



Committee Report

To:	Chair McQueen and Members of the Affordable Housing Task Force
Committee Date:	March 17, 2022
Subject / Report No:	Public Lands for Affordable Housing Project /PDR-AF-09-22
Title:	Public Lands for Affordable Housing Project – Introduction & Workplan
Prepared by:	Liz Buckton, MCIP, RPP
Reviewed by:	Randy Scherzer and Anne Marie Shaw
Lower Tier(s) Affected:	All local municipalities
Status:	

Recommendation

1. That Report PDR-AF-09-22 regarding use of surplus public lands for affordable housing be received; and,
2. That regular updates be provided back to the Affordable Housing Task Force.

Executive Summary

A staff resource has been contracted to initiate work on the Surplus Public Lands for Affordable Housing project which is an action identified in the Housing Action Plan. This project will explore the creation of resources to assist the County and local municipalities in assessing the suitability of their surplus public lands for new affordable and market rental housing creation and will support implementation of ‘Housing First’ policies contained within the County Official Plan. This report provides a summary of the overall project concept and scope, and shares the preliminary project workplan, which identifies key tasks and deliverables for the project, through August 2022.

Background and Discussion

On March 3rd, 2021, staff presented PDR-AF-01-20 (Addendum) to the Affordable Housing Task Force (Task Force) identifying a number of ‘Items for Follow-up’. As directed by the Task Force, these items have been incorporated into the Housing Action Plan, with status updates to be provided on an ongoing basis.

The Action Items listed within the March 2021 report were as follows:

1. Working with municipalities on municipal development charge updates related to rental

housing.

2. Ensuring CIP programs are up to date and in place across Grey.
3. Exploring refinements to the planning process at both the County and municipal levels to streamline approvals.
4. Consideration of pre-zoning land at the municipal level for density and rental housing.
5. **Exploring surplus County/municipal lands to offer up for new affordable and rental housing.**
6. Exploring potential for new green rental developments and partnerships.
7. Consider 'pitching' communities within Grey as ideal location for new rental developments.
8. Demonstrating leadership by Council and staff on the need for rental housing.
9. Promoting funding sources, such as CMHC funding, where applicable.

The Surplus Public Lands for Affordable Housing Project specifically arises from Item 5, above, but is anticipated to additionally address or incorporate elements of each of the other items identified.

As shared verbally during the January 2022 Affordable Housing Task Force meeting, Staff had pursued a grant opportunity for this project in late 2021 though the project was unfortunately not selected for funding. Using funding from the Social Services Relief Fund, alternate resources were allocated to the County Planning Department budget, allowing the project to proceed with support of an in-house part-time (contract) role, rather than an external project consultant, as was initially proposed. Registered Professional Planner Liz Buckton joined the team beginning on January 17th, 2022 and early project planning tasks are now underway, as outlined below.

Project Description

This project aims to facilitate the implementation of the Housing-First policies of the Official Plan and to support the development of affordable housing on surplus public lands, where appropriate. This will be accomplished through the creation of reference & educational materials; local affordable housing-creation targets; better-practices & process mapping; and, the development of a GIS-based tool, which together can be used by the County and local municipalities in carrying out site assessment and pre-development activities for surplus public lands.

Key Components

It is anticipated that this project will be comprised of four main components, described in the Table 1 below and illustrated at **Appendix 1** (Project Schematic) to this report:

1. Project Hosting
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Provide a central location for information by:<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Expanding 'Housing for All' section on County website - will house reference & educational materials;• GIS-based public lands mapping tool to aid County and local municipal staff in identification and screening of potential affordable housing sites.

Discussion	Both the website and GIS tool/resource are already established and will be expanded and refined through this project.
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2. Communications: Call to Action & Public Education

- Preparation of public-facing messaging and educational materials around local housing needs, supply, statistics, as well as available tools & incentives to support housing creation.
- Articulation of a tangible target (e.g. X units of affordable/community/workforce housing by DATE) that we will collectively work towards. This will be informed by a review of local statistics to discern specific housing needs and with consideration to those developments already in-process across the County.
- Provision of clear (\$) definitions of ‘affordability’ by unit type, size and location.
- Development of visual identity and key messaging relating to creation of ‘Housing for All’
- Consideration and preparation of appropriate case studies for sharing on the Housing for All website.
- Curation of specific overarching tone/approach for communications around affordable housing, embracing:
 - Housing as key community infrastructure** - Our community is comprised of interdependent individuals and organizations. Housing is a social determinant of health with impacts felt at both an individual and community-scale.
 - Housing creation as an act of community self-determination and agency** - We are aware of housing gaps and needs in our community. We have empathy for those experiencing housing insecurity and we appreciate the profound impacts of a lack of affordable housing on lives, livelihoods and more broadly, the health of our community. We will exercise our agency - independently and collectively - taking actions to support housing creation that meets our community’s identified needs.
- A review of ongoing housing-related action will further inform the tone, specific messages, and educational materials to be developed.

Discussion	<p>Housing affordability is a hot topic these days, receiving widespread media attention and study by both private and public sector organizations. Being an election year (Provincial and Municipal) Staff expect that ‘<i>the housing crisis</i>’ is well-positioned to become a key election platform issue.</p> <p>Staff observe that because of this widespread media coverage there is increasing baseline awareness of housing supply, affordability, and equity issues by the general public. Staff do not recommend a significant focus on generic awareness-building through this project. Instead, Staff perceive an opportunity to better articulate and describe our specific local supply and affordability ‘gaps’ in a manner that will help to inform actions by local municipal, non-profit and private sector partners.</p> <p>Additionally, Staff support a thoughtful shift in the tone of communications away from ‘housing <i>crisis</i>’, instead highlighting the role of affordable housing</p>
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	as key community infrastructure and encouraging a compassionate and empowered response to related supply, affordability and equity issues. This is in keeping with 'social change' research, which indicates that people have a limited capacity for worry and that the use of emotionally charged appeals and hyperbolic language may work in the short term to capture attention and engagement but can result in emotional numbing and a decline in engagement and related actions over time.
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3. Roundtable: Liaison & Support

Maintenance of an ongoing forum for discussion/information support to lower-tier municipalities relating to Affordable housing creation and the implementation of Housing First policies relating to their surplus lands.

Discussion	<p>Ongoing liaison and supportive communication are expected to be delivered through a series of invited meetings with local municipal staff, ideally at regular intervals throughout project development.</p> <p>Initially, the focus will be on establishing a free flow of information to/from lower-tier municipal partners. The form and function of this group is expected to evolve over the life of the project and beyond.</p>
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4. Better Practices & Process Mapping

- Better-practices information will be developed to assist the County and local municipalities in assessing their surplus lands for potential affordable housing creation.
- Key considerations and typical processes/path dependencies relating to the potential creation of Affordable housing on surplus public land will be identified.
- An evaluation of existing lower-tier Community Improvement Plans (CIPs) will be undertaken. CIPs are a key enabling tool, allowing for lands to be held, maintained, improved, or disposed of at or below market rate, where such actions support identified community development objectives and priorities.

Discussion	<p>It is expected that viable Affordable housing creation is most likely to result where:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Proper municipal/corporate structures are in place to facilitate transfer or lease of surplus public lands at or below, market value. • Site Characteristics are generally suitable for housing development (e.g., servicing, size, siting, zoning, environmental constraints or contamination, compatible and supportive uses nearby, access to transportation options etc.) • Pre-Development work has been undertaken to bring the lands into a shovel-ready state, facilitating access to grant/loan opportunities and reducing development review/approval timelines. • Path dependencies within the process have been identified and ordered, where possible, helping to simplify an otherwise nuanced, complex process. • Sites are evaluated through the lens of grant eligibility and 'incentive
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	<p>stacking’ to support economic viability for affordable housing creation.</p> <p>The better-practice resources to be developed through this project will have regard for the elements noted above and will build upon the various housing-related policies of the County Official Plan to support their implementation and the creation of new Affordable housing.</p>
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Table 1: Key Project Components

Project Schedule/Workplan

Contract staff support for this project is in place through August 2022. The above-noted project components, documents and deliverables are expected to be substantially completed within this timeframe. A visual Project Workplan has been prepared and is affixed as **Appendix 1**, herein. Within that Workplan, four distinct ‘workflows’ have been identified in Table 2, as follows:

Workflow	Activities
Internal Communications	Reflects ongoing reporting and dialogue between Staff and the Affordable Housing Task Force.
Project Hosting & Messaging	Captures: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • data gathering & landscape review activities • preparation of specific housing targets • development of key messages, educational materials, resources • website & GIS tool refinement • hosting/publication of materials online
Better Practices and Process Mapping	Includes: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • CIP status/incentive review • Granting Agency discussions, program eligibility and site criteria research • Preparation of process-mapping and identification of key path dependencies for affordable housing creation on surplus public lands • Ongoing discussions with Legal Staff to ensure compliance under legislation
Municipal Liaison	Includes initial outreach and scheduling of project roundtable, firstly with lower-tier municipalities. Will include sharing of GIS public lands inventory tool, better-practices and process mapping resources.

Table 2: Workflows and Related Activities

Project Resourcing

The project is expected to be substantially carried out using in-house staff and technology resources. External graphic design support may be pursued relating to the visual branding component of the project.

Legal and Legislated Requirements

In general, municipalities are restricted by section 106 of the *Municipal Act, 2001* from selling land for less than fair market value. Section 106(3) provides an exception to this rule where a municipality is selling the land for the purpose of implementing the municipality's own community improvement plan (CIP) established under section 28 of the *Planning Act*.

Section 28(2) of the Planning Act provides that any local municipality with an official plan containing provisions related to community improvement can designate a community improvement project area, and then establish a CIP for that project area. That section also permits certain upper-tier municipalities to establish CIPs, but only if they are prescribed by regulation, Ontario Regulation 221/07 lists the upper-tier municipalities that may establish a CIP, but it does not include Grey County at this time.

Any work to be performed by the County in assisting its lower-tier municipalities must be carried out in accordance with the restrictions in the Real Estate and Business Brokers Act, 2002 (REBBA). That Act restricts a very wide range of activities related to the sale/disposition of real estate, including marketing, negotiation, and agreement preparation. Exceptions exist in REBBA that would apply if the County was a party to any real estate transaction.

Financial and Resource Implications

At this stage the project is being carried out using existing staff resources, in addition to the contract staff position being funded from the Social Services Relief Fund. Additional staffing or financial resources may be needed as the County progresses with this project. Any additional staffing or financial resource requests not already within the approved 2022 budget, will come back to this Task Force and County Council for consideration and approval.

Relevant Consultation

- Internal: Planning, Housing, Legal, Finance
- External: Future Consultation with Municipalities, Not-for-Profit Housing providers, Developers

Appendices and Attachments

Appendix 1 – Visual Workplan

Appendix 1 – Visual Workplan

