

York's Northern Six miss out on Federal housing dollars, but politicians disagree on reasons

York Region's six northernmost municipalities, including Aurora, will not get a share of the \$4 billion earmarked by the Federal Government for its Housing Accelerator Fund.

The fund was announced in 2022 by the Government of Canada to provide funding to local governments to boost housing supply.

Cities and towns, under the objectives of the fund, would have the chance to share in this financial pot to help increase their housing supply, setting out short and longer-term goals on how the funds might be used.

In a statement on Tuesday morning, Mayor Tom Mrakas said the leaders of York Region's six northern communities – dubbed the N6 – would not receive any contributions from the fund.

‘I recognize that with a Federal election on the horizon, politics is part of the calculus of every decision the current government makes,’ said Mayor Mrakas in his statement. ‘But given the enormity and urgency of the housing crisis in communities across the country, I am deeply dismayed by the Federal Government’s decision to politicize such a critical issue as housing. It’s disheartening to see them withhold taxpayer funds from municipalities with strong applications, while seemingly favouring those that align with their political agenda. This approach undermines the genuine efforts of those of us working tirelessly to address the housing crisis and achieve ‘housing for all.’ It’s a disservice to communities in need and reflect a prioritization of optics over real solutions.

‘York Region, one of the fastest-growing areas of the country, is poised to experience significant growth of over 800,000 people by 2051. While the Provincial government has recognized the need for investment in infrastructure to support this growth, the Federal government’s failure to approve funding, especially for the Northern Six municipalities of York Region, is concerning. This decision neglects the urgent need for resources to accelerate growth and address housing challenges in these areas. Unfortunately, with the Federal Government turning a blind eye to the needs of our rapidly-growing communities, it is our residents and communities that will bear the brunt of the consequences.’

Mayor Mrakas did not respond to The Auroran’s request for further comment on what he described as the ‘prioritization of optics over real solutions’ by press time this week. (This story will be updated online)

Aurora’s Members of Parliament, however, pushed back on the idea this was a decision made through a political lens.

‘I am surprised by Mayor Mrakas’ comments, particularly his reference to the government politicizing decisions regarding the Housing Accelerator,’ said Newmarket-Aurora MP Tony Van Bynen in a statement to The Auroran. ‘Six of the ten ridings in York Region are held by Liberals and three of the Northern Six municipalities are represented by Liberals. In fact, Aurora has two Liberal members both of whom are always available, if asked, to support worthwhile investments into the community.

‘The Housing Accelerator has funded projects in 179 communities across Canada. In fact, over 540 municipalities have applied but funding has allowed only about a third to receive approval. It’s my hope, given the initial success of the program, that more funding might be made available. I am certainly willing to advocate on Aurora’s behalf going forward.’

Aurora-Oak Ridges-Richmond Hill MP Leah Taylor Roy offered a similar viewpoint.

She said, ‘the bottom line is we need more housing and I will do everything I can to try and get more housing in York Region.’

‘This is not a partisan issue,’ said Taylor Roy, adding she and her office communicated with Town Hall on this application.

‘This was funding that was \$4 billion, we knew it was going to be highly competitive, it was over-subscribed by \$3 billion. Most of

the applicants didn't get funding; quite frankly, most of them did not," she said. "The Ministry had been very clear that they were going to be prioritizing consideration of the communities based on the relative level of ambition and policy choices.

"Funding was given across the country to various ridings – urban, rural, small, large – and unfortunately the application that was made by [Aurora] – what they put in wasn't seen as one of the more ambitious. I have to say, too, the Minister made it very clear that they would also be looking at policy choices on the part of municipalities and the fact that the Town of Aurora decided not to move forward with the men's shelter that had been planned and proposed for the last three years with the Region of York – that had nothing to do with the Federal government, obviously, but I am not sure that sent a strong message to the people reviewing the application that Aurora was doing everything they could to provide homes to all the residents, in all fairness.

"Everybody has to be working together."

By Brock Weir
EditorLocal Journalism Initiative Reporter