

# SEEKING SHELTER IN AURORA



Lana Hall

After a series of delays, a proposal to develop an emergency shelter in Aurora will be considered at the Town's public planning meeting next week. Although the project has been plagued by residents' concerns, housing advocates say the proposed emergency and transitional housing facility would replace some of the region's aging shelter facilities and would provide more convenient access to services for shelter clients looking to rebuild their lives.

The site of the proposed facility, located at 14452 Yonge Street south of Henderson Drive, is currently owned by **York Region**. The Region offered the site as a potential location for a new shelter when it was determined that a replacement for some of the Region's aging shelter facilities was needed. The proposed facility would replace the 48-unit Porter Place facility, comprising two shelter buildings currently located in East Gwillimbury. The East Gwillimbury buildings are owned by York Region and operated by **Blue Door Support Services**. The new Yonge Street location would provide Aurora with its

first shelter and transitional housing facility.

"It really is in the middle of nowhere," says Blue Door chief executive officer (CEO) **Michael Braithwaite** of the existing Porter Place facility. "Which is wonderful because we don't get any complaints. But at the same time, it's not the best location for clients."

The new facility proposed for 14452 Yonge would consist of a five-storey mixed-use residential building containing 55 units, including 37 emergency housing units and 18 transitional housing units. The basement and ground floor would accommodate community programming spaces. The facility would share

the site with the Henderson pumping station, which supports wastewater flow

CONTINUED PAGE 7 ■



Rendering of York Region's emergency shelter and transitional housing facility proposed for a site at 14452 Yonge Street in Aurora. The building would meet both Passive House Design standards and LEED Gold certification and would be designed to mitigate crime through environmental design principles, including clear sightlines, ample lighting and 24/7 support on-site for tenants and shelter clients.

SOURCE: YORK REGION  
ARCHITECT: ARCADIS IBI GROUP

Map of the site at 14452 Yonge Street in Aurora, where York Region has proposed to build a five-storey, 55-unit emergency shelter and transitional housing facility. The facility would replace an older shelter facility in East Gwillimbury, providing clients with more space and easier access to amenities.

SOURCE: YORK REGION



# SEEKING SHELTER IN AURORA

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 6

and is currently undergoing improvements to meet operational demands during extreme weather.

The proposed shelter would be designed to meet both Passive House Design standards and LEED Gold certification and to prevent crime through environmental design principles, such as clear sightlines, ample lighting and 24/7 support on-site for tenants and shelter clients.

First proposed by York Region in 2019, the shelter project has faced a number of delays. In January 2023, the project was temporarily put on hold after pushback from local residents concerned about possible impacts to the neighbourhood, prompting the **Ontario Human Rights Commission** to criticize opposition to the shelter, declaring that residents' concerns had no legal or land-use planning basis to oppose the project.

In June 2023, York Region council voted to not appeal the **Town of Aurora's** decision at the **Ontario Land Tribunal**, should the proposal be refused by the Town.

Now, Aurora town council is scheduled to consider the item at its next public planning meeting on February 13.

Amid a growing

homelessness crisis, says Braithwaite, the proposed shelter location is ideal. It's close to amenities, and its co-location with the pumping station means it is slightly sheltered from Yonge Street.

"If you didn't tell somebody it was there, they would never know. It gives [shelter residents] access to transit, health services and other things they might need to access employment," he told *NRU*.

Braithwaite says backlash from residents is nothing new when it comes to neighbourhood change, but notes that emergency and transitional housing are both elements of a complete community.

"When people say 'Is there going to be change?' Sure, of course. 'Are there going to be times when we'll have to work through challenges on that site?' Of course. It's not to deny that things will never go wrong, but to know that when you have the right partners in the Region, they're there to work with those vulnerable people and get them where they need to be. [Shelter clients], if they want to maintain their housing, they're going to have to be a good neighbour. And for the most part, 95 per cent of the men,

that's what they want, and they will work hard to do so."

Despite the months-long delay since the Town's initial public planning meeting for 14452 Yonge Street site, Town of Aurora ward 1 councillor

**Ron Weese** says some questions about the project remain unanswered.

"[There are] residents in the area who have concerns over the intake processes of the emergency and transitional housing centre, and the proximity of this that is on Regional land ... It's very close to railroad tracks, it's very close to a sewage pumping station, and it's also within a couple hundred yards of a residential community," he says.

Weese notes that there are some questions around traffic management and a plan for transitioning shelter clients into the community.

"I think what we're hearing from our residents are things that are very typical of any kind of emergency and transitional shelter ... The principle side of this is we've seen an increase in the number of homeless men

in our community, as many have experienced elsewhere. We don't have an emergency or transitional shelter in Aurora. In a housing crisis, we should be looking after those people who are most vulnerable."

Aurora council is scheduled to consider the item at its public planning meeting on February 13. 🌱



## Policy Planning

We are looking to hire the following contract positions:

- Planner II – Policy
- Planner II (Affordable Housing)
- Project Manager, Affordable Housing

For more information and to apply please visit:

<https://jobs.richmondhill.ca/go/View-All/2572817/>

Deadline to apply is **February 23, 2024**