

SUBJECT: Affordable and Special Needs Housing Strategy:
Draft Strategy and Work Program for an Implementation Plan

PREPARED BY: Murray Boyce, Senior Policy Coordinator
Planning and Urban Design Department

RECOMMENDATION:

THAT the report entitled “Affordable and Special Needs Housing Strategy: Draft Strategy and Work Program for an Implementation Plan”, dated April 5, 2011, be received;

THAT the report and the Draft Affordable and Special Needs Housing Strategy be posted on the Town website for public review and comment;

THAT Staff establish a Technical Resource Group, to include key stakeholders in the provision of Affordable and Special Needs Housing as outlined in this report, to review and provide input on the Draft Strategy and participate in the development of a plan to implement the actions outlined in the Strategy;

THAT Staff report back to Development Services Committee with final recommendations for an Affordable and Special Needs Housing Strategy and a plan to implement the actions outlined in the Strategy, including a financial incentives policy framework and incorporating policies for Affordable and Special Needs Housing into the draft Official Plan;

AND THAT Staff be authorized and directed to do all things necessary to give effect to this resolution.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY:

Given the fundamental need for affordable housing options within the Town, and the relatively limited supply of affordable units, it is essential to address shelter as a strategic priority and to create opportunities for the development of affordable and special needs housing within Markham.

Recognizing that the Town can play an effective role in creating opportunities for new affordable and special needs housing units through financial incentives, advocacy and partnerships, education and policy initiatives, the Town retained SHS Consulting to identify a series of recommended actions for a new strategy.

Having regard for Markham’s role, in the context of the roles played by other senior levels of government, and the authority and resources available to the Town, Staff have reviewed the consultant’s recommendations and prepared a draft Affordable and Special Needs Housing Strategy for public review and comment. See Appendix A.

The Strategy focuses on practical steps that can be taken together with community partners to increase housing choices for Markham residents and workers. The delivery of

the Strategy must be coordinated with Markham's new Official Plan, Community Sustainability Plan, Integrated Leisure Master Plan, Economic Competitiveness Strategy and Transportation Strategic Plan and linked to the financial incentives for affordable housing action identified in BMFT.

Partnerships and community support and participation in the Strategy will be key to its success. In this regard, Staff are proposing that the draft Strategy be posted on the Town website for public review and comment and that a Technical Resource Group, to include key stakeholders in the provision of Affordable and Special Needs Housing as outlined in this report, be established to review and provide input on the Draft Strategy and participate in the development of a plan to implement the actions outlined in the Strategy.

Some of the key stakeholders that will be invited to attend future Technical Resource Group meetings include representatives from the Region of York Housing and Planning Departments, the Central Local Health Integrated Network (LHIN), the Town of Markham Sustainability Office and Seniors' Advisory Committee, as well as local residents and landowners.

Staff propose that the work program to develop a plan to implement the actions of the Draft Affordable and Special Needs Housing Strategy be coordinated with the Region of York Housing and Planning Departments throughout 2011, to coincide with the targeted delivery of a new Regional Housing Strategy in 2012.

It is recommended that Staff report back to Development Services Committee with final recommendations for an Affordable and Special Needs Housing Strategy and a plan to implement the actions outlined in the Strategy, including a financial incentives policy framework and incorporating policies for Affordable and Special Needs Housing in the draft Official Plan.

PURPOSE:

This report provides a Staff response to the recommendations of SHS Consulting contained in their report "Town of Markham Affordable and Special Needs Housing Strategy: Recommended Policy Framework", November 2009. The report also provides Development Services Committee with a Draft Affordable and Special Needs Housing Strategy and outline of a work program to develop a plan to implement the Strategy.

BACKGROUND:

At its meeting of February 22, 2011, Development Services Committee received a staff report entitled "Affordable and Special Needs Housing Strategy: Recommended Policy Framework". The report and accompanying presentation provided an overview of the findings and recommendations of the Affordable and Special Needs Housing study undertaken by the Town's consultant SHS Consulting.

The Committee requested that Staff review the consultant's recommended policy framework and report back on a Draft Affordable and Special Needs Housing Strategy and Official Plan policies, and include recommendations to address public input and participation in the review of the draft Strategy, and a work program to develop a plan, in

collaboration with the Region of York and other key stakeholders, to implement the actions outlined in the Strategy.

DISCUSSION:

Redefining a Role for the Town regarding Affordable and Special Needs Housing

Based on the housing needs identified in Markham, a comprehensive review of current policy and effective practices, and feedback from a wide range of stakeholders, a series of recommended actions for an Affordable and Special Needs Housing Strategy were developed by the Town's consultant SHS Consulting. These actions were identified in the February 22, 2011 staff report and were aimed at facilitating and supporting the development of increased affordable and special needs housing opportunities within the Town. The recommended actions were categorized under seven recommended goals:

- 1. Ensure a diverse range of housing choices*
- 2. Increase the supply of affordable home ownership housing*
- 3. Increase the supply of affordable rental housing*
- 4. Increase affordable housing for singles, youth, seniors, new immigrants, and single person households*
- 5. Provide a range of affordable housing options for families*
- 6. Examine further emergency and supportive housing needs*
- 7. Increase the supply of accessible housing*

The recommended actions were further organized in five broad policy directions: Policy Development, Financial Incentives, Advocacy, Partnerships and Education. Collectively, these directions redefine the current role of the Town in the provision of affordable and special needs housing relative to senior government, private sector and community interests and determine how the Town will respond to affordable and special needs housing initiatives of other stakeholders.

Staff Response to Consultant's Recommended Actions

A detailed discussion of each of SHS Consulting's recommended actions, and the staff response, is provided in Appendix 'B'. This section of the report summarizes the substantive themes of the consultant's recommendations relative to the components of the Town's role regarding affordable and special needs housing and the recommended goal, discussed above, and identifies appropriate responses/actions for the Town. These responses/actions are reflected in the Draft Affordable and Special Needs Housing Strategy attached as Appendix 'A' to this report.

Goal 1. Ensure a Diverse Range of Housing

The SHS recommendations 1.1-1.4 recommend new housing targets for unit type and unit tenure as well as an educational component. Staff agree with identifying new housing targets in the Town's Affordable and Special Needs Housing Strategy, New Official Plan and Community Sustainability Plan for housing type and tenure, and monitoring annual housing growth towards the targets, and having the Strategy and Implementation Plan identify opportunities to incorporate a range of housing forms and designs as part of a comprehensive educational campaign.

Goal 2. Increase the supply of affordable home ownership housing

The SHS recommendations 2.1 to 2.7 recommend, among other things, adopting a new housing target for unit affordability and the provincial definition of affordable home ownership, as well as developing a policy for fee deferrals in exchange for the development of affordable homeownership housing. Staff agree with identifying a new housing target for housing affordability and monitoring annual housing growth towards the target (this would apply to affordable rental housing as well). It is also recommended that staff consider and report back on the potential for including deferrals for development charges and parkland dedication as a financial incentive upon the completion of a financial incentives policy framework for affordable and special needs housing.

A Development Charge Deferral Policy, which addresses Affordable Housing, will be brought forward to Committee in Q2, 2011.

Goal 3. Increase the supply of affordable rental housing

The SHS recommendations 3.1 to 3.5 recommend, among other things, developing a new policy to discourage the conversion of rental housing units to condominium units, approving a new Strategy for Second Suites, adopting the provincial definition of affordable rental housing, as well as developing a policy to provide conditional grants for development charges and reduced parkland in exchange for the development of affordable rental housing.

Staff agree with adopting a new definition of affordable rental housing in the Town's Affordable and Special Needs Housing Strategy and Implementation Plan and the Town's new Official Plan as well as identifying new rental housing demolition and conversion policies and guidelines. In 2009, Council determined no further action be taken by Staff with respect to second suites. It is recommended that staff consider and report on including conditional grants for development charges and reduced parkland dedication fees as a financial incentive upon the completion of a financial incentives policy framework for affordable and special needs housing.

It should be noted that any grant, or reduction of fees, would need to be offset by a tax-funded source. Given the competing priorities for tax dollars, staff will need to carefully consider the application of providing grants for Affordable Housing initiatives.

Recommendations 3.6 to 3.14 recommend, among other things, investigating the addition of social/affordable housing as a charge under the Town's development charges by-law, working with the Region and other housing providers to identify lands suitable for intensification or redevelopment, and to apply Section 37 as appropriate, to create more affordable rental opportunities. Staff agree with identifying in the Town's Affordable and Special Needs Housing Strategy and Implementation Plan, partnership opportunities to work with the Region and other housing providers to create more affordable rental housing opportunities. However, the Region of York would be responsible for determining whether a Regional development charge for affordable/social housing should be included in its implementation strategy for affordable housing.

Goal 4. Increase affordable housing for singles, youth, seniors, new immigrant households

The SHS recommendations 4.1 to 4.5 recommend, among other things, developing a Seniors Plan with the Region and the Central Local Health Integrated Network and working with the Region, Welcome Centres and other immigrant support services to ensure housing and related information is available and accessible. Staff agree with identifying in the Town's Affordable and Special Needs Housing Strategy and Implementation Plan, partnership opportunities to work with the Region, Central LHIN and other stakeholders to address the affordable housing needs of singles, youth, seniors, and new immigrant households.

Goal 5. Provide a range of affordable housing options for families

The SHS recommendations 5.1 to 5.4 recommend, among other things, encouraging a mix of housing within Urban Growth Centres and Key Development Areas that can meet the housing needs of families and examining the feasibility of lowering Development Charges for multi-residential dwellings suitable for families within the Urban Growth Centres. Staff agree with identifying in the Town's Affordable and Special Needs Housing Strategy and Implementation Plan and the Town's New Official Plan policies to encourage a mix of family housing types in Urban Growth Centres and Key Development Areas including appropriate ground related housing. It is recommended that staff consider and report on including lower development charges for multi-residential dwellings suitable for families within Urban Growth Centres as a financial incentive upon the completion of a financial incentives policy framework for affordable and special needs housing.

Markham will be updating its Development Charges by-laws by 2013. During the preparation of the background study and by-laws, staff will analyze options for lowering the rates for Affordable and Special Needs Housing.

Goal 6. Examine further emergency and supportive housing needs

The SHS recommendations 6.1 to 6.12 recommend, among other things, adopting the provincial definition of Special Needs Housing and evaluating options for developing special needs housing targets, amending the current zoning by-laws to reduce or eliminate distancing requirements for group homes (where applicable), and support the Region of York, the Central Local Health Integrated Network and community agencies in the provision of housing units for persons with special needs. Staff agree with identifying the provincial definition of Special Needs Housing in the Town's Affordable and Special Needs Housing Strategy and Implementation Plan and the New Official Plan and investigating further options for working with the Region and the Central LHIN on developing special needs housing, including establishing possible targets for special needs housing as well as a review of other Town policies respecting shared housing (ie. student housing, rooming housing, etc.) and supportive housing (ie. group homes, and custodial long term care facilities for seniors and persons with disabilities, etc.)

Goal 7. Increase the supply of Accessible Housing

The SHS recommendations 7.1 to 7.5 recommend, among other things, including, as part of the development of special needs housing targets, an annual target for

modified/accessible units, and a policy in the new Official Plan to encourage accessibility features in new housing development. Staff agree with identifying in the Town's Affordable and Special Needs Housing Strategy and Implementation Plan and the Town's New Official Plan a policy to encourage accessibility features in new housing. It is also recommended that, as part of the Strategy and Implementation Plan, the Town investigate further options for working with the Region and the Central LHIN on developing special needs housing as well as a review of other Town policies respecting shared housing (ie. student housing, rooming housing, etc.) and supportive housing (ie. group homes, and custodial long term care facilities for seniors and persons with disabilities, etc.)

Draft Affordable and Special Needs Housing Strategy

Having regard for Markham's role, in the context of the roles played by other senior levels of government, and the authority and resources available to the Town, Staff have prepared a draft Affordable and Special Needs Housing Strategy for public review and comment. The draft Strategy is based on Staff's response to the consultant's recommendations above. See Appendix A.

Developing a Plan to Implement the Actions outlined in the Strategy

The Strategy focuses on practical steps that can be taken together with community partners to increase housing choices for Markham residents and workers. The delivery of the Strategy must be coordinated with Markham's new Official Plan, Community Sustainability Plan, Integrated Leisure Master Plan, Economic Competitiveness Strategy and Transportation Strategic Plan and linked to the financial incentives for affordable housing action identified in BMFT. It must also be coordinated with the delivery of other key stakeholder initiatives, including among other initiatives, the Region of York's new Housing Strategy and the Central LHIN and Region's new Seniors Plan.

Staff propose that the work program to develop a plan to implement the actions of the Draft Affordable and Special Needs Housing Strategy be coordinated with the Region of York Housing and Planning Departments throughout 2011, to coincide with the targeted delivery of a new Regional Housing Strategy in 2012.

Community Support and Participation in the Strategy

Partnerships and community support and participation in the Strategy will be key to its success. In this regard, Staff are proposing that the draft Strategy be posted on the Town website for public review and comment and that a Technical Resource Group, to include key stakeholders in the provision of Affordable and Special Needs Housing as outlined in this report, be established to review and provide input on the Draft Strategy and participate in the development of a plan to implement the actions outlined in the Strategy.

Some of the key stakeholders that will be invited to attend future Technical Resource Group meetings include representatives from the Region of York Housing and Planning Departments, the Central Local Health Integrated Network (LHIN), the Town of Markham Sustainability Office and Seniors' Advisory Committee, as well as local residents and landowners.

CONCLUSION:

It is recommended that Staff report back to Development Services Committee with final recommendations for an Affordable and Special Needs Housing Strategy and a plan to implement the actions outlined in the Strategy, including a financial incentives policy framework and incorporating policies for Affordable and Special Needs Housing in the draft Official Plan.

FINANCIAL CONSIDERATIONS:

There are no financial implications at this time. Future financial considerations will be reported on separately upon the completion of the financial incentives for affordable housing action identified in BMFT by the Finance Department.

BUSINESS UNITS CONSULTED AND AFFECTED:

The Sustainability Office, the Economic Development Department and the Finance Department were consulted on the findings and recommendations of the Affordable and Special Needs Housing Strategy Study.

RECOMMENDED BY:

Jim Baird, M.C.I.P., R.P.P.
Commissioner of Development Services

T.J. Lambe, M.C.I.P., R.P.P.
Manager of Policy and Research

ATTACHMENTS:

Appendix 'A' – Draft Affordable and Special Needs Housing Strategy
Appendix 'B' – Staff Response to Consultant's Recommended Actions