

MPP Chris Ballard named Minister of Housing



By Brock Weir

When Premier Kathleen Wynne called Newmarket-Aurora MPP Chris Ballard on Saturday with an offer to become Ontario's new Minister of Housing and Minister Responsible for Poverty Reduction, he didn't have to be asked twice.

The hard part was keeping it a secret, but come Monday he and his family were at Queen's Park for his swearing in by the Lieutenant-Governor, sharing in the excitement of Premier Wynne's cabinet shuffle.

?This is such an honour for me that the Premier would have confidence that I can move two important portfolios forward,? said Mr. Ballard, a former Aurora Councillor. ?The Premier, in consultation with others out there, as well as myself, knew my passion for [affordable housing and homelessness] so I didn't give it a second thought. When she called and asked if I would be interested in this new portfolio, I agreed. I think our creating a standalone Ministry of Housing really sends a message to the Federal Government about how serious we are in negotiating appropriately for the good of Ontario ? so there was no arm-twisting required!?

Since being elected to Queen's Park two years ago, homelessness, poverty-reduction and affordable housing are among the chief areas Mr. Ballard has been advocating for. Now that he's steering those portfolios, he says he is eager to roll out legislation he has been working on as a Member of Parliament.

?I know these issues are near and dear to the hearts of many, not only facing people in my riding, but across Ontario,? he said. ?We have got legislation that has been introduced that will focus on increasing the stock of affordable housing across Ontario, I will need to make sure we move on that, that it is implemented, and that we are working closely with our municipal partners. What's really exciting about this too is we have entered a new era of Federal government relationships, so I will be leading the charge to negotiate Federal dollars for Ontario and social housing.

?What I have heard from an awful lot of activists in the community and Town Councillors is the importance of the Province working closely with municipalities and with organizations on the street to deliver the right service at the right time. Working closely and not imposing a Made at Queen's Park solution right across the Province, but really working closely with individual organizations and municipalities to find out what is important to them and what their priorities are.?

There is a strong focus on organizations like food banks, shelters and homelessness services such as Inn From the Cold, and working with youth and, as a result, he says ?interesting affordable housing things? are happening particularly in Newmarket with rental accommodations.

He wants to trumpet what Newmarket is doing within the ministry but also impart a sense he is getting from everyone in the community ?on the need to get it right when it comes to housing, affordable housing and social housing.?

?[We] need to make sure that as the Province's economy continues to grow and we continue to add new jobs that we don't leave anybody behind.?