

Blue Door secures five York Region properties for housing as part of Land Trust initiative

Blue Door Shelters has secured five properties in York Region as part of its Housing for All Land Trust.

The Housing for All Land Trust was launched in 2024 as a new approach to securing land for affordable housing.

The Trust idea was presented to Aurora Council by Blue Door last year, and Interim Executive Director Emmy Kelly says they have hit the ground running with the first five properties, located in Newmarket and Markham, and this is only the beginning.

Blue Door says the Housing for All Land Trust takes a long-term, community-centred approach by acquiring and holding properties in perpetuity, ensuring they remain affordable and protected from market speculation.

The five properties that have come under the fold are a mix of scattered site acquisitions and long-term lease agreements.

'We're super-passionate about creating safe, dignified housing,' says Kelly. 'There has been a lot of progress and earlier this year Blue Door engaged in a very comprehensive community consultation with funders, service delivery partners, developers, housing and homelessness experts, and what we heard loud and clear was that continued need for housing for all that it's needed, it's needed now.'

'We are focused on building that movement further and continuing to acquire, build, and entertain affordable housing in York Region. Right now, we've been able to acquire some scattered sites. Blue Door is doing their first development and we're looking at potential land sites to continue to engage in more development of affordable housing.'

At the end of the day, the Housing for All Land Trust is dedicated to preserving housing stock 'from being financialized' and is driven by the three watchwords of 'Advance, Protect, and Grow.'

'That's really what we're hoping to do with the affordable housing portfolio in York Region,' says Kelly. 'Advancing' speaks to the new developments that we can undertake. 'Protecting' is acquiring sites in the community that may otherwise be subject to speculation, financialization, and then 'growing' the portfolio of affordable non-market housing for the community. It's the right time for this land trust as well because Canada now has a focus on building non-market housing.'

'Properties in the trust will belong to the community and will be safe from political or market changes. That's really our goal. What we aim to do with the properties in the Land Trust is that they will be kept dignified through the engagement of Blue Door's trades-based employment social enterprise Construct. We're doing a lot of sense-making to ensure that the work we're doing is sustainable and considers all the different elements. Construct will be supporting with property repairs and, at the same time, offer hands-on training opportunities for people facing homelessness and looking to enter meaningful, well-paying careers in the trades.'

'Really what we're focused on doing now is we're primed and prepared to be the convener of York Region organizations, supporting sector collaboration, participation in preparation for a bundled approach to build Canada homes. Bundling is where different organizations will work together to achieve scale. We see successful examples of this model in different countries and even within Canada. Organizations that may even have different target demographics for service working together to achieve a larger development because we know Build Canada Homes is looking at developing at scale, so this will allow non-profits to be ready to act quickly. We know that it's going to take everyone though: Government, state partners, foundations, corporations, developers, local community members, everyone really coming together to get York Region out of the affordable housing crisis that we're currently in.'

The crisis, she says, is 'too big for any one organization' to support and, in their role as Regional Convenor, they hope to build a solid network to make a real difference.

?This is our moment, collectively, as York Region, to build the York Region we all want to live in and one where everyone has a safe, dignified, affordable place to call home. I think that is the art and intent of the message we want to get out and what we're trying to achieve right now.?

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