

Orangeville Council promises annual funding for Family Transition Place's affordable apartment project]

By Sam Odrowski

More affordable housing for women and children fleeing domestic violence could be coming to Dufferin County.

At its Monday, February 6 meeting, Orangeville Council indicated support, both financially and in principle, for Family Transition Place's (FTP) plans to build an affordable apartment complex.

The current proposal looks to build 22 apartment units designated for the women and children that FTP counsels and provides shelter.

They could live at the apartment for up to five years instead of being limited to a six-week to three months stay at FTP's emergency shelter.

"It would be rent geared to income housing and we are ready to build," said Norah Kennedy, Executive Director of FTP.

The organization has already contributed its land and \$400,000 to the project. FTP is now seeking a grant from the Canadian Mortgage and Housing Corporation (CMHC), totalling \$8.5 million, to move it forward. And to increase their application's likelihood of being approved, Kennedy requested that Council indicate ongoing financial support for the project's operation.

In response, Mayor Lisa Post made a motion, which passed unanimously, to write a letter of support for the project to CMHC and allocate \$20,000 annually through the Town's community grant funding program if it moves forward.

FTP applied for grant funding for the apartment project last year through CMHC's Rapid Application Initiative but was denied.

"We were told we had a very strong application, but we were reminded that it was a national competition and a lot of it depended on where they [CMHC] felt the most need in the country was," said Kennedy. "We know it's a risk again. It's CMHC. It's national. But we have ticked off all of the boxes with this design."

The other box FTP had to check was to demonstrate to CMHC that other levels of government support their proposal financially, which was achieved through Mayor Post's motion for \$20,000 annually. FTP is requesting financial support from the County of Dufferin today (February 9), and with support from both levels of municipal government, their application is more likely to be successful.

During Kennedy's presentation, she noted that FTP is currently full and remains this way most of the time, mainly because people have nowhere to go after staying with FTP.

"Once women and their children come into the shelter, there is nowhere for them to discharge to, nowhere that is affordable or sustainable for them," she said. "Their options are very limited."

Many are left to choose between going back to their abuser, finding another community to live in or ending up on the streets due to the lack of housing and accommodations locally.

Another reason FTP's almost always full is the escalation of domestic and gender-based violence coming out of the pandemic, according to Kennedy.

The vision for the three-story tall apartment project is to have 22 affordable, accessible dwelling units with the wrap-around services

FTP offers. This includes counselling for mental health, addictions and independent living.

The apartment would also have a community room where childcare or group therapy sessions could be held and a gym.

An added touch is a rooftop garden with a sensory play area.

If the apartment moves forward, it will positively impact the availability of rental units locally, which are in dire supply, according to Kennedy.

'This isn't about Family Transition Place,' she said. 'It's not about FTP expanding, it's about finding a solution to housing.'

Kennedy noted her thanks to Orangeville Council for their support for the project.

'I just want to express my deepest gratitude to all of you for supporting this work,' she said. 'I think together we can make a real difference in our community.'