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County of Renfrew hosts Affordable Housing Summit

RENFREW – On Thursday, April 4, 2024, the County of Renfrew hosted a successful and informative Affordable Housing Summit; a full day which opened a dialogue towards the development of critical relationships to grow affordable housing across the Renfrew County region.

The goal of the Summit was to identify innovative partnership opportunities. It was a dynamic gathering aimed at creating a collaborative environment for developers, builders, investors, real estate specialists, elected officials and municipal staff to spark out-of-the box-thinking to address the housing crisis being felt across Ontario and beyond.

The conversation was sparked by Jason Davis, Director of Development and Property, who introduced the County of Renfrew's newly launched Expression of Interest, which makes County properties potentially available for developing affordable housing, including existing ageing stock within the Renfrew County Housing Corporation portfolio and other lands owned by the County of Renfrew.

"We are looking for willing partners and we want to develop plans to address the housing crisis that work for all parties involved. We are open to any and all innovative ideas," Mr. Davis said.

Overall, organizers were pleased about the multi-sector community engagement towards finding housing solutions and the feedback throughout the day, including the need for more seamless processes and less red tape.

Attendees heard from a range of speakers including Renfrew-Nipissing-Pembroke MPP John Yakabuski, who indicated the Provincial Government is working on a housing bill, and Renfrew County Warden Peter Emon, who shared details about the Eastern Ontario Wardens' Caucus '7 in 7+' regional housing plan that aims build at least 7,000 community rental units over seven years across eastern Ontario and relieve the pressure of the affordable housing waitlist.

"As Warden, I am heartened by the success of our housing summit, where community members have come together to discuss this important topic," Warden Emon said. "Let us harness the power of collaboration, innovation, and shared purpose to build a brighter future for all members of our communities."

Andrea Patrick, Director of Community Services, provided an overview of the programs offered through her department including Community Housing, Childcare & Early Years, and Ontario Works. She noted the wait for a housing unit ranges between seven and ten years with approximately 1,500 names on the local waiting list, while mentioning that figure is likely low as the wait time is a deterrent for many.

The Community Services Department offers financial assistance for housing through a number of programs: Affordable Home Ownership, Ontario Renovates and the Emergency Minor Home Repair Assistance Program.

Chief Administrative Officer Craig Kelley highlighted the newly minted Mesa initiative, which aims to address the root causes of homelessness, substance abuse and addictions and mental health while fostering a resilient and healthier community for all residents of the County of Renfrew. The Community Services Department along with the County of Renfrew Paramedic Service and Development and Property Department are working together on the program, a collaborative approach to compassionate care in the community.

In addressing the housing crisis, Mr. Kelley stressed the need for willing partners; “In times of crisis this community has stepped forward, and this is the time to do it again to meet the growing need and demand for attainable and affordable housing,” he said. “All options are on the table.”

Attendees also heard speakers from Cahdco, an organization which develops affordable housing solutions, and Habitat for Humanity, which brings communities together to help families build strength, stability and independence through affordable homeownership. Attendees received information about potential funding from the Federation of Canadian Municipalities’ Green Municipal Fund, and the need for shovel-ready projects when applying for funding from the Canadian Housing and Mortgage Corporation.

Submissions for the aforementioned Expression of Interest are due by June 7, 2024 and the County is looking forward to seeing the proposals that come forward to address the housing crisis. The Expression of Interest can be found on the County’s website at <https://bit.ly/AffordableHousingEOI>. A report on the Summit will follow the results of a post-event survey and be presented along with the results of the RFEIOI, later this spring.

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