



REPORT TO: Co-Chairs and Members of Public Health and Social Services Committee

SUBJECT: Response to Provincial Consultations on the Ontario Long Term Affordable Housing Strategy

RECOMMENDATION

That this Committee recommends to Regional Council that the "Response to Provincial Consultations on the Ontario Long Term Affordable Housing Strategy" (Appendix A) be approved and submitted to the Ministry of Municipal Affairs and Housing.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

- In 2009 the Ministry of Municipal Affairs and Housing (MMAH) announced that they were going to develop a long-term housing strategy to make it easier for Ontario families to find and maintain affordable housing.
- In Spring 2009 MMAH encouraged the public, partners and stakeholders to provide pragmatic, specific and affordable solutions to assist in building the plan.
- In reply, Niagara Regional Housing actively engaged stakeholders to create the "Response to Provincial Consultations on the Ontario Long Term Affordable Housing Strategy" (Appendix A).
- The strategy identifies three pragmatic, specific and affordable recommendations to assist in building the plan:
 - more predictable funding;
 - local flexibility within the context of a Housing Delivery Plan; and
 - greater integration of support services funding with affordable housing programs.
- The service system would reflect the priorities identified under a broader poverty reduction strategy

FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

There are no financial implications directly associated with this report.

PURPOSE

The purpose of this report is to request Committee and Regional Council approval of the Response to Provincial Consultations on the Ontario Long Term Affordable Housing Strategy (Appendix A) for submission to the Ministry of Municipal Affairs and Housing.

BACKGROUND

In 2009 the Ontario government announced the development of a long-term housing strategy to make it easier for Ontario families to find and maintain affordable housing. The Long Term Affordable Housing Strategy is guided by the vision of improving Ontarians' access to adequate, suitable, and affordable housing and provides a solid foundation on which to secure employment, raise families and build strong communities. The strategy will provide a framework for affordable housing in Ontario over the next 10 years.

From June to September 2009, thirteen consultation sessions were held across the province seeking opinion on the proposed vision, principles and goals that will ultimately frame the strategy. The closest consultation session to Niagara was held in Hamilton. Niagara Regional Housing and Niagara Region Community Services participated in this session.

In Spring 2009, MMAH encouraged the public, partners and stakeholders to provide pragmatic, specific and affordable solutions to assist in building the plan. In reply Niagara Regional Housing actively engaged stakeholders to create the "Response to Provincial Consultations on the Ontario Long Term Affordable Housing Strategy" (Appendix A).

REPORT

As outlined in the "Response to Provincial Consultations on the Ontario Long Term Affordable Housing Strategy", extensive consultations took place in Niagara involving a variety of stakeholders including over 3000 surveys. The consultations resulted in the identification of three pragmatic, specific and affordable recommendations to assist in building the plan:

Recommendation #1 - More Predictable Funding

- Predictable, "block" funding allocations that allow the Service Manager to plan and respond to local needs and the continuation of federal funding after the current funding arrangement expires.

Recommendation #2 - Local Flexibility within the Context of a Housing Delivery Plan

- Greater local flexibility within the context of consistent funding and Provincial and Federal Affordable Housing Strategies to allow for a comprehensive Local Affordable Housing Delivery Plan.

As identified under the broader context of the poverty reduction strategy, affordable, adequate and suitable housing means;

- access to affordable housing for everyone; all levels of income, all points along the housing continuum starting with homelessness and ending with home ownership;
- adequate supply of well maintained and affordable options that meet the needs of people along the housing continuum; and
- suitable, safe housing; access to employment, community resources, human services

Recommendation #3 - Greater Integration of Support Services Funding with Affordable Housing Programs

- That provincial funding for support services be included as a priority in the provincial strategy and linked to affordable housing programs to allow households to remain housed and to live independently.

There are a number of social, economic and environmental benefits of an affordable housing strategy. The most fundamental benefit is the expansion of the community's capacity to meet the needs of individuals experiencing difficulty competing in the housing market. It is important to consider the entirety of the housing continuum; starting with homelessness and ending with homeownership which was the recommended focus of the Human Service Implementation Steering Committee. Integration of support services extends to services offered by community agencies and the Niagara Region to support individuals through programs such as aging at home, mental health, addictions and employment readiness which is the basis of a Community Human Service Plan as recommended in the Provincial-Municipal Fiscal and Service Delivery Review.

Submitted by:

Approved by:



Brian Hutchings
Commissioner, Community Services

Mike Trojan
Chief Administrative Officer

This report was prepared by Lori Watson, Director Social Assistance and Employment Opportunities and reviewed by Lora Beckwith, General Manager Niagara Regional Housing.

Appendix A - Response to Provincial Consultations on the Ontario Long Term Affordable Housing Strategy