



Housing Supply STRATEGY



Challenges and Issues

The development of new rental housing in the Region has been at a virtual standstill since 1995, when the provincial government withdrew its support for social housing development. The private sector has been unable to create new affordable rental housing on its own. Affordable ownership housing has been out of reach for many young families, entry level professionals and human services workers.

- Currently, York Region has a rental vacancy rate of 0.7%.
- Little new rental housing is being built in the Region.
- Changing demographics include a growing senior population, rapid urbanization and rising population.
- Waiting list for Social Housing is 4,800 households.
- 25% of the Region's homeowner households pay over 30% of income on housing.
- 40% of the Region's renter households pay over 30% of income on housing.
- Increasing pressure on emergency shelters.
- Changing face of homelessness, rise in youth and working families at risk.

This is an opportunity to address key housing areas: affordable ownership, rental and non-profit as well as the relationship of housing to transit, human services, our economy and growth management.

Housing Action Areas

Affordable
Ownership

Private
Rental

Non-Profit

Regional Chair's Message

York Region is one of the fastest growing municipalities in Canada. As our communities become more urban and populous, our challenge as a Regional government is to help ensure that the housing needs of all our residents - youth, seniors, single persons, couples and households with special needs - are met.

We recognize the immediate need to partner with others to achieve our goals, including the building industry, government, our area municipalities and ratepayers.

York Region is committed to ensuring that our housing investments enhance the private rental market, as well as meet the needs of households on the social housing waiting list.

Thank you for your input on this document. Together we will create made-in-York solutions that include high quality, integrated housing options to compliment our quality of life.

Yours truly,

Bill Fisch
Regional Chair & CEO

What We are Doing Already

York Region is taking a leadership role in housing. Some of the York Region initiatives that are complete or underway include:

- Designated Consolidated Municipal Service Manager for Homelessness and Housing - 1998.
- Produced Homelessness Task Force Report - 2000.
- Produced the York Region Housing Directions Report 2000.
- Produced York Region Special Needs Housing Report 2000.
- Produced Community Plan to address Homelessness - 2001.
- Owns and manages 1,695 housing units.
- Administers 6,131 affordable housing units.
- Lowered tax rates for multi-residential units.
- Supported the establishment of a Habitat for Humanity affiliate in York Region.
- Linking labour force strategy to housing issues.
- Regional Council adopted the Housing Supply Strategy in June 2002.

Clearly more needs to be done and the Region is committed to co-ordinating an action plan.

Why a Housing Strategy

The need for an increased supply of rental housing, affordable ownership and non-profit housing was first recognized in the Region a number of years ago. Today, many of the Region's major initiatives are linked to the housing supply issue. For example, the provision of a wide variety of housing is key to the Region's approach to growth management. Likewise, housing is very much related to the Region's Transit, Economic Development and Human Services Strategies. Vision 2026 is a further example of a project that recognizes the integral role of housing in York Region's future.

As a Consolidated Municipal Service Manager, the Region is now responsible for Social Housing including the administration of 6,131 housing units. The public, area municipalities and other stakeholders have identified the need for affordable housing. In addition, the business community has told us that appropriate housing for a growing and diversifying workforce is not available. Regional Council has adopted this action-based housing strategy which will help to co-ordinate the efforts of all stakeholders.



What was Heard

In developing this strategy the Region held a Forum and several focus groups, bringing together representatives from the building industry, area municipalities, non-profits and the provincial and federal governments. This is a summary of what was heard:

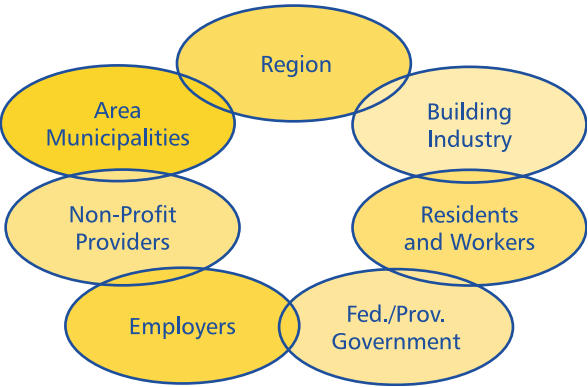
- York Region needs to play a leadership role in the provision of housing.
- Integration of housing into our communities and location close to transit, human services and employment is key.
- Our most vulnerable households will continue to need rent subsidies in order to afford suitable housing.
- Collaboration and innovation are required between the Region, Area Municipalities, Provincial and Federal Governments, Non-Profit Providers, Building Industry, Employers and the Community.
- Continued economic vitality is dependent on affordable housing.
- An effective community education and acceptance campaign is needed to support the development of affordable housing.
- Now is the time for action.

Timetable



Housing Partners

The involvement of many partners is essential to the success of the Housing Supply Strategy. A balance must be found between policy initiatives and investment in order to create more opportunities for ownership, rental and non-profit housing. The range of housing choices available to our residents is increasingly important to the economic health and vitality of our communities.



Next Steps

This Housing Supply Strategy identifies a number of action areas. The Strategy focuses on practical steps that can be taken together with our community partners to increase housing choices for our citizens.

Affordable housing delivery must be co-ordinated with the Region's Growth Management Strategy, Transportation Master Plan and changing urban structure. Critical to the success of this strategy is the support of the community and the development of new partnerships to create affordable housing.

To keep informed about our progress please visit our website www.region.york.on.ca.



Affordable Ownership

The development industry in York Region has built 80,000 new units in the last 10 years. These units provide increasing choice in housing types and affordability. However, to purchase a basic townhouse or condominium in York Region requires an annual income of approximately \$40,000. Over one-third of our households can not afford to purchase a home without some assistance. A range of actions is required to provide more opportunities for home ownership.

- Rigorously implement Regional Official Plan policies, in particular housing mix, compact communities and intensification of centres and corridors.
- Investigate a home ownership demonstration project with area municipalities and the development community.
- Support building industry to develop innovative affordable housing.
- Promote inclusion of second suites in new homes to assist new homebuyers and to create new affordable rental units.
- Strongly discourage down zoning of sites in areas with medium and high density designations.



Non-Profit Housing

There are 7,200 units of non-profit and co-op housing in the Region, 6,131 of which are administered by the Region. Production of non-profit housing units has not kept pace with our rapidly diversifying population. The waiting list for non-profit housing is almost 5,000 households.

- Implement a Housing First Policy to ensure that surplus regional lands are considered for non-profit housing.
- Provide 100 units per year of new non-profit housing through direct delivery by the Region's Non-Profit Housing Corporation.
- Work with non-profit housing providers to identify opportunities and resources to develop new non-profit housing.
- Provide conditional grants equal to development charges.
- Encourage area municipalities to waive development charges and fees for new non-profit housing development.
- Work with landlords to continue the integration of low income households into the community through the Rent Supplement Program.

ACTION AREAS

ACTION AREAS

Rental Housing

The Region has an acute shortage of rental housing units. Only 587 rental units have been produced since 1995. The vacancy rate for rental units is 0.7%. Rental housing is often the first housing unit for most of us and provides appropriate housing for several stages of life.

- Enact a Municipal Housing Facilities By-law to enable the Region to provide incentives to the private sector to help create affordable rental housing.
- Provide 200-500 new rental housing units through a private-public sector partnership pilot program.
- Encourage area municipalities and school boards to reduce fees and charges to support affordable rental housing.
- Promote alternative development standards to encourage affordable rental housing. (i.e. reduced parking standards)



- Discourage the demolition or conversion of rental housing to condominiums.
- Continue the Region’s phased program to reduce multi-residential tax rates to be on par with property tax rates for single family dwellings.
- Work with area municipalities to encourage the creation of accessory apartments in all single and semi-detached dwellings subject to rigorous safety standards.



- Encourage area municipalities to allow rooming houses, boarding and lodging homes in their communities.
- Encourage area municipalities to allow group homes for those with special needs.
- Facilitate the expansion of emergency shelter beds in the Region.
- Work with “at risk youth” to develop a transitional housing project.



Community Education and Awareness Campaign

In the past, York Region was primarily a series of bedroom communities made up of mostly single family residences. Today, York Region is increasingly diverse in terms of family type, household income and age. Providing a range of housing choices for our labour force, young adults and seniors is essential.

- Develop an education and awareness campaign to promote community understanding of the housing needs of York Region’s residents and labour force.
- Create a Housing Fact Sheet to provide basic information about housing in York Region.
- Work with area municipalities to identify “Made-in-York” affordable housing success stories that demonstrate high quality design, community integration and intensification of centres and corridors.
- Work with employers to identify housing needs.



Partnerships

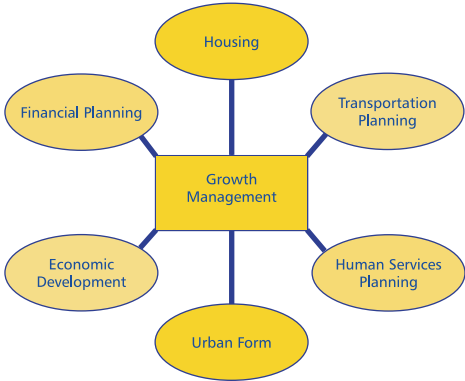
An effective housing strategy requires the involvement of all private sector, public sector and non-profit partners. The health of our communities and the strength of our economy depends on these partnerships.

- Establish a case management team to expedite the approval of affordable housing projects.
- Work with municipalities to “streamline” affordable housing development in their communities.
- Develop and implement a partnership program to support the private sector in developing affordable rental housing.
- Create a best practices working group with area municipalities to share ideas, successes and challenges in developing affordable housing.
- Through a partnership with Human Resources Development Canada, study the housing needs of our labour force to ensure continued economic vitality in our communities.
- Local municipalities will be asked to become full partners by endorsing the Housing Supply Strategy.
- Encourage financial institutions to develop innovative funding sources for affordable housing such as the use of pension funds.
- Work closely with the area municipalities to co-ordinate the implementation of the Housing Supply Strategy.

Growth Management

Housing is a key component of the Region’s growth management strategy. It is important to recognize the relationship between housing, economic vitality, transportation and quality of life. The Region will lead by ensuring that investments in housing, transit and human services support and enhance our planned urban structure.

- Co-ordinate planning for housing, transit and economic development and human services.
- Refine the Regional Official Plan to ensure that it reflects the policies and direction of the Housing Supply Strategy.
- Complete a study on financial incentives including development charges to encourage higher density residential development in centres and corridors.
- Implement the Region’s Transit Strategy.



Federal/Provincial Role

Clearly, the provision of affordable housing needs to be supported by more than just the municipal property tax base. The Federal and Provincial governments are beginning to play a larger role in the provision of housing through such programs as the proposed Federal Affordable Housing Program. The Region will call on senior levels of government to provide new support to increase the availability of affordable housing.

- Call on the Federal government to change tax policies that restrict or discourage investment in housing, change CMHC’s restrictive mortgage insurance criteria, provide new funding for housing programs and commit to a sustainable National Housing Strategy.
- Call on the Provincial government to increase funding for rent subsidies for low income households, make legislative changes to prevent the loss of existing affordable housing and provide new funding for housing programs.

Monitoring Success

It is important to update Regional Council, the community, and all those who participated in the development of this Housing Supply Strategy on the progress that is made.

- The Region will produce an Annual Report on Housing, reporting on the action items that have been completed, those that require further work and information about housing production in the Region. Successes and challenges in reaching housing targets will be highlighted.
- The Region will develop and implement mechanisms to track public opinion and concerns with respect to the quality and quantity of housing options in the community.
- The Region will regularly re-examine the Housing Supply Strategy, incorporating new and innovative ideas, partnerships and tools to provide a wide range of affordable housing options, as well as to better match housing to the labour force, transit and our urban structure.