

# The Regional Municipality of York

Regional Council  
Community and Health Services  
December 16, 2021

Report of the Commissioner of Community and Health Services

## Unionville Seniors Hub and Community Centre

### 1. Recommendations

The Regional Clerk circulate this report to Clerk of the City of Markham.

### 2. Summary

This report provides an update on implementation of a seniors hub and community centre in Unionville Commons, a Housing York Inc. building in the City of Markham.

Key Points:

- Community hubs are innovative and accessible spaces that bring people together to access a range of services, programs and opportunities to promote inclusive, healthy and resilient communities
- The Council approved Seniors Strategy includes direction to design and implement a multi-service centre/hub model
- Redevelopment of a community housing project located on a campus with a long term care home and a seniors life lease residence in the City of Markham provided the opportunity to establish a seniors hub and community centre
- A Request for Proposal will be issued shortly to select a lead agency to operate the integrated seniors hub and community centre
- In partnership with the selected lead agency, construction of the seniors community centre and hub is expected to be completed in 2023
- Regional funding for capital construction costs to outfit the hub and community centre will be supplemented by federal and provincial government funding through Investing in Canada Infrastructure Program, Community, Culture and Recreation funding stream
- Operations are intended to be self funding, avoiding the need for Regional tax levy contributions or subsidies from Housing York Inc. while retaining affordable membership fees for the community centre

- The City of Markham has been an important partner, contributing valuable project advisory support and collaborating to ensure alignment with programs and services

### 3. Background

#### **Council approved York Region Seniors Strategy includes direction to work with local municipalities to design and implement a multi-service centre/hub model(s)**

York Region's seniors population is growing faster than any other age group. By 2031, one in five York Region residents will be over age 65, 21.8% of total population, increasing to 25% by 2041. 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).

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.

In 2016, Council approved the [York Region Seniors Strategy](#). One of the actions in the strategy is to “work with local municipalities, community agencies, private sector and 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.” This direction supports age-friendly, complete communities and was reaffirmed in York Region's 2019 to 2023 Strategic Plan. Key Activity 3.5 is to “work with local municipalities, community agencies, private sector and Province of Ontario's health agencies to design and implement a multi-service centre / hub model(s) that will co-locate services to respond to the needs of seniors.”

[April 2018](#), York Region Seniors Strategy Update report identified that planning is underway with Regional and City of Markham staff to support the development of the Unionville Seniors Hub that will provide better integrated and coordinated services for seniors to help them age in place for longer.

#### **The new seniors hub and community centre will be located on ground floor of new affordable rental building for seniors, Unionville Commons, in the City of Markham**

York Region is working with Unionville Home Society and Minto Communities to redevelop Unionville Home Society campus to include a 265-unit affordable rental building for seniors, [Unionville Commons](#), to be owned and operated by Housing York Inc. The campus is located at 4310 Highway 7 East, City of Markham and includes a long term care home, life lease apartments and community centre for seniors. Existing community housing on the site will be redeveloped by the landowner, Minto, and the residents will be given right of first refusal to

move into Unionville Commons. Construction began in 2019 with substantial completion anticipated Q2 2023. Residents are expected to move in towards the end of 2022 and into 2023.

The redevelopment agreement with Unionville Homes Society and Minto requires the existing community centre on the campus to be vacated in late 2022 to permit redevelopment on that portion of the campus. As part of the agreement, York Region is to build a new community centre, and this provided the opportunity to establish a hub, achieving actions set out in York Region's Seniors Strategy and the 2019 to 2023 Strategic Plan. Integrating the hub and community centre supports provision of a robust range of programs and services which enables York Region to maximize use of the space to support community needs and may be more appealing to organizations looking to locate in the hub.

Unionville Commons has approximately 11,000 square feet of accessible, multipurpose, and recreational space for the seniors hub and community centre on the ground floor. Planned exterior seniors hub and community centre spaces include a patio, garden and event lawn (Attachment 1). Design and construction of the seniors hub and community centre is anticipated to begin in Q2 2022, with operations commencing Q1 2024.

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. In addition, 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 driveway entrance on Highway 7. Visitors will have shared drop-off and pick-up by 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**

The City of Markham is currently home to highest share of seniors population in York Region. Of all seniors in York Region, 31% live in City of Markham. Between 2021 and 2051, number of seniors living in City of Markham is forecasted to grow by 113%.

The seniors hub and community centre will extend beyond serving the residents of Unionville Commons and the campus to also support surrounding communities in the City of Markham to access seniors-focused services, programs and amenities. To support this broader function, there has been extensive engagement to identify programs and services that are needed and could be offered through the Unionville Seniors Hub project.

[September 2019](#) report on 2018 Long-Term Care and Seniors Services Annual Performance Update noted a needs assessment to identify potential programs and services at seniors hub and community centre generated more than 450 responses from residents and partners. Stakeholders were engaged in the needs assessment through online and print surveys, a comment card campaign, focus groups, partner panels, and pop-up consultation sessions at local community centres.

Needs identified included:

- supports geared towards seniors' health including primary care physicians, dentists, podiatrists, and other personal services
- recreation and personal support programs
- newcomer and intergenerational services
- multilanguage programming
- transportation supports

Additional stakeholder engagement will be completed in early 2022 to update the needs assessment.

## 4. Analysis

### **The program, governance and financial model for the seniors hub and community centre was determined through community engagement and best practice research**

Staff conducted research, including visits to numerous existing hubs, to better understand effective approaches to community hub governance, financing and programming. Attachment 2 provides a summary of research findings.

Through this process, outcome goals were identified for the seniors community centre and hub at Unionville Commons:

1. Governance – continued role for community input into operations through an advisory table; regional oversight; need for experienced leadership
2. Financial – revenue neutral operations for York Region and Housing York Inc.
3. Programming – best organizations for the job; holistic service models; affordability of programming

### **Lead agency governance model will be used to operate integrated seniors hub and community centre**

Governance in this context refers to who makes operational and service delivery decisions including selecting which programs and services are offered out of the hub and community centre and overseeing staffing.

A governance model with York Region as lead operator of seniors hub and community centre was considered. York Region does not currently operate a community centre and does not have that experience. Community and Health Services does have experience with contracting with other organizations to provide services in Housing York Inc. buildings such

as the Richmond Hill Hub in the City of Richmond Hill, where youth emergency and transitional housing supports are provided, or as a service provider at The Link community hub in the Town of Georgina. Although directly operating the hub and community centre would provide York Region with greater control of operations, it would be a new line of business, could be costly, and would be more administratively burdensome than municipal and community-based hubs visited and researched.

Based on research, the lead agency model was selected as the best approach to delivering on all three outcome goals.

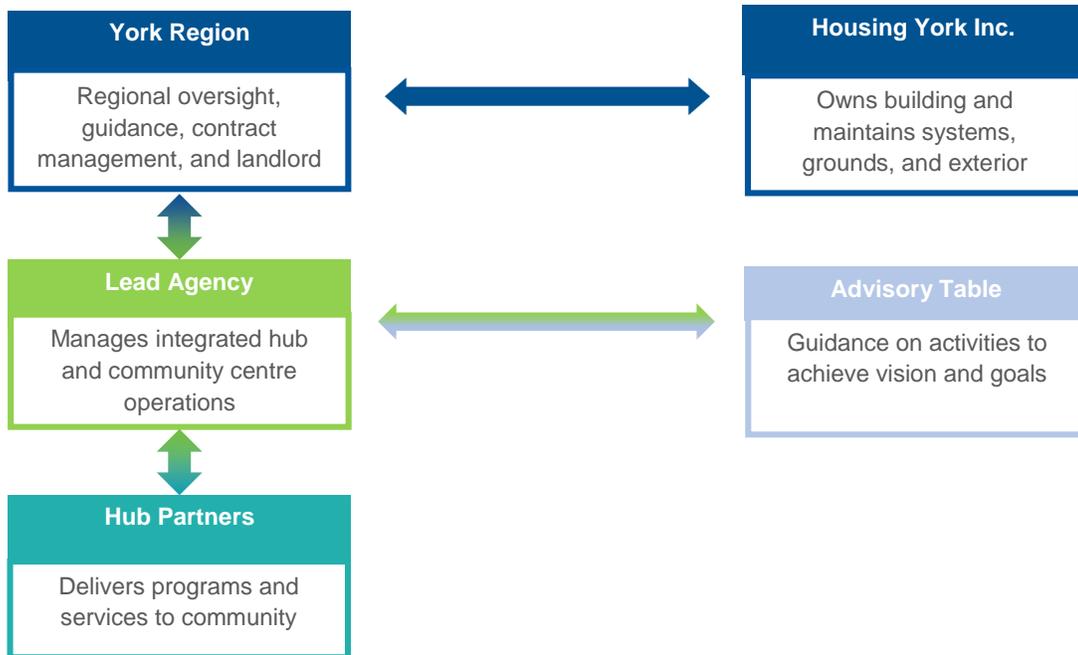
In a lead agency model, one external organization is responsible for service delivery decisions including selecting which programs and services are offered out of the hub and community centre and overseeing staff. A lead agency model balances level of Regional oversight with the necessary agility and client-centered approach to provide services that respond to the needs of residents.

The lead agency approach permits York Region to access the expertise and experience of the lead agency in operating a hub and/or community centre. The organization would be able to leverage its established relationships in the community that provide services aligned with the purpose of the hub, which may extend beyond those available to York Region.

In the lead agency model for the Unionville Commons community centre and seniors hub (Figure 1), York Region will contract with a lead agency up to five years, and provide oversight to operations similar to York Region's current practices in contracting with organizations to operate emergency housing and projects funded through the Community Investment Fund.

Eligible applicants include non-profit agencies, private companies, institutions, and partnerships.

**Figure 1  
Lead Agency Model**



York Region approached City of Markham staff in 2019 to explore project collaboration opportunities. City of Markham declined opportunity to serve as lead agency and expressed interest in collaborating on and supporting space design, business planning, establishing an Older Adult Club, procurement processes, and participating in advisory table.

**Seniors hub and community centre to be self-sustaining while affordable and accessible to all residents**

The seniors hub and community centre space provided in the Housing York Inc. building and associated systems, exterior and grounds, will be leased to York Region on a cost recovery basis. York Region will make the space available to the lead agency, with the lead agency required to cover the lease costs. The lead agency will be also be responsible for maintenance of leasehold improvements, janitorial services and separately metered utilities.

Operating costs will be the responsibility of the lead agency. To cover its operating expenses, including lease costs, and to support delivery of a range of services, the lead agency will be permitted to sublease space to partner agencies and implement other revenue generating activities. The cost recovery rent and analysis of business cases suggest this would be financially feasible for the lead agency, though there are risks. York Region will work with the lead agency to ensure community centre fees remain affordable and all residents have access to the space.

Construction to fit out the community centre and hub will be completed by York Region, in collaboration with the lead agency. Construction will include designing and building accessible, multipurpose community spaces that support age-friendly service navigation and is responsive to stakeholder feedback.

Details on capital and operating costs are provided in the financial section of this report.

### **Hub and community centre programming to be guided by advisory table**

To ensure lead agency is achieving vision and goals established by York Region, its decisions will be guided by York Region staff along with an advisory table comprised of community members and key partners. The advisory table will be established after the lead agency is selected.

Staff expect services provided will be consistent with the needs assessment and accessible to residents.

### **York Region will be seeking lead agency through a competitive procurement process**

An open, fair, equitable and competitive procurement process will be used to secure lead agency with a Request for Proposals released to market in early 2022. A competitive procurement process will give York Region the opportunity to consider proposals on how the proponent would operationalize York Region's innovative vision of an integrated seniors hub and community centre that meets unique needs of local seniors, including financial viability. All types of organizations, including for-profit, registered charity or not-for-profit will be invited to submit a proposal to serve as lead agency.

The initial contract would be for a period of up to five years. At the end of this period, the contract may be renewed for another five years or cancelled. This will allow time to determine if the lead agency model is working or if another model needs to be considered.

A competitive lead agency selection process is consistent with the procurement process used to select other organizations operating in Housing York Inc. buildings, such as those delivering York Region's Homelessness Prevention Program.

## **5. Financial**

### **The Federal and Provincial governments will fund 73% of capital costs to fit up the community centre and hub spaces**

In conventional lease arrangements the lessee is responsible for all leasehold improvements. The anticipated capital cost of fitting out the seniors hub and community centre is approximately \$2.5 million. As the result of a successful grant application to Investing in Canada Infrastructure Program, Community, Culture and Recreation funding stream, from 2022 to 2024, the Federal government will provide up to \$1,000,744 (40% contribution) and the Provincial government will provide up to \$833,870 (33.33% contribution) towards eligible capital costs. A cost share is required. York Region will contribute approximately \$667,246 (26.67% contribution). York Region's capital contribution supports financial viability of seniors hub and community centre and delivery of York Region's objectives. \$2.5 million for leasehold improvements is included in the 2022 Capital Plan.

## **York Region does not plan to provide funding for seniors hub and community centre operations**

The Lead agency will pay lease costs on a cost recovery basis. These lease costs will cover the proportionate share of Housing York Inc.'s municipal property taxes, building insurance, direct labour costs, capital replacement reserve contribution for major building components and replacement of elements provided as part of interior constructions, utilities in common areas, elevator maintenance and inspections, exterior grounds maintenance, and more. The lead agency must be able to financially sustain program management, service delivery and reporting requirements to ensure no negative financial impact for York Region and Housing York Inc.

Similar to other local community hubs, the lead agency will be encouraged to pursue available funding opportunities and generate revenue to ensure operations are self-sustaining. Revenue generation opportunities could include securing tenants to rent space on a permanent basis, charging affordable membership and user fees, room rental fees, applying for Seniors Active Living Centre designation through Ministry for Seniors and Accessibility, and grants and donations. The lead agency will also be required to ensure affordability for the community center. However, the lead agency will not be able to regulate the costs charged by partners who sublease space at the hub. The scope of the seniors hub and community services and programs must be appealing to sustain community interest.

York Region staff will continue to manage project and provide oversight, policy, communications, and other business service supports where needed.

## **6. Local Impact**

The City of Markham Older Adult Strategy identifies priorities to best serve its aging population, including committing to building an age-friendly community responsive to older adults. Markham aims to ensure 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 seniors hub and community centre project. The seniors hub and community centre will help address needs of Markham's growing seniors population. York Region is grateful to City of Markham for continued collaboration and project advisory support to ensure alignment with programs and services.

## **7. Conclusion**

The seniors hub and community centre aspires to empower seniors, increase connectedness, improve quality of life, and enable seniors to age in place. Public procurement process to select lead agency to operate seniors hub and community centre is expected to conclude in Q2 2022. In 2022 and 2023, York Region will work with lead agency to engage local community members to design and build seniors hub and community centre and plan for program and service delivery. Opening of the seniors hub and community centre

is anticipated Q1 2024. Continued collaboration with the City of Markham is appreciated and key to success for seniors hub and community centre.

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For more information on this report, please contact Karen Antonio-Hadcock, Director, Integrated Business Services Branch, Community and Health Services Department at 1-877-464-9675 ext.72088. Accessible formats or communication supports are available upon request.



Recommended by:

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December 10, 2021  
Attachments (2)  
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