



Community and Health Services Department
Office of the Commissioner

MEMORANDUM

TO: Members of Community and Health Services Committee

FROM: Adelina Urbanski, Commissioner of Community and Health Services

DATE: September 12, 2012

RE: **Human Services Planning Board of York Region Update**

This memorandum provides an update on:

1. The Human Services Planning Board's (the Board) collective action activities
2. Proposed advocacy activities for the creation of more affordable private market rental housing options in York Region
3. Board membership vacancies and recruitment activities

Background

In May 2011, Regional Council endorsed the Board's *Making Ends Meet in York Region* call to action to address economic vulnerability in York Region. The Board identified two priorities for low and moderate income families and individuals:

- Affordable Housing: A good mixture of safe and affordable housing options and programs throughout York Region
- Economic Self-Sufficiency: A strong combination of employment and human services supports

In May 2012, Regional Council endorsed the Board's *Collective Action Plan* and *Baseline Measures: Turning the Curve* report. The *Collective Action Plan* identifies areas where Board members have agreed to work together to advance the Board's priorities and the *Baseline Measures* report is used to measure the community's progress in advancing those priorities.

The Board's work is conducted under the mandate of enhancing the effectiveness and efficiency of human services in York Region through capacity building in the human services sector and collaborative advocacy.

Highlights of Recent Board Collective Action Activities

The Board has made progress in a number of areas:

- **Housing Affordability Discussion Series** – In June 2012, the Board hosted a housing symposium called “Turning Talk to Action: Creating Housing Options for All”, which was attended by over 100 participants from the building industry, government, and non-profit agencies. The discussion focused on the York Region housing context and innovative affordable housing practices from leading experts. The symposium was moderated by Board member Stephen Gaetz, Associate Dean, Research and Field Development, Faculty of Education, York University and Director, Canadian Homelessness Research Network.
- **Housing Hub Model** – The Board is exploring a partnership with York University to research collaborative housing hub best practices.
- **Fair Access** - The Board will present to local municipal councils this fall on collaborative partnership opportunities for municipalities, school boards, and the Region to increase accessibility to recreational and cultural programs in York Region.
- **Mentoring Partnership Program** – The Board is working with Toronto Region Immigrant Employment Council (TRIEC) to expand skilled immigrant mentoring programs in York Region. A mentoring program has been initiated by the City of Markham and discussions are ongoing with the Town of Newmarket and York Regional Police. Under the *York Region Immigration Settlement Strategy*, the Community Partnership Council (CPC) is also collaborating in this effort.
- **Funder Discussions** - The Board is in the initial phases of developing a *Making Ends Meet in York Region* investment strategy to encourage further investment in York Region’s human services sector by key funders. The CPC is also exploring opportunities to align their work with this initiative.
- **Community Results Based Accountability (RBA) 101 Workshop** – RBA is a best practice model for turning results into measureable actions. The Board is using RBA to scope and define tangible results for *Making Ends Meet in York Region*. As part of the Board’s capacity building activities, it will be hosting a RBA workshop on November 1, 2012 that will be open to York Region’s human services organizations. The workshop will be hosted by Mark Friedman, Director, Fiscal Policy Studies Institute, Santa Fe, New Mexico, who is recognized internationally for his work on RBA.

Need for Increased Affordable Private Market Rental Housing in York Region

In today’s economic climate the issue of affordable housing does not receive the necessary attention and funding to provide housing options for families and individuals through all stages of their lives. Municipalities have a responsibility for the planning and delivery of affordable housing options in their communities and local commitment to affordable housing is vital to addressing this. Municipalities do not have the resources to do this alone (Source: ONPHA’s *Waiting Lists Survey 2012 Report*).

Under the Affordable Housing priority, the Board is using a Rental Vacancy Rate Indicator and a Rental Housing Unit Starts Indicator to monitor and measure progress. In 2011, York Region's vacancy rate was 0.8 percent and 1.2 percent of housing starts were for the rental market. As a benchmark, a three per cent vacancy rate indicates a healthy rental market. Although the Region has been responsive to residents' housing needs through investments in purpose built government assisted housing, and in various programs, services, and policies aimed at keeping in their homes; an overall strategic and comprehensive approach to creating affordable private market rental housing is needed. This is an issue that is felt nationally as demonstrated by the Federation of Canadian Municipalities report entitled, *The State of Canada's Cities and Communities 2012*. It will take the mobilization of the entire community, beyond local government, working together to think about, develop, and expand housing affordability options across all our communities.

Advocacy and Capacity Building Next Steps

The Board is meeting in October 2012 and it will be proposed that its collaborative advocacy activities focus on encouraging affordable private market rental housing options in York Region. A number of advocacy ideas emerged during the recent Housing Symposium's best practices discussion that the Board is considering pursuing, such as:

- Hosting future housing symposiums and/or a series of focused discussions with specific sectors, such as building industry or local municipalities, on the creation of rental housing, including secondary suites
- Facilitating exploration discussions with the building industry on models for developing affordable rental housing units in York Region
- Organizing a community challenge that solicits innovative affordable housing ideas

This advocacy focus will support York Region's vision for having affordable housing options that allow people to remain in the Region through the various stages of their lives and is a Council endorsed priority in a number of initiatives including:

- *Vision 2051's* Goal Statement: "In 2051, York Region has housing to match the needs of its residents and workers. Housing choices support affordable and sustainable living, and address the needs of a diverse and aging population."
- *York Region's Official Plan* requires that 25 per cent of all new housing and 35 per cent of new housing in Regional Centres and key development areas be affordable.
- *York Region Strategic Plan's* objective to "support healthy communities through a broad range of housing choices and supports to meet the diverse needs of residents."
- *York Region Housing and Homelessness Plan's* (currently under development) proposed objectives of housing choices that meet our needs and an integrated network of partnerships, programs and services that promote housing stability.
- *Making Ends Meet in York Region's* Affordable Housing Community Result.
- *York Region Local Immigration Partnership: Immigration Settlement Strategy's* priority to "improve quantity and quality of affordable, safe, and stable housing."

The Board will identify which specific advocacy activities it would like to undertake and will report back to Committee and Council later this year.

Membership Vacancies and Recruitment Activities

The Board is comprised of 24 members appointed by Regional Council. Staff changes at the following member organizations have resulted in the departure of five Board members:

- Canadian Mental Health Association
- Central Local Health Integration Network
- Community and Home Assistance to Seniors
- Vaughan Chamber of Commerce
- Toronto Region Immigrant Employment Council

Staff is currently working with the Chair's Office to fill these vacancies. In addition, we are pursuing representation from the business sector and have reached out to IBM who has expressed interest in joining the Board.

Conclusion

The implementation of effective housing policies that create a full mix and range of housing types, rental and ownership options, and affordability requires the engagement and support of all levels of government and collaboration with the building industry, non-profit agencies, and York Region's residents and businesses. The Board is a facilitator of change and, through its capacity building and advocacy work under the *Making Ends Meet* initiative, it aims to leverage the many strengths of York Region in partnership with the broader community.

Adelina Urbanski
Commissioner of Community and Health Services

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Planning and Development Services Committee