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Regional changes could mean greater incentives for rental housing

By Brock Weir

Housing and condominium developers could find it more worth their while beginning next year to provide more rental units in the projects.

According to York Region Chair Wayne Emmerson, the Region is in the midst of reviewing their new Development Charge Bylaws, which governs the amount of money (DCs) incoming developers must provide municipalities to account for the growth their projects will bring to the community.

Among the changes Mr. Emmerson says he is hoping to see brought forward are deferrals on DCs until their rental units are filled up, something that has been a bit of a hindrance.

?I am hoping we can defer DC costs until [the units] can actually start to be occupied,? said Mr. Emmerson at a recent announcement by Newmarket-Aurora MPP Chris Ballard, Ontario's Minister of Housing, which will see an additional $23 million brought to the Region to help facilitate further affordable housing units among the nine York Region municipalities. ?These are incentives we need for the development industry.?

Of the $23 million in new money, $17.9 million is earmarked to support ?the Region's growing housing supply? with the balance set for maintenance and capital repairs to existing Regional housing stock. But, now that the money is here, who has been passed the ball to take things the rest of the way and make affordable housing a reality in municipalities like Aurora where politicians and residents alike have repeatedly cited it as a problem?

?20 years ago, when we talked about the need for rental housing and secondary suites around the municipal table, there wasn't a lot of buy in from residents about where to locate rental accommodation for whatever reason,? said Mr. Ballard, noting a changing tide in opinion. ?I think we're at a point right now where I hear daily from residents in the area that their children can't find a place to live because there is no rental accommodation. Their parents would like to rent and move to the area and can't. I think we're at a point in time where we can move on and make a lot of those decisions that maybe we didn't before, but now I think everyone is really looking forward to making those decisions and moving some affordable and rental housing ahead.?

Mr. Emmerson said he agreed with the assessment, and noted he too had heard similar sentiments from people in the area.

For Newmarket-Aurora MP Kyle Peterson, affordable housing is an essential in any community as it ?provides a safe space for children to learn and grow, where families bond around the dinner table, and parents find the stability they need to succeed in the workplace; where seniors find the comfort and security of familiar surroundings.?

?We know that when we help low income households access the housing they need, we are doing more than put a roof over their heads,? he said ?We are helping to build a foundation for broader social and economic success for these families and for our community. When it comes to building an inclusive society where all Canadians have opportunities to succeed, housing matters. For this reason, the social infrastructure funding announcement in budget 2016 included $2.3 billion over two years for targeted housing investments.?

Noting a strong National Housing Strategy is a key component of future success ? and that public consultation on the strategy is already underway ? any solution needs to be ?locally driven? but through partnership with all levels of government, he said.

?The Housing strategy is going to run the continuum of housing, anywhere from emergency shelters all the way up to market rent, so there are solutions to be found on the broad continuum and our local partners will be best to advise us of that,? said Mr. Peterson.

To weigh in on the development of a National Housing Strategy, visit letstalkhousing.ca.