience, municipalities have mostly waited for the feds and the province to get their partnership together first and then the municipalities that come to the table."