



Community and Health Services Department  
Housing York Inc.

## MEMORANDUM

To: Directors of Housing York Inc. Board  
From: Kathy Milsom, General Manager  
Date: November 12, 2020  
Re: Housing York Inc. Activity Update

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### **Raising fire safety awareness with local fire services during Fire Prevention Week**

Fire Prevention Week takes place in early October to remind residents on how to identify hazards and prevent fires.

Cooking is the leading cause of home fires in Ontario. With more people working and staying at home due to COVID-19, the risk of residential fires has increased. As such, Ontario's Office of the Fire Marshall focused this year's Fire Prevention Week theme on "Serve Up Fire Safety in the Kitchen."

Central York Fire Services, and Georgina Fire and Rescue Services teamed up with Housing York Inc. (HYI) to promote fire safety with residents. Due to COVID-19, on-site events to commemorate the week were not held. Instead, the firefighters packed reusable bags with educational materials on fire safety. HYI delivered over 1,000 bags door-to-door to residents in properties located in the Town of Newmarket, Town of Aurora and Town of Georgina.

In addition to this annual event, HYI reminds residents throughout the year of the importance of fire prevention with handouts, posters and community events. As an example, in September, HYI circulated posters to all residents on physical distancing during fire alarms and tips on preventing cooking fires at home.

### **Flu shot clinic provided to Keswick Gardens, Town of Georgina residents**

York Region Public Health is stressing the importance of getting a flu shot this year to protect residents and help reduce the strain on health care systems responding to COVID-19.

Although HYI common rooms remain closed to general use to help stop the spread of COVID–19, HYI is providing healthcare partners with access to deliver flu shot clinics. As reported at the November Board meeting, flu shot clinics have been offered in partnership with Community Home Assistance to Seniors in HYI buildings where they provide assisted living services to seniors.

Most recently, as part of the community paramedicine program, York Region Paramedic Services collaborated with HYI to provide high-dose flu shots for seniors at Keswick Gardens in the Town of Georgina.

Flu shots were available to all residents in the building from October 22<sup>nd</sup> to November 26<sup>th</sup>. To ensure safety, residents were required to call the clinic to speak with a paramedic to complete a COVID–19 screening book an appointment before visiting the building’s common room to get the shot. This process ensured seniors were not lining up and allowed time for cleaning between appointments.

### **An update from the Mackenzie Green, City of Richmond Hill, resident gardening committee**

HYI received the following note from the resident who leads the volunteer gardening committee at Mackenzie Green in the City of Richmond Hill:

“Each year, with the support of HYI, the garden has been expanded to include a variety of plants and flowers.

The spring display of tulips and daffodils is always a big hit with the residents of Mackenzie Green, particularly after the long winter months. With COVID-19 restrictions in place, it was especially important for residents to enjoy the wonders of nature.

The success of the garden would not be possible without the help of volunteers, including two students who were able to receive their student volunteer hours for high school for their help with planting and general clean up in the garden.”

This year, HYI participated in the City of Richmond Hill's Pollinator Protection Program which is designed to help restore butterfly habitat by encouraging residents to plant Monarch-friendly plants and flowers. Over the past several years, the population of the Monarch has been on a major decline and it is hoped that programs like this can help to increase the numbers by improving green space and habitat. A dozen plants conducive to attracting butterflies and bees were planted at Mackenzie Green and will be part of the display next year.

This was one of the best years for the beatification of Mackenzie Green with almost ideal weather conditions throughout the summer. Residents and guests of the building commented on how the garden brings them joy and makes the building a better place to live.

## **Rent arrears are trending upwards, with limited resumption of Landlord and Tenant Board activity**

At the end of October, 193 households owed a total of \$210,000 in rental arrears, a modest increase from the August low of 186 households owing \$173,678.

HYI's normal tenancy management practices were initially suspended in response to COVID-19. HYI stopped issuing Notice to End your Tenancy Early for Non-payment of Rent (N4) in April. In June, HYI began issuing N4s to households that had not established a payment plan as well as to those that fell behind on their payment plan. From June through October, HYI issued 172 N4s to more than 100 households. Most households respond to N4 notices and make reasonable efforts to repay their arrears.

Since August 1<sup>st</sup>, when the Landlord and Tenant Board resumed operations, HYI has filed 22 of the Application to Evict a Tenant for Non-payment of Rent to Collect Rent the Tenant Owes (L1) forms. Under normal circumstances, the escalation to an L1 is effective for the majority of those households that did not respond to the N4s. In the absence of a repayment plan, the L1 results in a hearing at the Landlord and Tenant Board which can result in an eviction order if the resident persists in non-payment. HYI rarely evicts residents, with only three eviction orders enforced in 2019.

Pre-COVID, hearing dates were typically set within two weeks and held within four to six weeks of the L1 filing. To date, the Landlord and Tenant Board has contacted HYI to schedule a hearing for an application filed in March 2020. No hearing dates have been set for any of the 22 current L1s. There is no indication at present as to when hearings will be scheduled for current applications. While the majority of residents in arrears are making best efforts to repay, 14 of the L1 applications are for residents who have paid little or no rent in months. Delays in the Landlord and Tenant Board process will result in increasing arrears for these households and likely future bad debt.

## **Leasing continues at Woodbridge Lane, in the City of Vaughan, with Meta Centre as Housing York Inc.'s newest supportive housing partner**

Woodbridge Lane is 90% leased. The units remaining to be leased are modified to be barrier-free for people with physical disabilities. In total, 20 per cent of the Woodbridge Lane units are modified. Of these, most are one-bedroom units with the remainder divided between two- and three-bedroom units. Although not required to do so, HYI makes best efforts to match these units to people with disabilities who will benefit from the modifications. As of early November, 17 accessible units remained to be leased. It takes more time to rent these units because best efforts are made to offer the units to people who will benefit from the modifications. The modified unit leasing process included the following steps:

- Modified units were offered to applicants on the Region's modified unit subsidized housing waitlist for Woodbridge Lane, resulting in 13 tenancies.

- Modified units were available during the market leasing process. Although there was some interest, no tenancies resulted from this process.
- Community agencies were invited to submit supportive housing leasing proposals for units.
- Agencies that received the supportive housing request for proposals package were also informed of the availability of subsidized modified units for clients referred by the agencies, through an expedited waitlist review process.
- Finally, HYI began offering units to seniors on the Region's waitlist for Woodbridge Lane, as seniors are likely to benefit from the unit modification as they age in place.

With respect to the supportive housing leasing proposals, HYI has supportive housing partnerships in a number of mixed and family communities. Through these arrangements, people who need supports to live in the community benefit from support services provided by a community agency.

Many community agencies have difficulty finding good quality, accessible and affordable rental housing for their clients. It is not uncommon for HYI to be approached with requests for agency rental units. In the interest of fairness, HYI distributed a leasing opportunity information package to all existing supportive housing partners, Regionally-funded agencies with supportive housing experience, as well as agencies that had contacted the Region to express interest in Woodbridge Lane.

The leasing opportunity package included the criteria HYI would consider when selecting partners, including:

- Agency's supportive housing experience (minimum three years' successful supportive housing experience; landlord references)
- Planned supportive housing service model
- Agency's experience with supporting clients in a multi-residential community setting
- Compatibility with HYI's operational priorities, including financial sustainability and parking management

As Woodbridge Lane does not receive rent subsidies, HYI must achieve a revenue target to sustain operations. In an effort to balance revenue requirements and agencies' affordability challenges, the supportive housing unit rents were set based on the Canada Mortgage and Housing Corporation's average market rents for Vaughan. Average market rents are much lower than actual rents in the market and are generally considered to be affordable. Agencies were also offered the option of leasing office and/or program space in the building. A virtual information session was held for agencies that expressed interest in the opportunity.

HYI received four agency leasing proposals. After reviewing the proposals, HYI selected Meta Centre, a community agency that serves children, youth and adults with developmental disabilities, dual diagnoses and multiple disabilities. HYI is currently finalizing a head-lease agreement with Meta Centre for two, two-bedroom units. The agency will be the tenant, responsible for paying the rent and ensuring compliance with building rules. The agency will select and support their clients who will occupy the units. Meta Centre employees will provide 24/7 on-site support to enable four of their clients (one per bedroom) to live at Woodbridge Lane. Discussions are also in progress for the remaining supportive housing units with another agency that submitted a leasing proposal.

Units not leased through these efforts will be rented through HYI's normal processes, maximizing the number of subsidized units that can be provided while still achieving the rental revenue target.

## **Housing Development Updates**

### **Maplewood Place, City of Richmond Hill – makeup air unit replacement**

Construction to replace the makeup air units located on the roof at Maplewood Place started in October 2020 and will be completed in December 2020. The two existing makeup air units were originally installed in 1997 and need replacement, as both units have exceeded their useful life. The new makeup air units will include both heating and cooling, and will service all common areas.

### **Unionville Seniors Affordable Housing Development, City of Markham – ongoing construction work**

Martinway, the general contractor for this project, continues to progress with work on the underground parking area, including building foundations, columns, waterproofing, excavation of soil and moving of materials. Concrete pouring of slab on grade is in progress. Shared site servicing and a new driveway through the Unionville Home Society area are nearly complete, with final asphalt and landscaping to be completed this year.

### **Stouffville Affordable Housing Development, Town of Whitchurch-Stouffville – site plan application approval anticipated**

The site plan application approval process is nearing completion with the Town of Whitchurch-Stouffville's planning staff and is expected to be approved shortly. A virtual public information process was launched in October, including a short video explaining the project, design elements and project schedule. The public had the opportunity to complete an online survey to provide feedback. Two-hundred and ninety responses were received, with the majority of respondents commenting on the importance of having affordable rental units within the Town of Whitchurch-Stouffville. A range of feedback on how to further improve the proposed site plan design was collected, resulting in a further review of the aesthetic design of the proposed building to ensure it fits appropriately within the fabric of the neighbouring community. This

design review process will take place in the new year during the detailed design phase of the building, once site plan approval has been granted by the town. Demolition of the existing commercial structures has begun and will conclude in December.

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