



Community and Health Services Department

Memorandum

TO: City of Markham Council

CC: Wayne Emmerson, Chairman and CEO
Lina Bigioni, Chief of Staff, Office of the Chairman
Bruce Macgregor, Chief Administrative Officer

FROM: Katherine Chislett, Commissioner, Community and Health Services Department

DATE: December 1, 2022

RE: **Unionville Commons and Unionville Seniors Hub and Community Centre Update**

The purpose of this memo is to provide members of City of Markham Council with information about the progress of Housing York's Inc. Unionville Commons development, tenant move in process and progress towards establishing a seniors hub and community centre. York Region staff appreciated the support from Markham Council and staff as it relates to these initiatives and look forward to your continued support and collaboration.

Unionville Commons construction progressing

Planning and development for Housing York Inc.'s Unionville Commons, a seniors affordable rental building located at 4310 Highway 7 East, began in 2014, culminating in an executed tri-party agreement in 2016 between Unionville Home Society (UHS), Minto Communities and York Region. Planning approvals were secured in late 2018. Construction on the building began in December 2019.

Occupancy of the first four floors is scheduled to occur in March 2023, with approximately 40 Heritage Village residents moving in. Substantial completion of construction will occur in June 2023, and the remainder of new residents will move in throughout the summer. When completed, Unionville Commons will provide 265 permanent rental homes for seniors in Markham, approximately 70% of which will be subsidized to affordable levels, and 30% which will serve the market rate rental sector.

Relocation opportunity for Heritage Village residents

As a result of the sale of lands by UHS to Minto Communities, the existing social housing development, Heritage Village, will be demolished to make way for construction of ownership townhouses. As part of the tri-party arrangement, York Region is committed to offer Heritage Village residents the opportunity to lease a rental unit at Unionville Commons. To date, approximately 40 of 45 eligible residents have committed to relocating into Unionville Commons.

Throughout 2022, Housing York Inc. has worked with UHS to provide Heritage Village residents with information about Housing York Inc. as a landlord and Unionville Commons as their potential future home. All residents had the opportunity to identify their unit selection preferences. Housing York Inc. was able to work with all residents to offer an appropriate unit. Lease signing appointments are underway with move-in planned for March 2023.

Community engagement has been critical to project success

Housing Services hosted community meetings over the last eight years to consult with and inform stakeholders. Heritage Village residents have been engaged since project conception. Local neighbours, Wyndham Gardens residents, and UHS staff and families have also been heavily consulted through the planning and development process.

Minto chairs quarterly Community Liaison Committee (CLC) meetings with participation from York Region and UHS staff, select Heritage Village/Wyndham Gardens residents, community members and local and Regional Councillors. The purpose of the CLCs is to create a central point for information sharing about the project for stakeholders, as well as to provide opportunities for feedback. Since 2016, 19 CLC meetings have been held to date. We appreciate the participation of local Councillor McAlpine and former Regional Councillor Hamilton at numerous community or public meetings, in addition to receiving occasional email updates on construction progress.

In addition, formal engagement has occurred with members of Markham Council in presentations or development application reviews at Council or Committees of Council meetings.

The York Region Plan for Seniors includes direction to work with local municipalities and external partners to develop a community hub for seniors

York Region's seniors population is growing faster than any other age group. By 2031, one in five York Region residents will be older than 65 years, 21.8% of total population, increasing to 25% by 2041. The City of Markham is home to the highest share of York Region seniors with 31% of all York Region seniors. Between 2021 and 2051, the number of seniors living in City of Markham is forecast to grow by 113%.

As seniors age they may require access to supports to remain safely in their homes and stay healthier for longer (see [November 2020 report](#), Forecast for Long-Term Care and

Seniors' Housing Implications). In 2016 York Region Council approved [York Region Seniors Strategy](#). One action in the Strategy is to “work with local municipalities, community agencies, private sector and the Central Local Health Integration Network to design and implement a multi-service centre / hub model(s) that will co-locate services to respond to the needs of seniors.”

The Region's Unionville Commons development provided the opportunity to establish a seniors hub and community centre on the ground floor. An [April 2018 York Region Seniors Strategy Update report](#) identified that planning was underway with Regional and City of Markham staff to support development of a Unionville seniors hub to provide better integrated and coordinated services for seniors to help them age in place for longer. A [December 2021 report to Regional Council](#) provided an update on implementation progress and explained that part of the approximately 11,000 square feet of multipurpose space will be designated as a community centre.

The seniors hub and community centre will feature accessible, multipurpose, and recreational spaces. The site is serviced by York Region Transit (YRT) route 552, Markham Local and Mobility On-Request Paratransit services, with a designated YRT stop planned near Unionville Commons main entrance. The site can be accessed by YRT services on Highway 7, including bus rapid transit, and conventional transit Monday through Sunday and holidays. The Seniors hub and community centre will be accessible by car from the driveway entrance on Highway 7. Visitors will have shared drop-off and pick-up locations by the main entrance, which is barrier free, as well as access to short term surface and underground parking spaces. The building supports active transportation with outdoor bicycle storage spaces for visitors. The site is walkable and includes pedestrian pathways that link to the broader community.

The seniors hub and community centre will serve the broader Markham community

Community hubs can provide seniors with localized, easy to access services that support their health and well-being. A community hub is a service delivery model that co-locates multiple organizations under one roof to provide residents with enhanced access to resources, services and programs through collaboration and coordinated planning between the co-located services. In addition to improved service accessibility, community hubs are a cost-effective solution because they can reduce administrative and program duplication and create opportunities for community agencies to offer local and affordable services.

The seniors hub and community centre at Unionville Commons serve both the residents of Unionville Commons and the surrounding communities in the City of Markham and York Region to access seniors-focused services, programs and amenities. A [September 2019](#) report to York Region Committee of the Whole on the 2018 Long-Term Care and Seniors Services Annual Performance Update noted a needs assessment and community consultations to identify potential programs and services at the seniors hub and community centre generated more than 450 responses from residents and partners.

Additional stakeholder engagement is a priority and will be completed once the lead agency is on board. The purpose of this additional stakeholder engagement is to update the needs assessment and to document if and how community needs have changed since 2018.

Seniors hub and community centre aligns with City of Markham Older Adult Strategy

The seniors hub and community centre will help address needs of Markham's growing seniors population. The City of Markham [Older Adult Strategy](#) report identifies priorities to best serve its aging population, including committing to building an age-friendly community responsive to older adults and ensuring spaces, programs and services are inclusive, flexible and accessible for older adult citizens of all backgrounds and abilities. There is close alignment with York Region's Seniors Strategy, support for age-friendly communities, and the seniors hub and community centre project.

York Region approached City of Markham staff in 2019 to explore project collaboration opportunities. City of Markham staff expressed interest in collaborating on and supporting space design, business planning, establishing an Older Adult Club, procurement processes, and participating in an advisory group. York Region is grateful to City of Markham for continued collaboration and project advisory support to ensure alignment with complimentary programs and services.

Competitive procurement process underway for hub and community centre lead agency

The Unionville Seniors Hub and Community Centre will be operated by a lead agency under contract with York Region. In a lead agency model, one external organization is responsible for service delivery decisions including selecting the programs and services offered and overseeing operations. A lead agency model is similar to York Region's practice of contracting with organizations to operate emergency housing.

A [Request for Proposals](#) to serve as the lead agency for the seniors hub and community centre was released in Q1 2022 and closed in Q2 2022. York Region is in the process of negotiating an agreement with a lead agency. This lead agency would initially be contracted for up to five years. At the end of the initial contract period the contract may be renewed for another five years or cancelled, to give time to determine if the lead agency model is working effectively or if another model must be considered.

The lead agency will be responsible for the cost of their operations, avoiding the need for Regional tax levy contributions or subsidies from Housing York Inc. while retaining affordable membership fees. To cover its operating expenses, the lead agency will be permitted to sublease space to partner agencies and implement other revenue generating activities.

Hub and community centre programming to be guided by advisory group

To ensure the lead agency is achieving the vision and goals established by York Region, its decisions will be guided by York Region staff along with an advisory group comprised of community members and key partners. A campaign to recruit advisory group members will launch in early 2023. More information about recruitment of advisory group members will be shared with City of Markham staff. City of Markham Council members will also receive recruitment messaging that can be used to encourage those in their networks, such as seniors or those who work closely with seniors, to apply.

Unionville seniors hub and community centre next steps

Through 2023 and into 2024, York Region will work with the lead agency to engage local community members, design and build the seniors hub and community centre, and plan and prepare for program and service delivery. The target opening of the seniors hub and community centre has been updated to Q3 2024. Continued collaboration with the City of Markham is appreciated.

For more information on Housing York Inc.'s Unionville Commons, please contact Kathy Milsom, General Manager, Housing Services, Community and Health Services Department at kathy.milsom@york.ca or 1-877-464-9675 ext.72091. Accessible formats or communication supports are available upon request.

For more information on the seniors hub and community centre, please contact Karen Antonio-Hadcock, Director, Integrated Business Services Branch, Community and Health Services Department at karen.antonio-hadcock@york.ca or 1-877-464-9675 ext.72088.