

Apartments, social housing in region's plans

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500 units will be built by the private sector over the next three years.

The region is encouraging a mix of social housing, rental apartments and home ownership.

Regional staff and politicians have long recognized incentives are needed to bring private builders on board.

The strategy, outlined for the region's housing and social services committee last week, identified several ways the municipality can entice the private sector to help build affordable apartments and homes.

The region has already started offering breaks on development charges and property taxes, providing financing for projects and making available federal money from a fund devoted

to creating affordable housing in Ontario.

This fall, council will consider a bylaw to enable the region to employ the available incentives.

Individual projects will be analyzed and, if they meet the region's criteria, bylaws will be passed to allow breaks for developers, she said.

"Each project would be brought forward based on its merits," Ms Patterson told the committee.

The federal government would contribute as much as \$25,000 for each housing unit, provided the municipality and province match the contribution.

The region is pledging to make the funding scheme work, even though the province has not offered any new money, Ms Patterson said. Queen's Park has indicated it will waive provincial sales tax, up to \$2,000 per unit, under the federal fund-

ing plan.

"Certainly we're disappointed the province is not contributing more to the program," Ms Patterson said.

5,000 households are currently on waiting lists for assisted housing.

The region has some catching up to do:

- Since 1995, just 587 new rental units have been built in York Region, one of the nation's fastest-growing municipalities. The vacancy rate hovers continually below 1 per cent.

- 5,000 households are currently on waiting lists for assisted housing. The region manages about 7,200 units.

- Quality, affordable housing for middle-income families is in short supply. That affects not only the quality of life for families forced to settle for less than satisfactory shelter, but also hampers industry, which needs a stable, local labour force.

The region has taken action to address the problem. In addition to a forum on housing in Newmarket last November, the municipi-

pality has hosted meetings with various groups, including the Greater Toronto Home Builders Association.

Mr. Murphy said his association likes what it sees in York's plan.

"They're covering the whole gamut of housing, which is a very good thing and a positive thing," he said.


But while politicians are willing to offer incentives, they want to be sure they can continue to provide the infrastructure needed to support new development, while giving builders breaks on the charges that pay for those sewer pipes, roads, parks and other services.

"You're looking at 1.5 per cent of our lot levy fees being affected by this program," said Newmarket Mayor Tom Taylor, chairperson of the housing committee.

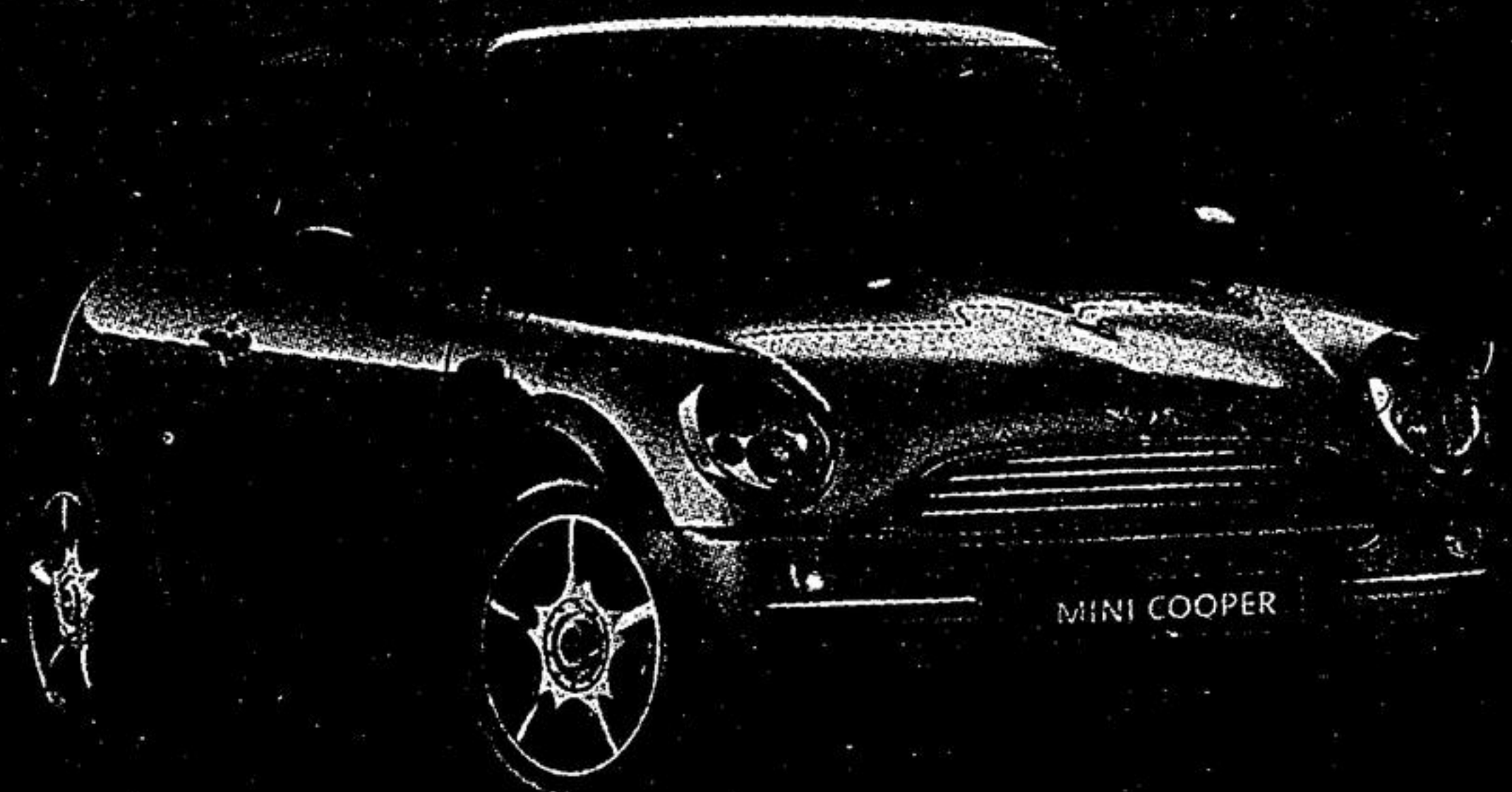
Mr. Taylor's municipality has led the way in providing breaks for builders. Last year, Newmarket passed a resolution giving development charge breaks to non-profit housing projects.

And Newmarket will be the site of an expanded assisted housing development for seniors and the disabled. Last week, the housing

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