

Peel working housing abuse and trafficking survivors

By Bill Rea

Peel Region is continuing its efforts to provide housing for survivors of domestic violence and human trafficking.

Regional staff recently sent a report on the matter to councillors, which was received without comment.

The report stated that the Province launched a two-year pilot program in the fall of 2016 with 22 service managers, including the Region. The aim was to provide survivors of domestic violence with a portable housing benefit.

Staff reported the program produced positive results, so it was expanded to include all communities. As well, in November, the Province announced that the housing benefit would be available to eligible survivors of human trafficking, starting April 1.

The report stated that when it comes to domestic violence, survivors on the Region's centralized wait list get the option of receiving a portable housing benefit instead of waiting for subsidized housing unit with rent geared to income (RGI). Staff added participating in the program is voluntary, and those taking part get to keep their places on the wait list.

Staff stated 84 survivors have joined the pilot program, and 24 have left, with most of them electing to take RGI units.

The results of the pilot project indicate the portable housing benefit has advantages. It lets the victims get out of their abusive situations faster because they don't have to wait for a vacant unit to come available.

When it comes to dealing with survivors of human trafficking, the report reminded councillors they endorsed funding last year for a two-stage housing support model, while also endorsing an expedited development application process for this sort of housing.

The report said staff have reviewed 14 Regional surplus sites that could be suitable for affordable housing. Two places in Mississauga could be suitable for transitional housing for human trafficking survivors, but the other 12 were found to be inappropriate, either because they are in rural areas, or extensive renovation work would be needed.

Staff also reported that Family Services Peel has received a little more than \$302,000 in funding from the Ministry of Community and Special Services to help develop and screening tool for service providers to identify people at risk of being trafficked.