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Dufferin County calls on province to address homelessness]

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Local Journalism Initiative Reporter

Dufferin County has called on the provincial government to collaborate with municipalities to address homelessnessin Ontario.

The county has hitched its wagon to an effort by the Association of Municipalities of Ontario (AMO) to lobby Queen's Park to work more collaboratively with municipalities to increase the supply of housing.

The upper tier council, at its March 9 meeting, called on the province to urgently acknowledge that homelessness in Ontario is a social, economic, and health crisis, and to commit to ending homelessness in Ontario.

Dufferin Warden Wade Mills, who is also Shelburne's mayor, said a comprehensive plan to prevent, reduce, and ultimately end homelessness is needed.

?The homelessness crisis is taking a devastating toll on families and communities, undermining a healthy and prosperous Ontario,? Mills said. ?Dufferin County Council is resolved to help those in need in our community and is working to ensure all residents have a place to live, but we cannot do it alone.?

The county resolved that the province must work with AMO and a broad range of community, health, Indigenous and economic partners to develop, resource, and implement an action plan to achieve the goal of ending homelessness.

Increasing housing supply is a priority for municipalities across Ontario, including Dufferin County. In Dufferin, there are currently around 800 applicant households on the Housing Access Dufferin Centralized Waiting List, with an average wait of four to eight years.

In 2021, one in 10 people in Dufferin lived in poverty. That's as many as 6,000 people. One in nine households lived in core housing needs.

?Homelessness is felt most at the local government level and by the residents that local governments serve,? said Councillor Darren White, chairperson of the county's health and community services committee.

?Together with our community partners, we continue to do our part to address homelessness in Dufferin County, but we do not have the tools and resources required to tackle the urgent, complex crisis of homelessness without provincial support.?

AMO, a non-profit organization representing almost all of Ontario's 444 municipal governments, presented housing and homelessness as top priorities for the 2023 provincial budget to the Standing Committee on Finance and Economic Affairs.

AMO's pre-budget submission highlights that the government of Ontario's per capita spending on programming is the lowest in Canada at $2,000 less per person than the national average.

It states that the homelessness crisis in Ontario is a direct result of decades of provincial underinvestment in areas such as affordable housing, community mental health and income assistance programs.

The government needs to increase the supply of deeply affordable housing through a variety of approaches, from rent subsidies to property acquisitions.

There's a need to increase financial assistance to individuals and families and fulfill the government's promise to transform its social

assistance system.

The province has to invest better in health services, community-based mental health services, supportive housing, and addiction services.

?The provincial government's belief that the housing supply crisis can be solved by limiting municipal access to infrastructure financing, eliminating environmental protections, or changes to municipal governance is unsound,? AMO President Colin Best said.

?Unless the costs of Bill 23 are fully offset by the province, it will cost Ontario property taxpayers $1 billion a year. This is a made-in-Ontario crisis resulting from provincial underinvestment and poor policy choices made by the government of Ontario.?

He said the government has the tools and resources to end the homelessness crisis it has created over decades.

?It must surely possess the leadership, capability and political will to get the job done,? Best said.