

Federal budget good news for York Region, Emmerson says

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While the federal Liberals are trumpeting their first budget as a transformative investment in Canadians' futures, critics complain the financial document, at best, fails to deliv-

er on key promises and, at worst, leads the country down the road to ruin.

In his budget, called Growing the Middle Class, Finance Minister Bill Morneau laid out a spending spree that he said will see the government spend \$11.9 billion on infra-

structure, bring in a child benefit that will lift thousands of children out of poverty and help middle-income families, and kick-start the economy.

But the budget also made a laughing stock of an election promise to keep the deficit at less than \$10 billion, critics said.

This year's deficit will hit almost three times that benchmark at \$29.4 billion. And while Morneau hopes to balance the books in five years, he didn't put that in writing.

The budget reflects the strong message Canadians have given the government to help families and make investments in the future, Morneau said.

"What we're also going to do is be prudent along the way," he said.

Investments in infrastructure include \$3.2 billion for public transit, with \$2.41 billion of that coming to Ontario and Quebec, \$2 billion for clean water and wastewater and \$3.4 billion for social infrastructure, such as housing, child care and recreation facilities.

But although \$1.48 billion is earmarked for affordable housing, Richard Lyall, president of Vaughan-based Residential Construction Council of Ontario or RESCON, doesn't think the funding will make much of a dent in the lack of affordable housing in York Region.

"This budget on housing is a real mess. I like the parts on seniors' renos, homelessness and shelter. Other than that, it lays a massive bill in the hands of millennials without dealing with the real problems," the Newmarket resident said.

"This will not put a dent in York Region's shortage of rental or affordable housing. My

eight-year-old could come up with a better budget."

York Region's serious lack of affordable housing is having a significant impact on economic development as young people struggle to afford places to live, Lyall said.

That dynamic is stopping businesses looking for a ready workforce from setting up in the region, he said. Fewer than 50 rental units have been built in York Region in each of the last three years, he said.

York Region chair Wayne Emmerson congratulated the government on its budget, pointing out Ottawa has committed more than \$120 billion over the next 10 years to improve and expand public transit, increase affordable housing, modernize water and wastewater infrastructure and enhance broadband service in rural and remote communities.

He called it an historic commitment to improve our communities.

Emmerson and several mayors and regional councillors met with Prime Minister Justin Trudeau and federal officials on a trip to Ottawa last month to lobby for a number of York priorities, including the extension of the Yonge subway to Richmond Hill, advancing all-day, two-way GO service serving Markham, Stouffville, Vaughan, King, Aurora and Newmarket, completing the final four Viva rapidway segments, addressing affordable housing needs and building the Upper York Sewage System.

"Clearly, our federal partners listened as our priorities align very closely with the priorities of the government of Canada," Emmerson said.



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