

?You all have the power to put your foot down and say we want this,? says Regional Chair on affordable housing

Local municipalities all have the power to ?put their foot down? and demand affordable and rental housing units from potential incoming developers, says York Regional Chair Wayne Emmerson.

Comments from Emmerson, who said York's nine municipalities and their representatives are ?the boots on the ground? when it comes to addressing homelessness, came earlier this month at a Committee of the Whole meeting where Council members discussed the Region's draft 10-year Housing and Homelessness Plan.

A blueprint to guide addressing the issue beginning next year though 2035, it's expected to be brought forward for Regional Council's adoption in the second quarter of 2025.

?Local municipalities are critical partners in advancing the priorities of Housing Solutions by enabling development of affordable housing options and responding to homelessness,? said Regional staff in their update to Council. ?Local municipalities will continue to be engaged through 2024 as the Affordable Private Market Housing Implementation Plan, Community Housing Development Master Plan, Homelessness Service System Plan, and the next 10-year housing and homelessness plan are being developed.?

Discussing the update, Regional reps agreed that more funding needs to come from the Federal and Provincial government to meet upcoming goals, but Newmarket Mayor John Taylor said time is of the essence to make concrete steps forward.

?We not only have a housing affordability crisis, but?just people [looking to] survive,? he said. ?I guarantee every member around this table has more people contacting them?who can't figure out how to make it until the next month. The reason I say that is because I think the data is very clear that is presented here, that is presented through some of the workshops we've done in the past, the number of people who are experiencing homelessness is growing? ?exponentially' might not be the right word ? is there a bigger word than ?exponentially'? I think we need to get our heads around that. I know this plan will do some of that work.

?There is a lot we're doing, but I am going to say it?it's not even close to enough in the next three to five years.?

Regional Council, he said, needs to have a ?clear opportunity? before the next budget to vote on the amount of funding York will put towards transitional housing and shelter beds in the next three years.

?When those three years come and our parks have tents all over the place, we know that we had that chance to quickly do something. Is there some logic and an additional recommendation that staff bring back a short-term rapid implementation with housing options?? he asked. ?We have very significant reserves. I have been a proponent of making sure we have sustainable financing going into the future?but the amount of money it would take for us to get?ahead of the game? wouldn't drastically impact our reserves.

?We need to look at it straight in the eye, decide to move it forward or not, so that when three years happens from now, we don't say, ?We didn't see that coming. We didn't have a chance to get ahead of that.?

Emmerson agreed that Regional Council will have to ?step up? at budget time, but said municipalities are the ?boots on the ground? as well.

?We know what is happening on the streets and in our parks, in our municipalities,? he said. ?You can't let the Province and Feds off the hook. We can't. We've got to continue to fight. When developers come to your door, when they look at 500 units to be build, you've got to step up and say, ?Where can we get 30 affordable housing units or rental? You have the ability when they come to your table? it is nothing to do with the Region. When it comes to a planning issue? you all have the power to put your foot down and say, ?We want this,' when you're going forward.?

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