

Blue Door moves forward with 'deeply affordable' townhouses at Kevin's Place

'Deeply affordable' housing options are coming to York Region through a new build by Blue Door Shelters.

Last month, Blue Door was 'thrilled' to receive word they had received a Minister's Zoning Order (MZO) that have formal approval to the construction of a 14-unit stacked townhouse development, Newmarket's Kevin's Place, that will serve the 'community's most vulnerable people experiencing homelessness.'

Homelessness, according to Blue Door, doesn't know borders, and this new development will have impacts across northern York Region, says Blue Door CEO Michael Braithwaite.

'We are incredibly grateful for the MZO approval, which allows us to move forward swiftly with this vital project,' he said. 'Our goal is to provide high-quality, affordable housing to those who need it most and this development is a big step towards that mission.'

The new construction will be purpose-built and serve as a replacement to Kevin's Place's current site, which currently occupies a converted single-family home that has stood for more than 100 years. Once complete, the 14 stacked townhomes will offer a variety of accessible configurations of up to three-bedroom housing options.

'In our minds, we all have these imaginary borders between cities and towns in York Region and people will go wherever the housing services are,' Braithwaite tells The Auroran. 'If we do something at Blue Door, it's not so much that this is for Newmarket, Aurora or Georgina'but how do we best serve our most vulnerable in the Region. We have a tiny house that was never purposely built for shelter or housing supports [so] we're going to take that down and the opportunity to put up 14 stacked townhomes'will serve the entire Region really, really well. There's such a need for deeply affordable and dignified housing.'

The new build will help take people off York Region's 'huge' affordable housing waiting list.

It's estimated that the new Kevin's Place will cost approximately \$8 million and Blue Door has been working with all levels of government to secure whatever funding they can.

'We're very hopeful we will get the funding we need and hope to have shovels in the ground to start the building process by the end of the year,' says Braithwaite. 'By the end of 2024, from there it's anywhere between 18 and 24 months of construction. In the meantime, with the program we run, we will have another home that we can run that program out of so we don't miss a beat and don't displace anyone.'

In addition to the government dollars, Blue Door's Kevin's Place project also received a financial boost this summer from Magna International. Blue Door, and specifically this project, were one of the beneficiaries of the 2024 Magna Community Fund, a pot of money dedicated for local non-profits which took the place of fundraising dollars previously raised each year during the auto parts giant's now-defunct Wild West Hoedown.

'Having that contribution to say, 'Look, we have support from our own community to make this happen' from generous groups like Magna goes a long way,' says Braithwaite. 'They need to see that there has been success already and will be more than likely to get on board. I think it really has been a catalyst to keep things going.'

'We own the land, we're raising \$1 million, we put a lot of our own money into getting to a certain point before funders will even look at the project, and Magna supported us by getting that done. We couldn't have done it without them.'

By Brock Weir