

SHELTER: Projects moving forward over next three years

Federal housing funding temporary relief, region says

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It won't solve York Region's affordable housing woes, but a new agreement will allow projects to move forward for the next three years.

The federal government announced this week the negotiation of a framework with the provinces that spells out spending in the final three years of its \$1.9-billion, five-year affordable housing initiative.

The deal gave affordable housing some breathing room following the expiration of a prior agreement in March.

York Region received \$26 million in the first two years, mostly directed toward new construction.

The region also used money from the provincial and federal

governments for housing subsidies and leveraged further investments, including a home-ownership program in partnership with Habitat for Humanity.

"What we're most hoping for is flexibility, so we can decide as a community what our needs are," regional housing director Sylvia Patterson said.

OUT OF LIMBO

The last few months of limbo caused some concern and some projects could have been expedited if the money flowed faster, Ms Patterson said, adding she was optimistic the funding would come eventually.

Monday's announcement is not new money, but rather the promise to spend the remainder of the five-year fund announced in 2008 and rolled out in 2009.

Sustainable, long-term funding is something York Region and other municipalities say they need to advance housing programs.

York's social housing wait list exceeds 7,600 households — more than 15,000 people — and the three-year program, which will be more like two-and-a-half by the time money starts flowing, isn't enough, Ms Patterson said.

While the framework outlines general principles, the details are still to be hammered out. Bilateral agreements with each province are to be completed later this summer.

Transfer payments will then flow from Ottawa to Queen's Park, and the money then distributed according to the provincial government's plan.

York Region won't know its

share until then.

In the meantime, local organizations are already feeling the effects of inadequate funding.

Former York Region Alliance to End Homelessness executive director Jane Wedlock stepped aside in March due to a lack of reliable funding.

The alliance is non-profit and comprised of local anti-poverty groups, such as Blue Door Shelters and the York Region Food Network.

"The affordable housing issue in York Region is still dire," food network executive director Joan Stonehocker said.

She noted the deal won't mean any new money, despite a growing wait list for social housing and said depleted staff at the alliance makes it hard to even keep abreast of issues.

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