

York Region staff pleased with turnout to men's housing open house in Aurora



Hundreds attended an open house last week for the proposed emergency and transitional housing project in the Town of Aurora.

The open house lasted three hours on Monday, January 29, and took place at the Aurora Public Library. York Region staff were on site to answer questions about the informational displays outlining details about the proposed 68-bed men's housing proposal at 14452 Yonge Street, just south of Industrial Parkway South, co-located with the new Henderson Sewage Pumping Station.

In terms of next steps, the Town's public planning session on February 13 will enable the community to share their thoughts on the proposal.

Kevin Pal, York Region General Manager of Social Services, said he was really appreciative of the community engagement and is excited to share about the project, which has been developing for years.

Many thoughtful comments and questions were expressed at the open house, however nothing that was surprising or new, he said.

"From my perspective, it was very interesting to hear lots of people very supportive of the project, and, of course, some concerns. We expect that. And that's the purpose of this event—trying to work with everyone, to educate and share as much as we can, and to engage with those in Aurora," he said.

Regarding the upcoming public planning meeting, Pal noted that it is an engagement opportunity for residents to share thoughts and perspectives with Council members. He encourages residents to come out and says he looks forward to more engagement.

Also present at the open house was Karen Antonio-Hadcock, General Manager of Housing Services for York Region, who said she too was pleased with the turnout.

One of the most common questions is why the housing has to be built in Aurora.

Based on current growth trajectory, homelessness is estimated to reach 2,100 to 2,300 people in York Region in the next five years. There are also no year-round emergency and transitional housing options for adults in central and southern York Region.

Bellman said one thing she hoped that people will remember is that homelessness continues to be a serious problem and that a shelter is desperately needed.

"This is the right place to put the building, it's the right time to do it, we have an increase in people experiencing homelessness in York Region and the facility is desperately needed. We're confident in the location and I think it's amazing that the community is

coming out to ask really thoughtful questions and to have conversation," she said.

York Regional Police Superintendent for #1 District, Russ Bellman, was in attendance at the open house to speak directly to community members about their concerns. He noted that there was a huge crowd in attendance at 5 p.m. at the first hour of the open house. Also in attendance from York Regional Police was a crime prevention officer and community services supervisor.

A commonly asked question regarding community safety is whether a transitional housing site will increase crime rate in the surrounding area. In short, the answer is "no," Bellman said.

"We look at existing data from existing shelters and see that there is no change in crime," he said. "I think the message is that the public needs to make sure that they are properly informed, that they have accurate information, and that they don't make assumptions based on a lack of information."

Bellman said residents can call the Crime Prevention Unit or visit their website to connect with York Region Police. He also noted the Community Crime Data Portal, an interactive tool where people can do their own research on levels of crime.

For those who were unable to attend the open house, a video talk-through of each of the informational displays is available online.

Updates on the project, along with a survey, is available at www.york.ca/newsroom/campaigns-projects/new-emergency-and-transitional-housing.

By Elisa Nguyen