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CANADA

York Region calls for answers on Housing Accelerator Fund

Regional Council is calling for answers on why its so-called “Northern Six” municipalities’ applications to the Federal Government’s Housing Accelerator Fund were denied.

By Brock Weir, Local Journalism Initiative Reporter The Auran

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Regional Council is calling for answers on why its so-called “Northern Six” municipalities’ applications to the Federal Government’s Housing Accelerator Fund were denied.

The motion, which was approved by Regional Council last week, was put forward by Whitchurch-Stouffville Mayor Iain Lovatt, called on Federal Housing Minister Sean Fraser and the CMHC to “formally re-assess” the applications of the N6 and to give further consideration to “advancing new Housing Accelerator investments in this year’s budget.”

The motion also asks the Feds to “prioritize municipalities with significant forecasted residential and employment growth like York Region and the N6 specifically.”

“What really frustrated me with the process, and I don’t disparage any municipality in the country that received this funding, but there is a municipality in Southwest Ontario of over 40,000 people, which is a little smaller than Whitchurch-Stouffville, but significant nonetheless, that received \$4.5 million from the Federal Government to build 139 single family homes over the next three years and that is not insignificant funding to support a smaller municipality like Stouffville. We started 1,140 homes last year alone in our community. The fact we didn’t get an explanation about what was

wrong with our application kind of makes it frustrating in and of itself. We had a meeting with CMHC and they wouldn't tell us. I am hoping that with the weight of this Council supporting this resolution we can get answers and certainly look at supporting future applications."

While the motion received support at the Regional table, Markham Mayor Frank Scarpitti questioned why the motion was there in the first place.

"There are a lot of grants that municipalities apply for...sometimes we get them, sometimes we don't, and I don't think we come running to the Region every time a local municipality doesn't get one of the grants. It is a little tough as well, and I want to make sure everyone made proper submissions...but I don't know the content of the individual applications and what [unsuccessful municipalities] put forward."

Mayor Scarpitti also said some of the messaging put out by mayors of unsuccessful York Region municipalities were "misleading" in "implying" the Feds overlooked York Region's housing program.

"They absolutely did not," he contended, adding that \$148 million came to York Region as a whole. "Three municipalities in York Region that are providing the bulk of housing over the next 30 years did get funding."

In the end, however, he supported the motion, as did Richmond Hill Mayor David West.

Richmond Hill was a successful applicant, but he said the more successful York Region municipalities are in receiving funding, the further the Region can "move the needle" on housing targets.

"That's the message we need to be sending as elected officials to be able to say we need more of this kind of thing rather than less," he said. "This is the kind of program that needs to be replicated on a Provincial level as well because the kind of program we have under the Building Faster Fund is not particularly helpful in incentivizing in a way that would help us with the jurisdiction we have to actually be successful. This sends a message that we all stand stronger together.

"It's helpful to all of us if we're able to be successful."

Aurora, as announced earlier this month, was not successful in its funding. Although Mayor Tom Mrakas, Aurora's representative at the Regional table, did not take part in last week's discussions, he expressed his "dismay" with the decision at the outset, stating the Feds had "politicized" the process.

"It's disheartening to see them withhold taxpayer funds from municipalities with strong applications, while seemingly favouring those that align with their political agenda," he said. "This approach undermines the genuine efforts of those of us

working tirelessly to address the housing crisis and achieve ‘housing for all.’ It’s a disservice to communities in need and reflect a prioritization of optics over real solutions.”

Aurora-Oak Ridges-Richmond Hill MP Leah Taylor Roy, however, stated Aurora’s application was not “ambitious” enough with housing goals and Council’s refusal of a men’s transitional housing building in Aurora’s south end did not send a “strong message to the people reviewing the application that Aurora was doing everything they could to provide homes to all residents.”

INFRASTRUCTURE ANNOUNCEMENT WELCOMED

On Thursday, the Province announced funding of \$1 billion through the Municipal Housing Infrastructure Program to support communities with, as the name suggests, infrastructure programs related to housing.

While the announcement did not include an allocation of what municipalities like Aurora might see, Mayor Mrakas said it was “welcome news.”

“This significant investment of tax dollars back into our communities will assist in covering the costs of building necessary infrastructure as we aim for responsible growth,” said Mayor Mrakas in a statement.

“Many municipalities, including myself, have advocated for more predicable funding to support infrastructure needs as our communities expand. It’s widely recognized that growth does not pay for growth. For every tax dollar collected, municipalities typically receive only 9 to 11 cents, despite being responsible for over 65 per cent of infrastructure. This unsustainable practice underscores the importance of the funds announced by the Province, marking a positive step towards ensuring our communities have the necessary infrastructure to continue thriving and growing. I will be [waiting] for the particulars of the newly-announced Municipal Housing Infrastructure Program to see how our Town stands to gain in accessing this critical funding.”

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