

New long-term care home will be cornerstone of new Francophone community



A new 160-bed long-term care residence set for construction on Bloomington Road will be the nucleus of a new Francophone community in Aurora.

The facility, which could begin construction as early as the end of this fall, will be operated by Communauté du Trille blanc (CTB), and serve as a central hub for a multi-purpose community serving French-speaking seniors, and will eventually include multiple housing types, a community centre, and five acres of recreation space which will be operated by the Town of Aurora.

The future of the long-term care hub was made official by the Provincial government on Thursday morning, where Cabinet ministers celebrated the transfer of land alongside Newmarket-Aurora MPP Dawn Gallagher Murphy, Mayor Tom Mrakas, members of Council, and leaders of the CTB.

The future of the land in question, 50 Bloomington Road, near Cardinal Carter Catholic High School and the York Catholic District School Board offices, has been the subject of talks on its future use since 2018. There was interest by the Town of Aurora at one point to secure the lands for recreational purposes, but the land was ultimately earmarked for long-term care use.

‘‘This is a momentous day for the Francophone community, not only in the GTA, but across the Province,’’ said Natalia Kusendova-Bashta, Minister of Long-Term Care. ‘‘Today, I am so proud to announce the sale of this government surplus land that will be turned into a brand-new long-term care home. This site will be transformed into a new planned community anchored by a 160-bed, fully air-conditioned long-term care home operated [by the CTB]. A new, modern 160-bed long-term care home, five acres of recreational land on the western parcel, which will increase the level of resident activity while, at the same time, help reduce social isolation, a French village, a campus of care that includes different types of housing, and a French-language hub – a continuum of health and community services for residents.’’

Kusendova-Bashta said she has been working on the file since her time as Parliamentary Assistant to the Minister of Francophone Affairs, Caroline Mulroney, and being on site Thursday afternoon, she said, was ‘‘like a dream come true.’’

‘‘It was been a journey where we have had so many conversations and we dreamed big when we dreamed of this Francophone village, which will respond to the needs of Francophone seniors not only in Aurora but within the GTA. Today, we can say we achieved our dream and we’re starting on a journey of getting this project done.’’

Minister Mulroney, in turn, said the project is part of a "broader vision to expand high-quality French-language service delivery in every corner of the Province."

"Whether in healthcare, education, or training, our goal is clear: to ensure that Ontario's Francophonie can access the French-language services that support their growth and their well-being at every stage of life," she said. "I would also like to take a moment to acknowledge the tremendous collaboration between the Ministry of Long-Term Care, Infrastructure Ontario, and [the CTB] or driving this project forward. People have been talking about it for almost a decade and, at the Ministry of Francophone affairs, we've been trying to move it forward for almost as long. It's such a pleasure to be here at the start of this incredible journey."

Infrastructure Minister Kinga Surma said Province's approach of looking at surplus lands as opportunities for "greater public purpose" was reflected in Thursday's announcement and she hailed it as "a wonderful mixed-use site not only [for] long-term care, but it will also senior residences, which I think is very important."

"Then we will work hard with the municipality on recreational space that will be made available," she said.

This was of particular importance to Mayor Tom Mrakas who said the five acres will be available to all residents to enjoy "and how they are ultimately enjoyed will be subject to a consultation process "in the coming months" to ensure it best serves the community.

But, in the end, he said the project as a whole "is helping strengthen the entire Town."

"Today marks a very special moment as we celebrate the biggest milestone yet in CTB's vision of building a Francophone community for seniors in York Region, and right here in Aurora, and I couldn't be prouder," he said. "CTB has worked tirelessly to reach this point through fundraising, persistent advocacy, and close collaboration with all levels of government" Together, this support reflects a deep understanding of how important it is to provide older adults with culturally-appropriate, language-specific care. It's an acknowledgement that this kind of care helps people feel truly supported, fosters a sense of community and belonging, and improves both physical and mental well-being.

"We all know as our population continues to age, not just in Aurora and York Region, but across Canada, governments, businesses, and community organizations need to work together to find innovative ways to support our diverse and aging population, just as we're doing here in Aurora."

Wrapping up the announcement was Jean Bouchard, Chair of the CTB Board.

Bouchard recalled the first sparks of this "dream" lighting up around a kitchen table in Aurora where like-minded businesspeople came together to "dream in order to offer a better environment for our Francophones and Francophile elders in York Region."

"It's seven years now and it's just the beginning," he said, paying tribute to Steve and Carole Mirkopoulos, who donated \$10 million to make this project a reality.

This donation, he said, was "pivotal" to its advancement.

"It is with great gratitude and also a deep admiration that I thank you deeply, Steve and Carole," said Bouchard. "The book that the [CTB] has been writing for almost seven years is the beginning of a new chapter. We know it will be filled with challenges and pitfalls, but our foundation is solid and full of hope."

By Brock Weir
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