

Town raises voice for federal support on homelessness crisis

The homelessness crisis has taken a devastating toll on families and communities, prompting municipalities to take action.

Following an approved motion put forward by Ward 2 Councillor Rachel Gilliland, the Town of Aurora has recognized the challenges of mental health, addictions, and homelessness which have had a significant and detrimental impact on the residents of Aurora and surrounding communities in Ontario.

"This is about the homelessness [crisis] and it impacts everybody in the community," said Councillor Gilliland at the Council meeting of December 12. "It affects individuals, families, women fleeing violence, youth, seniors, men, veterans and people with disabilities.

"As municipalities, we need help. And we're calling on everyone to expedite this need, especially as the winter weather approaches. The more voices that speak up, the more actions we want to see."

Homelessness has become an increasing prominent issue over the last year, said Councillor Gilliland. She added that she does recognize that the province has made additional commitments to ending homelessness, such as investing an additional \$202 million each year to the homeless provincial program and the housing plan.

However, according to the Federal Housing advocate Marie-Josée Houle, the federal 2023 budget investments fell drastically short, said Councillor Gilliland.

"We really need to focus on tangible financial resources to make sure that human rights are held for everybody," she said.

Councillor Gilliland's motion puts an emphasis on mental health, addiction and those with disabilities. "And this is something that AMO had called on municipalities to speak to," she said.

It was resolved that the Town of Aurora acknowledge that homelessness in Ontario is a social, economic and health crisis, including people with substance use disorders; and that the Town of Aurora commit to ending homelessness in the community in collaboration with the Region, and both the Provincial and Federal governments.

The Town of Aurora also resolved to increase action and supports on the following: commit to ending homelessness in Ontario; and work with the Association of Municipalities of Ontario (AMO) and a broad range of partners to develop and implement an action plan to achieve this goal; provide a long-term financial commitment to assist in the creation of more affordable and supportive housing for people in need; and increase investments in evidence informed substance use prevention and mental health promotion initiatives.

Lastly, the motion resolved that a copy of the motion be sent to the Premier of Ontario; the Minister of Municipal Affairs and Housing; the Minister of Children, Community and Social Services; the Minister of Health; the Minister of the Solicitor General; the Minister of Finance; the Chief Medical Officer of Health; Town of Aurora local MPs and MPPs; the Association of Municipalities of Ontario; and all Ontario municipalities.

Councillor Gilliland noted that the motion speaks to the Town's needs and expectations where all levels of government, AMO, and stakeholders can support and collaborate together.

Ward 5 Councillor John Gallo questioned if the Town could specify an outcome or expand on what the Town can specifically do to address the homelessness crisis.

"I'm not entirely confident that it'll move the dial in any direction," he said. "Because we don't have a lot of say in the province or

the federal government. We do, here, at this table, and if there's something specific that you believe we can do as a Council and as a Town to move this important issue forward. Is there anything specific that you'd want us to do?

?I want these things to have some type of outcome. That's why we do them.?

Councillor Gilliland replied that Council can take a look at opportunities in Town to help the homeless such as supporting new projects, funding, or any advocacy work.

Especially in a time when additional funding is needed, she added that Councillors should continue to use their voice when calling on stakeholders and other federal governments.

?I think the challenge is right now that municipalities, we don't have the funding and we need the help,? Councillor Gilliland said. ?And this is really a cry for help. But it's also our responsibility as a municipality to accept opportunities as they're presented. And if we are presented with these opportunities, we should also reciprocate.?

By Elisa Nguyen