

VIEW FROM QUEEN'S PARK: Housing in York Region

By Chris Ballard, MPP
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I was honoured to make an affordable housing announcement recently as the Minister of Housing and the Minister Responsible for the Province's Poverty Reduction Strategy ? and what made the announcement even more special for me is that it took place right here in the riding of Newmarket-Aurora ? a place I'm proud to call home.

It's a community I've had the privilege to represent as both a municipal councillor and as an MPP at Queen's Park. It's also where I've built a life with my family and, most importantly, where my wife Audrey and I chose to raise our three children.

In making this community our home, one thing has become abundantly clear to us. Here in Newmarket and Aurora, we belong to a community of Ontarians that will always come together to help those in need, when they need it most.

In support of that goal, I'm pleased to share that the Government of Ontario is contributing over \$650,000 to Belinda's Place through the Investment in Affordable Housing program, IAH for short.

Places like Belinda's Place take years of planning and countless hours of hard work by volunteers and the Region of York. This impressive facility features 37 apartments, 28 emergency beds and nine transition units. But most importantly, beyond bricks and mortar, Belinda's Place gives survivors of domestic violence a safe place to call home and build hope for a better tomorrow.

Belinda's Place is not just a sanctuary for women fleeing violence ? it's a place where women have the freedom and security to take the next steps in their lives.

Whether it's needed support to find a long-term home or coaching to assist in finding a job with steady income, those who go to Belinda's Place find welcoming arms. When they are ready to leave, they retain access to these same supports until they find a stable place to finally call home. Everyone at Belinda's Place is committed to people first, which in turn will help prevent, reduce and end homelessness in the province.

It's one of the Government of Ontario's top priorities and it's why we have set a target to end chronic homelessness by 2025. Services provided by places like Belinda's Place are helping us reach that goal.

The IAH program is an important component of Ontario's overall strategy for affordable housing and poverty reduction. The investment in Belinda's Place is in addition to IAH funding for six other projects across York Region that are giving our neighbours a place to call home. Our neighbours now have 230 new places to call home at the Richmond Hill Housing and Community Hub and Crescent Seniors Residence in Richmond Hill.

Our neighbours now have 101 new places to call home at Lakeside Residences in Keswick and DeafBlind Ontario in Georgina. Our neighbours now have 60 new places to call home at Hesperus Village in Vaughan and in the community I first called home as a young boy, our neighbours now have 39 places to call home at Kingsview in King City.

As our Premier likes to say, the decisions we make in government truly matter.

Today's investments are ensuring that seniors, small families, persons with disabilities, those suffering from mental illness, and survivors of domestic violence all have a place to call home. These investments also build on more than 142 new units that have been created here in York Region through the IAH program since 2011 for those in need of safe and affordable housing. And they build on over \$4 billion the province has contributed to affordable housing in Ontario since 2003.

Right here in York Region, our government has provided the Region with more than \$98 million since 2003 to build over 1,000 new affordable housing units, repair 66 units, provide 138 households with down payment assistance and prevent more than 1,500 evictions.

While we have made great progress, we also know that there is more work to do. The struggle for shelter has landed on the doorstep of more than just one home, more than just one community, and more than just one province. It will take a national effort to address this need in each of our communities.

The Investment in Affordable Housing program is proof of the good that can be achieved when all levels of government work together to bring families home. I look forward to continuing this work through the development of a National Housing Strategy that reflects the unique needs of provinces like Ontario and communities like Newmarket and Aurora. I feel hopeful for what we can achieve as a community when we all pull together.

And I feel a deep sense of pride about our shared values as a community, values that have formed the bedrock of what 'home' means to all of us. I look forward to continuing the work I've started to ensure communities across Ontario, just like Newmarket and Aurora, will continue to be known as some of the best places in the world to call home.

As always, I invite you to contact me on any issue. Please call my community office at 905-750-0019, or visit my website at www.ChrisBallardMPP.ca. My email is: cballard.mpp.co@liberal.ola.org. I look forward to hearing from you.