
HALDIMAND COUNTY

Report CDS-12-2023 Municipal Housing Pledge

For Consideration by Council in Committee on December 12, 2023



OBJECTIVE:

To introduce a draft Municipal Housing Pledge for Council's consideration.

RECOMMENDATIONS:

1. THAT Report CDS-12-2023 Municipal Housing Pledge be received;
2. AND THAT the draft pledge included as Attachment 2 to Report CDS-12-2023 be approved as the County's response to the request of the Minister of Municipal Affairs and Housing.

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Approved: Cathy Case, Chief Administrative Officer

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY:

The Minister of Municipal Affairs & Housing has requested that Haldimand County reconsider its decision to not complete a Municipal Housing Pledge (MHP). A MHP is voluntary and is not tied to any provincial incentive such as the Building Faster Fund or Strong Mayor Powers. It is a collection of strategies that indicate commitments the municipality will make to facilitate housing development. Should Council choose to reconsider and approve a MHP, it is due to the Minister by December 15th. The subject report provides a draft housing pledge for Council's consideration.

BACKGROUND:

In the fall of 2022, the provincial government requested Municipal Housing Pledges (MHPs) for 29 of Ontario's largest and fastest growing municipalities (i.e. those with populations at/approaching 100,000). The province also assigned these 29 municipalities with a housing target that they are expected to achieve. The request was made as part of the province's Housing Supply Action Plan which has a stated goal of building 1.5 million homes by 2031. MHPs identify the tools and strategies that municipalities intend to use to achieve their housing targets, whether the target they intend to achieve has been assigned by the province or is their own internally set target. Pledges may include, but are not limited to, priorities for site-specific planning decisions to expedite housing in priority areas, plans to streamline the development approval process, commitments to plan, fund and build critical infrastructure to support housing, and strategies to use municipal surplus lands.

On August 22nd, the Minister of Municipal Affairs & Housing (MMAH) issued housing targets to 21 additional Ontario municipalities, including Haldimand County. As part of this issuance, the MMAH also requested a letter of commitment from the Heads of Council. The province tied infrastructure funding and Strong Mayor Powers to the acceptance of the assigned housing target. A Municipal Housing Pledge (MHP) that outlines the strategies and options that would be used to meet the target was also requested at that time.

As part of staff report CDS-06-2023 Municipal Housing Pledge and Target, Council dealt with both aspects of the MMAH's request—i.e. the letter of commitment for a housing target and the Municipal Housing Pledge. Council's decision—relative to both - was to decline the Minister's request. A letter from the Mayor's office was subsequently sent to the Minister advising of this decision.

The County received a letter from the Minister dated November 1, 2023 (Attachment 1). The letter acknowledged receipt of the Mayor's correspondence advising of Council's decision. The Minister's letter also expressed a request to reconsider the decision relative to the MHP. While there is currently nothing 'tied to' the completion of a MHP, staff believe the Minister's request and emphasis on completion of one, could suggest there may be incentives tied to it in the future (i.e. infrastructure funding). As stated previously by the province, completing a MHP does not obligate the County to anything – rather, it is a voluntary pledge that represents a commitment to best efforts to facilitate residential development. The purpose of this report is to introduce a draft MHP for Council's review should it decide to reconsider its previous decision of not completing one.

ANALYSIS:

A Municipal Housing Pledge (MHP), as stated by the province, is not intended to be a land use planning document, and its development should not require external technical expertise. The MHP is intended to be approved by Council, should it choose to adopt a MHP, and should help to codify the County's plans to meet its housing development objectives. To that end, the province has provided municipalities with a range of potential strategies and actions that can be included if developing a MHP, including (non-exhaustive list):

- identifying measures where current lack of infrastructure capacity may limit future housing development;
- strategies to encourage and promote gentle intensification to enable and expedite additional residential units in existing residential areas;
- updated zoning by-laws to permit greater range of housing to be built without need for costly and lengthy rezoning applications;
- strategies to use municipal surplus lands;
- commitment to plan for, fund and approve specific critical municipal infrastructure to support growth and new housing, which may include expanded capacity as well as fully new facilities/assets; and,
- information on municipal development approval timelines and whether municipalities are being appealed for non-decisions.

Using the province's guidance information as a spring-board, staff have reviewed current programs (including 10-year capital budget), services and trends in an effort to identify options for inclusion in a MHP. To that end, the following ten (10) strategies are recommended:

1. Encourage and better facilitate construction of secondary suites by:
 - promoting this as a viable housing option through development of a 'how to' information brochure and public information campaign (website, social media, EDT newsletter);
 - implement zoning changes to permit flexible standards—including parking, site location and setbacks—to better support establishment of units.
2. Continued investment in and expansion of the County's e-permitting system (Cityview Portal) by:
 - continued promotion of the resource within the building industry, including video and in-person tutorials;

- continued investment in upgrading the system to incorporate enhanced features that allow for more efficient processes, such as the introduction of bulk permit application submissions which will allow for more efficient review process and large volume permit issuance.
3. Facilitating land use approval efficiencies (to expedite development approvals and getting shovels in the ground) by:
 - pre-zoning/up-zoning greenfield lands (i.e. undeveloped lands on the periphery of urban areas) with residential zones that permit a wider variety of housing types, including low and medium density;
 - assess infill properties and identify those which are candidates for higher density development; upon identification work with property owners to pre-zone those lands.
 4. Promote, enhance and use delegated approval authorities for site plan, subdivision, holding removal, part lot control, agreements (servicing, subdivision) to effectively facilitate residential development.
 5. Update infrastructure planning to align with Official Plan, growth targets, and housing needs assessment by:
 - completing updates to the County's urban area Master Servicing Plans;
 - initiating a Municipal Class Environmental Assessment (EA) Study (2024) for additional wastewater treatment capacity in Hagersville;
 - purchase land and advance the EA for a new wastewater treatment plant in Caledonia, with aim to initiate construction in late 2027;
 - continue with the County's water and wastewater Optimization Program activities to tap existing capacity and understand plant needs;
 - work with the Ministry of Transportation (MTO) to accelerate the completion of intersection improvements (design and construction) at Highway 6/Haldimand Road 66;
 - manage the County's servicing allocation program with renewed emphasis on the 'use it or lose it' principle that allows the County to withdraw allocation from those projects that do not move forward expeditiously or responsibly and provide it to those projects that are ready to advance.
 6. Promotion of County's residential development incentive program, which includes:
 - Development Fees (Development Charges, applications) deferral program;
 - Front End Financing of Local Services for Large Scale Residential Developments;
 - Development Charge Deferrals for Condo Developments;
 - Community Improvement Plan (downtown housing component).
 7. Prioritize sale of County lands that can be developed for residential purposes – i.e. Cross Street West and Frank Marshall Business Park in Dunnville.
 8. Broaden scope of Development Concierge Team (DCT), which is a cross-divisional team of experts that work one to one with developers to help streamline their specific process and more quickly secure necessary approvals. The DCT currently focuses on employment generating projects but expanding its focus to residential projects could be considered.
 9. Develop an affordable housing strategy (2025) which will examine suitability and opportunities for initiatives and programs such as:
 - inclusionary zoning which can require developers build a certain percentage of their units as affordable (below market) prices or rents;
 - create a process for disposal of County-owned land assets for the development of affordable housing;
 - partnering with non-profit housing providers to preserve and increase the stock of affordable housing.

10. Work to support the growth of construction trades (to help address labour shortages), with particular focus on expanding the County's partnership with City School by Mohawk College. The potential to grow the learning opportunities/courses offered by City School within the County—for skilled trades (electrical, plumbing) and general construction, in particular—will be explored. Further, staff will continue to engage with other key partners including the Workforce Planning Board of Grand Erie, the Grand Erie District School Board and the Brant Haldimand Norfolk District Catholic School Board to explore options of informing students from elementary to secondary of the various skill trades in construction and other key sectors with the goal of increasing these skills locally.

The above represents a suite of strategies that serve to augment current programs, instruments and services, as well as better utilize some tools and resources already in place. Staff do not consider anything within this list to be outside of the realm of achievability and this collection of initiatives are appropriate efforts in the context of meeting the County's housing objectives. Further, staff do not view the commitment to a MHP as being a risk or having any significant downside. To the contrary, committing to a MHP could potentially in future open up eligibility for funding opportunities. In essence, this can be considered a case of nothing ventured, nothing gained.

FINANCIAL/LEGAL IMPLICATIONS:

Not applicable.

STAKEHOLDER IMPACTS:

Not applicable.

REPORT IMPACTS:

Agreement: No

By-law: No

Budget Amendment: No

Policy: No

REFERENCES:

None.

ATTACHMENTS:

1. Minister's Letter.
2. Municipal Housing Pledge.