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The Regional Municipality of Durham Report

To: The Health and Social Services Committee
From: Commissioner of Social Services
Report: #2020-SS-8
Date: July 9, 2020

Subject:

At Home in Durham, the Durham Housing Plan 2014-2024 Annual Report

Recommendation:

That the Health and Social Services Committee recommends to Regional Council:

- A) That this report be received for information as the legislatively required annual report on the progress of At Home in Durham, the Durham Housing Plan 2014-2024;
 - B) That a copy of this report be forwarded to the Ministry of Municipal Affairs and Housing (MMAH); and
 - C) That the Region of Durham request that the provincial and federal governments review relevant tax legislation and policies to identify opportunities to better incent investment in the development of affordable purpose-built rental housing through progressive and responsive federal and provincial tax reform, in order to support the goals of At Home in Durham.
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Report:

1. Purpose

- 1.1 The purpose of this report is to update the Health and Social Services Committee and Council on progress related to At Home in Durham, the Durham Housing Plan 2014-2024. This serves as the sixth annual progress report for the Plan.

2. Background

- 2.1 Regional Council approved At Home in Durham, the Durham Housing Plan 2014-2024 in June 2014 (Report #2014-J-16), and the recommendations of the Affordable and Seniors Housing Task Force in October 2017 (Report #2017-COW-

- 249). Annual report requirements for both initiatives were consolidated in early 2019 (Report #2019-COW-4).
- 2.2 In November 2019, the Region of Durham completed its legislatively required five-year review of At Home in Durham, including an update on the progress of the plan and the implementation of the recommendations of the Affordable and Seniors' Housing Task Force (Report #2019-COW-25).
- 2.3 The Five-Year Review reaffirmed the Region's commitment to improve affordability and access to housing with and without supports, protect the existing affordable housing supply, encourage housing diversity, and build capacity in the housing system. It specifically committed to the following over the next five years of the Plan:
- a. Reducing chronic homelessness to zero
 - b. Increasing the supply of affordable rental housing by 1,000 units
 - c. Increasing the supply of medium to high density housing
 - d. Significant progress in the regeneration of community housing.
- 2.4 The Five-Year Review was completed only a few months prior to the current COVID-19 pandemic and the declared states of emergency in Ontario and Durham Region. This report highlights the early progress of initiatives arising from the Five-Year review in the midst of this pandemic.

3. Master Housing Strategy

- 3.1 The Region has initiated the development of a comprehensive Master Housing Strategy to operationalize and support the goals of At Home in Durham. The Master Housing Strategy includes a wide-ranging review of the current housing system to ensure optimal utilization of Regional resources and alignment with local housing needs, including:
- a. Revitalization of the Regionally owned Durham Regional Local Housing Corporation (DRLHC) portfolio, including the development of an evidence-based strategy to addresses maintenance, revitalization, regeneration (redevelopment) and disposal across the portfolio.
 - b. Review of public surplus lands and their potential social and community benefits.
 - c. New partnerships and incentives for affordable housing, including the development of a Regional Community Improvement Plan (CIP).
 - d. Review and modernization of the homelessness and emergency shelter system to reduce chronic homelessness to zero.
 - e. Support for the preservation and modernization of community housing, including opportunities for more flexible partnerships and support for capital needs.
- 3.2 Work is actively underway with respect to DRLHC revitalization. Urban Strategies Inc. has been engaged to provide design parameters and guidelines to frame and

evaluate potential development options for four DRLHC sites, including opportunities to increase densities on those sites.

- 3.3 The Region is in the early stages of engaging a consultant to support a comprehensive review for the design of a Regional CIP, which could in part support the development of new affordable housing across the region (Report #2019-COW-35).
- 3.4 The Region is also developing an Intensification Strategy to forecast development in Strategic Growth Areas, including Centres, Corridors and Major Transit Station Areas, as part of the Municipal Comprehensive Review.

4. Reducing Chronic Homelessness

- 4.1 In 2019, the Region partnered with the Canadian Alliance to End Homelessness (CAEH) to participate in its Built for Zero campaign. The goal of the campaign is to help a core group of leading communities to achieve and sustain functional zero chronic homelessness.
- 4.2 Working with our community partners, Durham has created a By-Name List that reflects the depth of need of each person experiencing homelessness. Knowing the people experiencing homelessness by name and prioritizing the most vulnerable is essential to ending homelessness in Durham.
- 4.3 Prioritizing the most vulnerable has enabled community partners in Durham to consistently increase the number of chronic homeless move-ins monthly, reducing the number of people in Durham experiencing chronic homelessness. The number of people assisted has continued to increase despite the COVID-19 crisis.

5. Supportive Housing

- 5.1 A key action of at Home in Durham is to improve access to safe and secure housing that supports the needs of a diverse community, including people who face challenges with mental health, addictions and homelessness.
- 5.2 The current COVID-19 crisis has highlighted that homelessness is not just a socio-economic issue but also a community health issue. People who are unsheltered or living in emergency shelters experience significant difficulty complying with social distancing and other public health guidance to reduce the spread of COVID-19 or other communicable diseases.
- 5.3 The Region's response to its homeless population during the pandemic has been largely successful. Staff worked collaboratively with community partners to increase access to emergency shelter through hotel/motel programs, implement isolation and recovery programs, expand shelter services and community hubs. To date, there have been no COVID-19 outbreaks in the homeless population in Durham.

- 5.4 The In and Out of the Crisis (IOTC) program operating out of Camp Samac in Oshawa has been particularly effective – providing temporary shelter for 67 people to date who were previously unsheltered, including meals, access to health services, and mental health and addictions supports. Four people in the IOTC program, who had been chronically homeless, have also been assisted to find safe, supportive and affordable housing. The program currently has a wait list of 22 people.
- 5.5 However, these measures are temporary. In order to address the health, community health and socio-economic impacts of homelessness, the Region needs long-term sustainable supportive housing solutions.
- 5.6 Staff are currently exploring opportunities to leverage community partnerships, surplus lands and innovative modular housing solutions to facilitate the development of affordable supportive and transitional housing to address the short-term and long term needs of vulnerable people in Durham (Report #2020-SS-9).
- 5.7 At Home in Durham advocates a housing first approach, but it is difficult to have housing first without housing.

6. Support from Upper Levels of Government

- 6.1 Upon the approval of the Five-Year Review of At Home in Durham at the November 13, 2019 Committee of the Whole meeting, it was requested that staff draft a motion with regards to requesting that the provincial and federal governments review the Tax Act such that affordable housing can be a better investment.
- 6.2 Affordable private rental housing development in Ontario and Canada has been in steady decline since the 1970s as taxation policies related to investments in private rental development became less favourable.
- 6.3 Both for-profit and not-for profit developers of affordable rental housing require more robust tools to offset long-term operating and debt servicing costs in order to ensure continuing affordability for low- and moderate-income people in our communities.
- 6.4 Municipalities have limited fiscal tools to incent affordable rental development, while also balancing costs for growth-related infrastructure. However, upper levels of government can influence investment in affordable rental housing through progressive and responsive tax legislation and policies.
- 6.5 To support the goals of At Home in Durham, it is recommended that the provincial and federal government review relevant tax legislation and policies to identify opportunities to better incent investment in the development of affordable purpose-built rental housing.

7. Conclusion

- 7.1 This is the sixth annual progress report of At Home in Durham, the Durham Housing Plan 2014-2024.
- 7.2 At Home in Durham establishes goals and actions that will improve affordability and access to housing with and without supports, protect the existing affordable housing supply, encourage housing diversity, and build capacity in the housing system.
- 7.3 Over the next five years, the Region of Durham is committed to initiating the development of 1,000 new affordable housing units, including new supportive and transitional housing for vulnerable low-income residents, and significant regeneration and redevelopment of four Durham Regional Local Housing Corporation (DRLHC) sites.
- 7.4 Upper levels of government can support the goals of At Home in Durham by implementing progressive and responsive tax legislation and policies that can influence investment in affordable rental housing in Durham.

Respectfully submitted,

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Stella Danos-Papaconstantinou
Commissioner of Social Services

Recommended for Presentation to Committee

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Elaine C. Baxter-Trahair
Chief Administrative Officer