



COUNTY OF WELLINGTON

COUNCIL REPORT

To: Warden and Members of County Council
From: Jana Burns, Wellington Place Administrator
Date: Thursday, May 30, 2024
Subject: Wellington County Housing Taskforce – May 2024 Update

Background

The purpose of this report is to provide an update on County activities related to the Wellington County Housing Taskforce.

Wellington County's economy is predominantly traditional, with manufacturing, construction, retail, transport, agriculture, and health as top sectors. Manufacturing alone accounts for almost 20% of employment and is growing 3% per annum. Despite technological advances, these sectors will remain heavily labour dependent. Recent discussions with local employers showed that approximately 80% of workers were previously recruited from the nearby community, and that this trend has almost reversed. The same discussions show that lack of housing remains a major hindrance to attracting new workers. While the hiring crisis has somewhat cooled, one local employer was, at its peak, incurring costs of \$375,000 to provide three buses over three shifts to bring workers to site. Recent conversations with employers highlight the limited regional talent pool and that businesses are increasing the number and types of incentives. Employers are also recognizing the need to be a better community partner, assisting with local events to attract new hires, for example.

The County Housing Taskforce originally focused on housing for the workforce. However, with our communities expected to see significant growth over the foreseeable future the need for greater social and economic diversity in the community increases, as does the need to preserve farmland. Therefore, in March the Taskforce confirmed it will focus on a range of housing options to ensure the community's resilience.

Taskforce Activities to Date

The Taskforce was established during the pandemic with the goal of increasing the housing stock by adding housing incentives to the CIP programme, developing a marketing campaign to combat NIMBYism, encouraging housing diversity within the Official Plan, and developing metrics to track growth. The Taskforce was coordinated by Economic Development as a recommendation from the 2019 County of Wellington Attainable Housing Strategy.

Planning and Development and Economic Development staff have also met with The Townships of Wellington North, Centre Wellington and most recently the Town of Minto to discuss current residential building trends, take-up on Additional Residential Units (ARUs), examples of successful intensification, and what actions member municipalities would like to see to support intensification. Conversations with member municipalities will continue, as this information is extremely useful for the Taskforce.

Preparation of a housing policy strategy is being explored by the Planning and Development Department, as part of the Official Plan Review. A meeting with Guelph Wellington Habitat for Humanity was also held May 23.

A chart is provided below showing the work completed to date and new activities planned. While the original activities have been implemented, the Taskforce has encouraged staff to think outside the box, review successful examples, communicate with the building community and residents, consider attractive housing options and styles to suit various income levels, and partner where relevant. The Taskforce has agreed that there needs to be consideration given to what role the County plays in providing advocacy, leadership, and guidance, and that the goal is to work together with member municipalities to provide greater housing supply options for Wellington County.

A review of recent trends was provided in a March Planning Committee report, which highlighted a shift in building permits towards a denser building typology between 2021 and 2023, contributing to a more diversified housing stock. Rental units are also seeing an increase due to demand, Federal financial support for developments over five rental units, and interest rates. ARUs, of which 322 have been constructed since 2016, are seen as being an important element in the future of housing supply as they offer multi-generational living, income support if desired, and they typically do not require a minor variance/zoning relief or new municipal infrastructure investments.

Housing is a very complex issue. Having County Housing, Treasury, Planning and Development and Economic Development at the table together with elected officials is very helpful in the discussion.

The Taskforce will reconvene to discuss action items in the short and long term.

Actions Underway

Wellington County Housing Taskforce Action Items

Activity	Details	Responsibility	Next Steps
Produce an ongoing Land/Site Inventory for new and adaptive-use housing projects	UNDERWAY The goal of this work is to monitor privately initiated housing developments offering different approaches to delivering increased density in urban areas.	County Planning	The County will continue to monitor privately initiated housing moving through the approvals process for new and innovative housing approaches.
Maintain and adapt Community Improvement Plan (CIP) Incentive Programmes	ONGOING/COMPLETED The County and its member municipalities have CIPs in place, with an array of programme incentives to encourage the development of affordable/attainable housing, including TIEGs,	Economic Development Member Municipalities	The County will work collectively with local municipalities to promote CIP incentive programmes. Local municipalities will explore incentives towards

	DC deferrals, brownfields tax assistance, etc.		affordable/attainable housing where they are not included in the municipal CIP and refine existing programmes to focus on particular housing types/needs (e.g. density-focused, etc.).
Adapt County Official Plan (OP) with housing-specific updates	UNDERWAY/ COMPLETED Updates to the Official Plan have been completed to support Additional Residential Units, enable streamlining through a Community Planning Permit System and remove language about the dominance of single detached dwellings. Additional policies are part of an in-progress OP Amendment to clarify, and support stacked and back-to-back townhouses.	County Planning	Staff will continue to develop more comprehensive, housing-specific updates as part of the ongoing Official Plan Review.
Adapt Local Official Plan (OP) with housing-specific updates	PENDING Upon acquiring approval towards County policy updates, changes to the Centre Wellington and Erin Official Plans would follow.	Member Municipalities (with County Planning support)	At the time of policy updates to local Official Plans, County staff will support the inclusion of housing-supportive policies through the policy review and approval process.
Conduct a County Housing Friendly Policy Review	UNDERWAY This initiative applies a housing-focused lens to the development policies in the Official Plan. Planning staff have prepared a discussion paper called "Housing Focused: A Housing	County Planning (with feedback from Member Municipalities)	Planning staff will review the feedback received on the discussion paper after the May 31, 2024 comment deadline and continue developing new and revised policies.

	Policy Review in Wellington” seeking feedback from Member Municipalities and community members about potential policy.		*Our approach will be updated to reflect the new Provincial Planning Statement once it comes into effect.
Pursue updates to local zoning bylaws	PENDING Updates to municipal zoning by-laws can be initiated by member municipalities at any time. Other changes would also need to follow approved/ in effect County or Provincial policy updates.	Member Municipalities (with County Planning input)	At the time of zoning by-law updates, County staff will support inclusion of housing-supportive standards through the review process.
Plan and support public engagement and education sessions	<p>UNDERWAY</p> <p>The goal of this work is to leverage engagement opportunities through the Official Plan Review to include a brief education component about the need for a range of housing types and densities.</p> <p>County departments and member municipalities will be working together in supporting, developing, and hosting public engagement and education sessions. Topics include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Housing and future development - YIMBYISM - ARUs - Smaller unit housing - Affordable housing, - Density etc.. 	<p>County Planning</p> <p>Economic Development</p> <p>Member Municipalities</p>	<p>Planning policy staff will develop educational content to deliver at public meetings for Official Plan Review. Educational opportunities may also be advanced on an ad-hoc basis through comments on individual development applications.</p> <p>Support to member municipal events such as business breakfasts, housing forums, employer events, public engagement and education sessions. This will also result in additional County-wide multimedia campaigns surrounding housing topics.</p>

Define and pursue a Housing Pilot Project within Wellington County	ONGOING The County Housing Taskforce will define a 'Housing Pilot Project'.	County of Wellington Member Municipalities	Staff will discuss and explore potential pilot sites, any outlined project and technical requirements, and partnerships that are required to pursue a housing pilot project.
Work with Non-Profits in creating affordable housing and to grow local capacity on the creation of affordable housing	ONGOING County staff have worked with non-profits in developing affordable housing projects within the County and the City of Guelph. Meetings with non-profits continue to outline an ongoing challenge of having to partner with landowners.	County of Wellington	The County will continue to work together with the non-profit sector to create and deliver more affordable housing units within Wellington County. Additional partnership opportunities will occur through networking and education events, staff outreach, combined funding proposals for future housing projects, etc.
Maintain Wellington County's Affordable Housing Reserve Fund	ONGOING The County makes contributions of municipal funds towards the County's Affordable Housing Reserve. Local municipal capital contributions to the development of government-funded affordable housing plays a critical role in the development of new affordable housing stock.	County of Wellington Social Services – Housing Services	Continue the County's contributions of municipal funds towards the County's Affordable Housing Reserve.
Continue activities towards the objectives included in the 10-Year Housing and Homelessness Plan for Guelph-	ONGOING Prepare the "A Place to Call Home" Annual Report on progress and activities towards objectives in the 10-Year Housing and	Social Services – Housing Services	Housing Services will continue to work with community service providers and municipal partners, taking actions towards achieving the objectives

Wellington – 5 Year Update.	<p>Homelessness Plan for Guelph-Wellington – 5 Year Update.</p> <p>The Annual Report is approved by Social Services Committee and Wellington County Council before it is submitted to the Ministry of Municipal Affairs and Housing (MMAH) by June 30th each year.</p>		identified in the 10-Year Housing and Homelessness Plan for Guelph-Wellington – 5 Year Update.
Maintain and pursue additional connections with local stakeholders, developers, non-profits and others to produce more housing projects in the County	<p>ONGOING</p> <p>County staff and member municipalities have built connections with representatives from public, private and non-profit organizations in the pursuit of opportunities to welcome a larger array of housing projects within Wellington County.</p>	<p>County of Wellington</p> <p>Member Municipalities</p>	County staff and member municipalities will continue to develop connections and establish partnerships to welcome more housing projects and a more diversified housing supply within Wellington County.
Pursue local zoning by-law updates for a broader range of housing projects	<p>PENDING</p> <p>Examples of housing-supportive zoning by-law updates include permitting increased density, removing minimum dwelling size, considering maximum square footages, permitting employee housing/ rooming houses, pre-zoning lands, permitting modular housing, etc.</p>	Member Municipalities (with County Planning support)	Seek feedback from Member Municipalities about interest in updating zoning by-laws to support more housing.
Establish permit prioritization and review guidelines for purpose-built rental, affordable,	<p>PENDING</p> <p>Explore opportunities to prioritize and provide guidance for review of purpose-built rental,</p>	<p>Member Municipalities</p> <p>County Planning</p>	Seek feedback from Member Municipalities about interest in establishing these types of new approaches.

and density-focused housing development projects	affordable, and density-focused housing development projects.		
Host a Developers/Builders Forum	PENDING A developers/builders forum offers an opportunity for Councillors, County, member municipal staff, developers and the building industry to understand market needs and discuss housing opportunities.	County of Wellington County Planning Economic Development Member Municipalities	The forum will be coordinated by staff and with member municipal and Taskforce input.
ARU Marketing & Education	PENDING Marketing and educating the public about ARUs will outline this as an alternative type of housing investment. In person, print and radio ads will be considered.	Economic Development County Planning Member Municipalities	Staff will devise a plan and collect input from member municipalities and Taskforce. on necessary content.
Planning and development of the next 10-year Housing and Homelessness Plan for Wellington-Guelph	UNDERWAY Housing Services will be working with consultants to develop our next Housing and Homelessness Plan. This process will involve an engagement strategy to collaborate with the public, service providers, persons with lived or living experiences, etc. as required.	Social Services – Housing Services	Housing Services is developing an RFP to delineate role and expectations for consultants. The Ministry of Municipal Affairs and Housing (MMAH) are required to provide direction to Service System Managers on specific expectations regarding what must be included in the plan, and those directions have not yet been issued.
Produce a Housing Catalogue for Wellington County	UNDERWAY The Federal government is developing a Standard Housing Design	CMHC MMAH	Staff will continue to monitor Federal and Provincial approaches so as not to duplicate

	Catalogue to help accelerate the delivery of homes by standardizing housing designs. The Province may also be developing a framework to use standardized housing designs.		the efforts of other levels of government. Elements that are appropriate to the County context will be considered further.
Explore additional funding models and tools to build affordable housing	UNDERWAY Planning staff have investigated the potential of expanding the County's Municipal Capital Facility By-law programme to provide incentives to for-profit developers in exchange for affordable rental housing.	County Planning Social Services – Housing Services Finance Economic Development	Further staff discussion is needed to ensure the benefits of this approach versus Community Improvement Plan (CIP) programmes that are already available.
Explore County and local internal planning processes for improvements in efficiency towards housing development applications and projects	UNDERWAY In May 2024, Planning staff reported to Planning Committee about initiatives of the Provincial government to streamline the land use planning and development process.	County Planning Member Municipalities	Staff will continue to monitor the package of legislative changes through Bill 185 and the proposed Provincial Planning Statement, and other proposed legislative changes.
Continue to improve local data collection and sharing	UNDERWAY A new annual monitoring report was launched in 2023 to provide detailed assessment of housing development across the County.	County Planning	Planning staff will continue to refine and enhance this report to include municipal breakdowns and provide more information about housing affordability rental, etc.
Develop Green Development Standards (GDS)	UNDERWAY Tri-County Green Development Standards Study is underway. Grey County will act as a lead on behalf of Dufferin and Wellington Counties.	County Planning Climate Change	Once the green development standards framework is created, Planning/Climate Change staff will review final recommendations towards the implementation of the

			<p>County's 'Future focused, climate change mitigation plan.'</p> <p>Member municipalities will be asked to provide input into programme development and the selection of relevant standards and metrics. Enabling these standards will be done through implementing policy within the County and local Official Plans, and directly through member municipalities.</p>
Advocate to Provincial and Federal governments	<p>ONGOING</p> <p>County staff have worked with partner organizations as well as provincial and federal governments to advocate for additional resources towards and opportunities to pursue attainable and affordable housing projects.</p>	All Departments	<p>The County has been and will continue to work with AMO, FCM, OPPI, RPCO and Western Wardens to advocate for attainable and affordable housing.</p>
Housing Conversations with Municipalities	<p>ONGOING</p> <p>County Housing Taskforce members meet with member municipalities to discuss current residential building trends, take-up on Additional Residential Units (ARUs), examples of successful intensification, and potential actions member municipalities would like to see to support intensification.</p>	<p>All Departments</p> <p>Member Municipalities</p>	<p>Staff have met with the Townships of Wellington North, Centre Wellington, and Town of Minto, and will continue meeting with all member municipalities.</p>

Recommendation:

That the County Housing Taskforce May 2024 Update be received by County Council for information; and;

that County staff be directed to explore the feasibility of participating with Guelph Wellington Habitat for Humanity in its planned Fergus development of 32 residential units, with specific focus on making 16 units compliant with the County's affordability standards.

Respectfully submitted,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'J Burns', with a stylized, cursive script.

Jana Burns
Wellington Place Administrator