

The Regional Municipality of York

Committee of the Whole
Community and Health Services
June 10, 2021

Report of the Commissioner of Community and Health Services, the Commissioner of Corporate Services and Chief Planner

10-Year Housing and Homelessness Plan 2019/2020 Progress Report and 2021 Action Plan

1. Recommendations

1. Council receive the *Housing Solutions* 2019/2020 Progress Report (Attachment 1) for information.
2. Council endorse the short-term action plan for 2021 and proposed direction for 2022 (Attachment 2).
3. The Regional Chair submit a letter to Members of Parliament and Members of Provincial Parliament representing York Region requesting they advocate to the federal and provincial governments to:
 - a. Increase York Region's allocation under the Canada-Ontario Housing Benefit to support at least an additional 500 households in the 2022 to 2023 and 2023 to 2024 fiscal years.
 - b. Commit ongoing capital funding under the Ontario Priorities Housing Initiative to support development of at least 200 new community housing units per year.
4. The Regional Chair submit a letter to Members of Provincial Parliament representing York Region requesting they advocate for the provincial government to:
 - a. Provide increased and sustainable funds under the Community Homelessness Prevention Initiative to support increased need within the homelessness and housing stability system and sustain supports introduced under the Social Services Relief Fund.
 - b. Commit to sustained funding for the Home for Good program beyond the 2021 to 2022 fiscal year.

2. Summary

This report provides Council with an update on progress made in 2019 and 2020 toward the goals and objectives set out in York Region's 10-year housing and homelessness plan, *Housing Solutions: A place for everyone – Phase 2, 2019 to 2023*.

Key Points:

- As Service Manager, York Region is required by the *Housing Services Act, 2011*, to prepare a 10-year housing and homelessness plan and report annually on progress
- The province allowed Service Managers to defer 2019 annual reports by one year due to the COVID-19 pandemic
- This report summarizes outcomes of key activities planned for 2019 and 2020, and actions York Region took to support residents' housing stability during the pandemic
- The report also presents a work plan for 2021 and proposed directions for 2022 under each of the three goals of the plan

3. Background

Council endorsed Phase 2 of York Region's 10-year housing and homelessness plan in October 2019

The *Housing Services Act, 2011*, requires York Region, as Service Manager, to develop and implement a 10-year plan to address local housing and homelessness needs, and to complete a review of the plan at least every five years. The Region's first plan, [Housing Solutions: A place for everyone](#) was approved in [June 2014](#). In [October 2019](#), Council approved the outcome of the five-year review, [Housing Solutions: A place for everyone – Phase 2 2019 to 2023](#) (*Housing Solutions Phase 2*).

Housing Solutions Phase 2 established three goals to address housing need in York Region, set out in Attachment 1. The goals focus on affordable housing supply, support services to help people find and keep housing, and strengthening the housing and homelessness system. Each goal includes three to four longer-term objectives to guide the Region's annual work plans between 2019 and 2023.

Annual work plans identify specific actions the Region will take to advance *Housing Solutions Phase 2*

Federal and provincial housing policy has evolved in recent years, with new funding and strategic directions identified under the federal [National Housing Strategy](#), and Ontario's [Housing Supply Action Plan](#) and [Community Housing Renewal Strategy](#). To support the longer-term objectives set out in *Housing Solutions Phase 2* while remaining responsive to new opportunities and pressures, new actions are identified each year. In October 2019, Council approved short-term work plans for 2019 and 2020, with annual work plans for subsequent years to be presented with each progress report.

The province allowed Service Managers to delay 2019 progress reports to 2021

Service Managers are required to report annually on progress toward the goals and objectives identified in their plans. The province allowed Service Managers to delay 2019 progress reports to June 2021 to focus on responding to the COVID-19 pandemic.

4. Analysis

Despite the pandemic, most of the actions identified for 2019 and 2020 have been completed

Detailed outcome and impact statements for the Region's accomplishments are set out in Attachment 1. Table 1 sets out key accomplishments.

Table 1
Housing Solutions Phase 2 Key Accomplishments in 2019 and 2020

Goal	Accomplishments
Increase the Supply of Affordable and Rental Housing	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Completed background work to update housing-related policies in the Regional Official Plan• Council approved a servicing reserve and development charge deferral policy to encourage affordable purpose-built rental housing construction• Built 194 new community housing units in the City of Vaughan and City of Markham
Help People Find and Keep Housing	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Launched new programs and enhanced existing ones to support people experiencing or at risk of homelessness, including a Diversion Program to divert individuals away from costly Emergency Housing and secure alternative temporary or permanent housing while receiving supports• Provided portable housing benefits to help 258 households afford private market rental housing through a Regionally-funded pilot program and the Canada-Ontario Housing Benefit• Completed a wait list review to assess housing needs of people on the wait list and inform future program and policy development
Strengthen the Housing and Homelessness System	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Worked with other Service Managers to advocate for province-wide policy changes to ensure the sustainability of the community housing sector as mortgages and operating agreements end; Council endorsed recommendations in December 2020• Mapped homelessness services in York Region to identify system pressures, and emerging practices to inform policies for a Coordinated Access and worked to strengthen inter-agency coordination to help

Goal	Accomplishments
	<p>prioritize and refer individuals and families experiencing homelessness for appropriate housing options</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Completed a forecast of long-term care and other seniors' housing implications in York Region to inform advocacy and planning to enable more seniors to age in place for longer The Region is now a signed partner with all three Ontario Health Teams located in York Region, providing an opportunity to influence and advocate for housing supports for residents

In 2020, York Region implemented new programs and services to respond to emerging housing needs during the COVID-19 pandemic

In addition to completing most of the 2020 actions identified in *Housing Solutions Phase 2*, the Region responded rapidly to emerging housing needs linked to the pandemic by adapting existing programs, creating new supports, and strengthening partnerships with service providers and agencies, housing providers and provincial ministries. In collaboration with these partners, Regional action helped prevent housing loss, enabled people experiencing homelessness to continue to safely access shelter and support to move to longer-term housing, and supported vulnerable people to safely shelter in place. Key activities to address pandemic-related housing needs included:

- Opening a temporary transitional shelter to support individuals seeking emergency housing during the pandemic through a central intake line and a focus on rapid rehousing and family reunification. In 2020, 552 clients were served through the transitional shelter, and of those 198 clients were supported to find permanent housing.
- Creating a temporary self-isolation shelter for individuals experiencing homelessness who are positive or awaiting test results for COVID-19 to safely quarantine while providing nursing supports for mild symptoms. In 2020, the site helped York Region hospitals support 43 individuals and helped limit the spread of COVID-19.
- Launching a COVID-19 In Situ program to provide short-term rent benefits to community housing residents paying market rent whose income decreased significantly due to the pandemic; 18 households received the benefit in 2020.
- Through partnerships, continuing to deliver a range of virtual programming to community housing residents, and supporting residents to shelter in place through wellness checks, food security, and a seniors' technology initiative.

The Region also responded to new capital funding opportunities not anticipated when *Housing Solutions Phase 2* was approved. The Region received funding through the provincial Social Services Relief Fund for approximately 24 new transitional housing units. The Region also applied for funding through Canada Mortgage and Housing Corporation's Rapid Housing Initiative. While not successful in the first round of allocations as the program was over-subscribed, the Region may be considered in the future. The [2021 federal budget](#), committed an additional \$1.5 billion for the Rapid Housing Initiative in 2021 to 2022.

Attachment 1 provides a detailed summary of actions completed by the Region and its partners to respond to the pandemic.

Some actions planned for 2019 and 2020 were deferred as Regional resources were redirected toward higher priorities

While most actions identified for 2019 and 2020 were completed, some were deferred to allow resources to be redirected to address more immediate housing-related needs and opportunities. There was no impact to existing Regional clients. These include:

- A comprehensive review of the Housing with Supports program (formerly Domiciliary Hostels) was completed in 2019 and further work on this was paused due to the pandemic
- A review of the Region's Portable Housing Benefit pilot program was deferred to prioritize implementation of the new Canada-Ontario Housing Benefit

In addition, a 2020 action to support a point-in-time count of people experiencing homelessness led by the United Way Greater Toronto was not completed as the count was postponed. In March 2021, the Ministry of Municipal Affairs and Housing announced Service Managers would be required to do enumeration before the end of 2021. The Region will partner with the United Way of Greater Toronto to carry out a 2021 point-in-time count in June.

Key performance measures and system indicators highlight continued challenges as well as successes in helping residents find and keep affordable housing

Housing affordability and lack of rental supply continue to be challenges. In 2020, despite a slight increase in overall vacancy rates for most unit sizes, the vacancy rate remained below the 3% benchmark considered to indicate a healthy rental market. The percentage of new ownership housing affordable to households with income at the sixth income decile (\$125,967 in 2020) decreased from 11% to 5%. As communicated to Council in [January 2021](#), this has an impact on the long-term growth and sustainability of the community.

Community housing system indicators tell a mixed story. At the end of 2020, there were 15,810 households on the subsidized housing wait list, down from 17,457 in 2019. Although the number of households offered subsidies significantly increased in 2020, the reduction in wait list size is due primarily to the one-time impact of removing 2,428 households not eligible under the Region's income and asset limit policies, and a lower than average number of new applicants.

System indicators for homelessness and housing stability services highlight the impact of the pandemic on service use in 2020:

- A lower number of individuals were served in emergency housing as COVID-19 infection prevention and control measures put in place resulted in reduced capacity.
- The average length of stay for those served in emergency housing increased individuals experiencing homelessness had limited options to find and secure temporary or permanent housing.

- Implementation of the transitional shelter with wrap-around support services and the implementation of the Diversion Program assisted 327 people experiencing homelessness to avoid an admission to emergency housing.
- A lower than expected number of households accessed the Region's Housing Stability Program and Homelessness Prevention Program in 2020, which may have resulted from federal income support programs such as the Canada Emergency Response Benefit and the five-month provincial eviction moratorium.
- A proactive service model was implemented to keep people from losing their housing or, if recently housed, to keep their housing. The Outreach Program, which serves people at-risk of or currently experiencing homelessness, saw more clients due to improved access to the program with implementation of a central intake line.

There may be ongoing implications for homelessness and housing stability services as both the pandemic, and the federal and provincial government responses continue to evolve in 2021.

In 2020, York Region helped 584 households on the subsidized housing wait list access permanent affordable housing and 73 households that experienced chronic homelessness to secure long-term housing

People on the subsidized housing wait list are supported to access housing through subsidized units in community housing, or through rent supplements and housing allowances in private sector housing. In 2020, housing subsidies were provided to 584 households from the subsidized housing wait list, compared to 245 in 2019. Much of the increase resulted from the Canada-Ontario Housing Benefit (237 households) and the opening of two new community housing buildings (90 households).

The Region also worked with community partners to assist individuals and families experiencing homelessness to find and access long-term housing options and support. This may have included helping people to secure a private market rental unit. For example, 73 individuals who were experiencing chronic homelessness received rent subsidies and wraparound supports through the Region's Home Now program, funded from the provincial Home for Good program and Community Homelessness Prevention Initiative. Priority was given to individuals on the By-Name List who presented with the highest need and identified as chronically homeless.

In addition, individuals and families experiencing homelessness may have accessed multiple supports and services, such as the supports below, to find housing.

- 198 households were assisted to find housing through the transitional shelter. Through a Housing and/or Diversion Worker, individuals staying at the transitional shelter, focused on achieving goals established in their housing plan
- 129 households were diverted from entering the transitional Shelter or emergency housing through support of the Diversion Program, which included family reunification

- 280 households were supported to move from emergency housing to longer-term housing, in partnership with emergency housing providers and community-based agencies

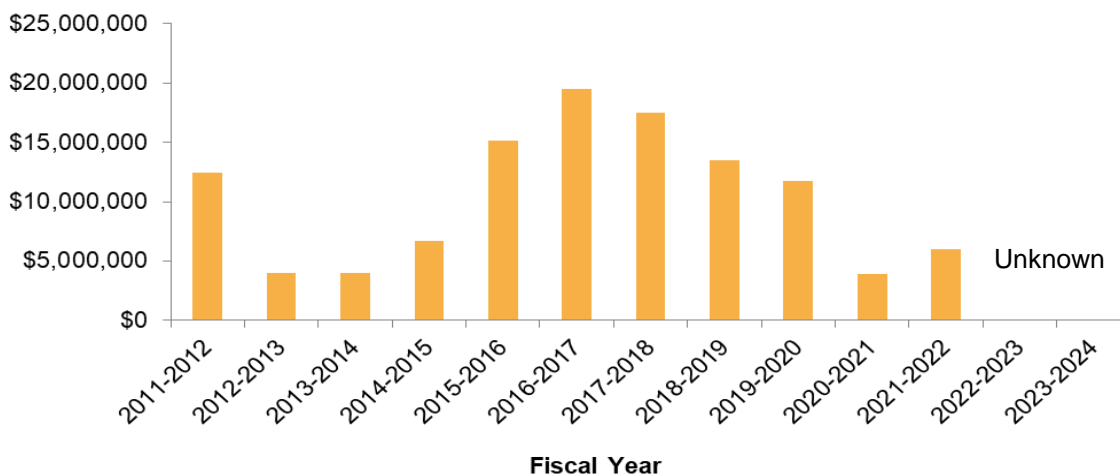
Ongoing federal and provincial investment is essential to advance *Housing Solutions Phase 2*

Although the Region makes substantial tax levy investments in affordable housing supply and programs and services to help people find and keep housing, increased and sustainable federal and provincial funding is essential to advance the *Housing Solutions Phase 2* goals. Without increased federal-provincial funding for rent subsidies and new rental supply, the Region will not be able to sustain or increase the number of households offered housing in future years.

Federal and provincial capital investment for new affordable housing in York Region has declined since 2016

Since 2004, the Region has successfully leveraged federal and provincial funding opportunities to build more than 1,200 new affordable housing units, with another 362 set to open by 2023. The Region funded approximately 64% of the required capital costs for Regionally-owned buildings. Funding from senior levels of government is critical to increasing the affordable housing supply, but they have not been the primary funders. In addition, as shown in Figure 1, federal and provincial capital investment has declined in York Region compared to 2016 and 2017.

Figure 1
Annual Federal and Provincial Capital Investments in York Region



The Region's allocation under the Ontario Priorities Housing Initiative – the current federal/provincial program which, in part, funds capital for new development – is unknown beyond March 2022. A sustained and increased commitment by the federal and provincial governments is essential to achieve the goals of *Housing Solutions Phase 2*.

Increased and sustainable operating funding is also needed to ensure York Region can continue to help people find and keep affordable housing

The Region's Canada-Ontario Housing Benefit allocation is also unknown beyond March 2022. An increased allocation over the next two years would allow the Region to continue to address wait list demand through portable benefits in the private rental market.

Although the Community Homelessness Prevention Initiative is an ongoing program, Home for Good funding is currently set to end in March 2022 and the province has not provided information on future funding. Many individuals and families who experience homelessness require long-term rent subsidies, as well as more access to affordable housing options, to find and keep housing. In 2021, the provincial Social Services Relief Fund will provide additional operating and capital investment to help the Region continue to support people who are experiencing or at risk of homelessness. While this funding is welcome, ongoing and sustained federal and provincial investment is required to meet the growing demand for affordable housing. The Region will continue to advocate for the federal and provincial governments to commit to sustained funding.

It is recommended that Council request local Members of Parliament and Members of Provincial Parliament to advocate on York Region's behalf for increased and sustained housing and homelessness funding

This report recommends the Regional Chair write to York Region Members of Parliament and Members of Provincial Parliament to request their support in advocating to the relevant ministers for the following:

- Increased federal and provincial investment under the Ontario Priorities Housing Initiative to support approximately 70% of the capital cost to develop a minimum of 200 community housing units per year
- Increased federal and provincial investment in the Canada-Ontario Housing Benefit to support a minimum of 500 additional households in the 2022 to 2023 and 2023 to 2024 fiscal years

This funding would enable the Region to double the rate of growth for Housing York Inc. and support non-profit development, in addition to continuing to support eligible households to afford private market rental homes. Without increased and sustained investment in both affordable supply and housing subsidies, the Region will have few opportunities to help more people waiting for subsidized housing.

This report further recommends the Regional Chair write to York Region Members of Provincial Parliament to request their support in advocating for increased and sustained funding under the Community Homelessness Prevention Initiative and a commitment to extend the Home for Good program. This additional investment would allow the Region to meet the growing demand for services and supports across the homelessness and housing stability system, sustain vital supports introduced under the Social Services Relief Fund, and ensure the sustainability of the Home Now program to continue to provide rent subsidies to

individuals and families who require them as well as other supports to help people remain housed.

An updated short-term work plan identifies actions for 2021 and preliminary directions for 2022

Attachment 2 sets out the work plan for 2021. The Region will continue working with local municipalities, the building industry (BILD) and other stakeholders to understand housing demand and find efficiencies to bring a range and mix of housing types to the market faster to meet demand. This includes work being undertaken through the Municipal Comprehensive Review BILD Advisory Group and Housing Task Force of Council. The Region will also focus on growing the community housing supply and enhancing services and supports to help people find and keep appropriate housing.

Proposed directions for 2022 are also identified in Attachment 2, based on anticipated resource availability and existing work plans. The finalized work plan for 2022 and anticipated outlook for 2023 will be presented with the next annual progress report in June 2022.

5. Financial

Actions for 2021 and 2022 were developed with consideration given to available federal and provincial funding, and budgetary pressures resulting from the COVID-19 pandemic. Table 2 outlines confirmed federal and provincial funding allocations for community housing, homelessness and housing stability programs for the 2021 to 2022 fiscal year.

Table 2
Federal/Provincial Funding Allocations for Community Housing, Homelessness Prevention and Housing Stability Programs

Funding Stream		2021 to 2022
Housing Programs	Ontario Priorities Housing Initiative	\$ 6,029,700
	Canada-Ontario Housing Benefit	\$ 2,568,185
	Social Services Relief Fund (capital)	\$ 7,300,000
Homelessness and Housing Stability Programs	Community Homelessness Prevention Initiative	\$ 15,692,604
	Home for Good (operating)	\$ 550,000
	Social Services Relief Fund Phase 3 (operating)	\$ 10,769,029
Total Annual Funding		\$42,909,518

The Region's investment in housing and homelessness prevention and housing stability programs in 2021 includes \$81.9 million in tax levy funding for Homelessness Community Programs and Housing Services, and \$1,283,625 under the Community Investment Fund Housing Stability Result Area. The Housing Services capital budget includes \$13.1 million from reserves.

An additional source of funding for homelessness programs and supports is provided by the federal government under Reaching Home: Canada's Homelessness Strategy, which is administered by United Way Greater Toronto. The Region works closely with community partners including United Way Greater Toronto to continue building, coordinating and leveraging opportunities to support residents to meet their housing needs and maximize the various funding sources available. Reaching Home funding has supported several initiatives including the delivery of Drop-By programming for individuals experiencing or at-risk of homelessness in the community and providing additional intensive case management support for emergency housing providers.

6. Local Impact

Residents in all nine local municipalities in York Region are impacted by rapid increases in housing costs, a lack of affordable and rental housing supply, and a need for support services. The short-term work plan for 2021 will help the Region and its partners continue to work together to address these issues.

Local municipalities are key partners in achieving the goals and objectives of *Housing Solutions Phase 2*, including increasing the rental housing supply and enabling the development of affordable housing options through supportive planning policies and participation in incentive programs. The Region will continue to work collaboratively with local municipalities to develop and implement affordability strategies and identify opportunities to advance a greater mix and range of housing. The Region will also continue to focus on housing stability and homelessness prevention initiatives to help people find and keep their housing.

7. Conclusion

Over the past two years, the Region has made significant progress toward the goals and objectives of *Housing Solutions Phase 2*, while also rapidly responding to changing federal and provincial housing policies and supporting residents to find and keep affordable housing through an unanticipated public health emergency. The updated work plan for 2021 will enable the Region and its partners to continue this work, informed by the long-term strategic directions set out in *Housing Solutions Phase 2*.

For more information on this report, please contact Kathy Milsom, General Manager, Housing Services at 1-877-464-9675 ext. 72091 or Paul Freeman, Chief Planner, at ext. 71534. Accessible formats or communication supports are available upon request.



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May 21, 2021
Attachments (2)
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