

Statement on Subsidized Housing presented by Carmel Hili and Rie Elemaolie, Social Justice Committee, Holy Family Church in Bolton

Purpose of our presentation to Caledon Council

Good evening, Councillors, we are here on behalf of a group of Caledonians concerned about issues of social justice. Our social justice group is based at Holy Family Church in Bolton. We want to talk to you about a basic need, namely decent and affordable housing. Affordable in our minds is housing that is accessible to our lowest income families, that is, subsidized housing often called social housing. We are concerned and upset that many families and single people out there, often unnoticed to our eyes and minds, are hurting and stressed. As concerned citizens of Caledon, we feel obligated to speak out.

We are familiar with our township. We have seen and continue to see all kinds of subdivisions popping up in various parts of our township in the last years, (the Albion-King Town line, Old Church Road/Innis Lake Road development, the West Mayfield village, the Mt. Pleasant/Hudsen. Sorrento, Brookfield and several more.) Others are in the planning stage.

OUR PLEA

And we ask: but where are the houses for people with low income, those who receive government assistance, who live with disabilities, who are unemployed, who depend on charity for food, who wrestle with mental health or addiction, who cannot buy houses... and can hardly pay the rent! True, we have had 10 Habitat for Humanity modest houses in Southfields but that is home ownership

The question arises in our minds: how we can govern ourselves in such a way that all of us get served, particularly in the basic need of housing and that nobody gets left behind. What's being built by private developers is for homeowners. But what about those in our midst who are unable to buy and who even struggle to pay the rent and attend to other basic needs such as food and clothing for their children., Many suffer at the bottom, voiceless and powerless: we know of cases of homelessness, people who sleep in their cars or on friends' couches or even in ravines.

THE SITUATION OUT THERE

There is hard data out there to show this:

- i) In a 6 month period, Caledon Community Services (CCS) food pantry was accessed about 1300 times (1). Hundreds depend on this food outlet at the Exchange to cope. "If it were not for the Food Bank, I'll be dead," Sean told one of us one day while being driven home. Now, who would go to a charity for such a basic need as food? Only people who are in desperate situations. In a 6 month period, CCS served 420 individuals and surrounded them with support. (2)

- ii) Data given us at a meeting of spiritual leaders estimate that about 12% of Caledon's people (i.e. 1,500 households) live below the poverty line (LIM) (3), well below the poverty line.
- iii) The CCS's Christmas Fund helps over 300 children in over 350 households with food and toys (4).
- iv) Many people seeking financial help or visiting the food bank live in private housing as per CCS data. Often, their housing is a constant source of stress for their rents well exceed the 30% benchmark of their income.
- v) In Bolton rent for a 1-bedroom basement apartment now goes for more than \$1000.00. If you are a single on Ontario Works receiving about \$800.00 per month or Ontario Disability Support Program at \$1,169.00 (5), how can you live? A couple with a child on government assistance with an income of \$1,400.00(6): how can they afford a 2-bedroom apartment in our town?
- vi) Ontario Works reports 130 recipients on Ontario Works in Caledon. (7) CCS alone supports 36 ODSPs and there are more.
- vii) Region of Peel housing list shows 88 households in Caledon on the list for affordable housing (8). We presume the list may not reflect the dire reality as many families may not apply due to the long waiting times.

THE LARGER PICTURE

We understand that the larger picture is not very promising. As part of the Region of Peel, Caledon's social problems are reflected on a larger scale in our immediate context. The Region also groans under its severe shelter needs. Some 17% of its population live below the poverty line (Canada Stats LIM) and 70% of them live in unaffordable housing. (9) Over 15,000 people resorted to overnight shelters (10) and close to 14,000 families are on the waiting list. (11) We are glad the Region initiated its own 10-year Housing and Homelessness Plan and established new strategies to develop affordable housing. There is however much ground to cover still. As Aileen Baird, Director of Housing Services states "only 0.03 of new units built each year are affordable." The Federal Government has strengthened the Region's will with its \$276.4 million infusion over ten years in affordable housing. However, strategies unfold slowly for those who are homeless now or else are living in precarious housing.

For low income families, the Province, at the base of all this, has now become a grimmer place to live with its bleak housing programs, with 17% of its children or 410,000 children living below the poverty line and about 7% or 183,000 in 74,000 families stuck in deep poverty. (12) Over 160,000 households are languishing on waiting lists. The Province today is far removed from the progressive and enlightened housing programs of the late 80s and early 90s, when close to 20,000 housing units were built within a few years. Currently, the Province has been currently even restrictive in its regulations affecting the Promoting Affordable Housing Act. Unlike Ontario, hundreds of jurisdictions in the US and worldwide have

welcome Inclusionary Zoning, creating thousands of units for low income families.

That is why we feel you (Council) should nudge, actually demand that private developers contribute to this national wound that even the UN Rapporteur for Housing has condemned and shamed us a few years ago.

- 1) **Permits:** you hold the key to whether developers build housing or not. You give the “go ahead” via **permits**. You could leverage this asset to make developers, who get very rich building houses, put aside an acceptable percentage of the housing for low income families.
- 2) **Inclusionary Zoning (IZ):** Ontario's *Promoting Affordable Housing Act* of December 2016 authorized municipalities to implement IZ policies for residential housing but foolishly excluded rental properties in its December 2017 regulations. As a member of the Association of Municipalities Ontario (AMO) and partner of the Region of Peel, you can boldly and unapologetically press to fix this wrong and in particular push your own Recommendations 37 and 40 (14) that the Province provide investments and incentives for purpose-built rental housing. You are moving on the Second Unit front: we urge you, however, to keep the fight for new rental buildings in which a generous percentage of subsidized units are included. IZ should hold sway in all types of housing: as a result, thousands of families could emerge out of deep poverty.
- 3) Consider a variation of the **Single Room Occupancy (SRO)** model, the rooming house model. SROs have fallen in disrepute in the last 60 years. However, tweaking the model in the form of a **bachelorette** could break the cycle of poverty for many single people and provide them with decent unit that is fit for them. Such units could be easily dispersed around in apartment buildings.
- 4) More subsidized housing units in Caledon: You can strongly make **your case at the regional level**. The last Housing Facts published by the Region shows Caledon as having 258 social housing units while Brampton, ten times the size of Caledon, has 3386. (15) Peel Housing should create more housing in Caledon in proportion to the size of our population.
- 5) Intensive housing: is it not time to address the question of **intensive housing** and begin planning mid-height apartment buildings in strategic parts of Bolton and other towns for mixed communities that would include low income and subsidized renters? Focusing on sub-divisions, gated communities and monster houses imply subtle and creeping sprawl while well-planned intensification would provide both a mixture of more market and social housing units, with added benefits to public transportation and local business.
- 6) You can leverage the Town's reach to demand that large corporations like Amazon, Canadian Tire and others who put pressure on housing supply in Caledon to contribute towards new housing for their employees.

- 7) Lastly, the **Wilson Family property** on Healey and Humber Station Roads. We are miffed but also upset that you seem to be giving the cold shoulder to this generous offer. Here is an opportunity for a Health Centre that can save us travel to and long waits in hospitals in addition to creating affordable housing. Several people on the Region's Waiting List are seniors. You, Council, need to explain to the public what problems are warranting your opposition to this health centre/housing proposal. Such a project would provide a major Health Centre to our township and create precious housing units for our seniors, many of whom cannot afford the \$3000.00 plus rent being charged by the new retirement apartment buildings.

In concluding, we submit that, like you, we have our own homes and live comfortably in them. However, in our good fortune, we tend to forget the hardships that many of our immediate neighbours are subjected to and the mental pain and growth disadvantages visited on their children. The Region's 2019 Budget report stated that 965 new affordable housing (16) are in development: stage but how many of them are coming to Caledon?

FINALLY, even if this unconventional comment comes at the end of our presentation, we submit that we all have engraved in our souls a sense of moral obligation and justice: we owe each other the opportunity to the basic necessities of life in sufficient measurements. This has been the bedrock of our civilization. All of us, rich, middle class and poor, are like strands of the same web. If any set of strands frays, the whole web weakens. We have seen how this is so true in our present predicament of COVID-19: we really depend on each other for our personal and communal well-being. We have all come together to support all segments of our population, especially the most vulnerable ones : homeless people being housed without precondition, people with disabilities upgraded to a more basic income, poor families receiving more generous children's benefits, people living from cheque to cheque lifted up by quick unemployment and government assistance funds. This plague has transported us to a new state of mind and social order. We have come to recognize our interdependent obligations to each other. It is these principles, we submit, that must move us to blot out another type of virus, namely, the scourge of homelessness, poverty and continuous anxiety about food and housing of many families, even in our Town and the Region.

- NOTES:
- (1), (2), (3), (4) Caledon Community Services (CCS) Data, Nov. 2019 meeting with spiritual leaders, literature, analyses.
 - (5), (6) Ontario OW charts, TO Employment and Social Service, Canada Stats Low Income Measurements for single and couple with child are \$24,886.00 and \$41,886.00 respectively.
 - (7) Ontario Works figures by R of P staff
 - (8) Region of Peel: Housing Facts 2019 – Current residence of households on Centralized Waiting List
 - (9) R of P Housing Facts 2019: Need for Affordable housing
 - (10) R of P Housing Facts 2019 – Homelessness Services
 - (11) R of P Housing Facts 2019 – Need for Affordable Housing
 - (12) Ontario Government: Poverty Reduction Strategy 2018 pp. 2, 3
 - (13) Canada First National Housing Strategy
 - (14) Association of Municipalities of Ontario: Fixing the Affordable Crisis, August 14, 201
 - (15) R of P Housing Facts 2019, Affordable Social Housing in Peel
 - (16) Region of Peel: Housing Facts 2019, Housing Services