

**Township of South-West Oxford
Minutes
SWOX Housing Opportunities Committee
October 3, 2023**

In Attendance: Mayor David Mayberry, Councillor Peter Ypma (Ward 2), and Paula Beckett (community representative)

Staff: Clerk Julie Middleton, Clerk's Assistant Nicole Chambers and CBO Howard Leaver

Regrets: Councillor Craig Gillis (Ward 6)

Call Meeting to Order

The meeting was called to order at 11:26 a.m. by Mayor David Mayberry and a quorum was present.

Motion to Accept Agenda

Resolution No. 1 Moved by Howard Leaver
Seconded by Peter Ypma

RESOLVED that the agenda for the October 3, 2023 meeting of the SWOX Housing Opportunities Committee be approved.

DISPOSITON: Motion Carried

Minutes

Resolution No. 2 Moved by Howard Leaver
Seconded by Paula Beckett

RESOLVED that the minutes of the September 5, 2023 SWOX Housing Opportunities Committee meeting be approved.

DISPOSITON: Motion Carried

Business Arising from the Minutes

Market Update

The Committee reviewed the August 2023 market report and noted that the average price of a home is down 20% compared to the same time last year. The average price in South-West Oxford is \$697,000. Discussion took place regarding the profit that developers require to sell homes in the Mount Elgin Subdivision.

Correspondence

Province announces new investments and tools for municipalities at 2023 AMO conference - Build Ontario

The Committee discussed the new provincial “Building Faster Fund” that will provide up to \$1.2 billion over 3 years for municipalities that meet or exceed housing targets they have pledged to achieve by 2031. David noted that 10% of this fund is earmarked for small northern and rural municipalities. What might be available to South-West Oxford may only be \$100,000 (40 million divided between 400 municipalities) – the Township cannot purchase a lot for this price.

In response to a question from Howard regarding quotas, David noted that if municipalities commit to a quota, they are able to qualify for the “strong mayors” powers. The Mayor of Woodstock has shown intent to move forward with this program to take advantage of provincial funding. Oxford County Council will be considering a request that the County set their own reasonable housing quota based on good planning, rather than a percentage of the collective 1.5 million homes that the province wants to build (and subtract the quota assigned to Woodstock). South-West Oxford’s contribution to the 1.5 million homes will be phase 6 in Mount Elgin.

The Committee discussed how, despite quotas, if people are not purchasing homes they will not get built. Julie noted this is in line with comments from the Task Force as their criticism lies on the planning process (approvals) – while in urban areas this may be an issue, this issue does not largely exist in Oxford County.

David and Peter had a recent conversation about childcare in Mount Elgin, and if it is possible to move the library into the subdivision proper (former Layton property or phase 6). Further conversations will need to take place with Kirby Heckford and Brian Graydon regarding what options we would have for this. Discussion took place about the use of the Mount Elgin Library. It was noted that the Brownsville and Mount Elgin Libraries collectively had 269 active users, 2,229 curb-site and in-branch visits, 895 wi-fi users, 12,000 borrowed materials and 233 participants in programs. Peter noted that if Mount Elgin is going to grow to the level that we anticipate, the library should be relocated to be of greater value. David noted his reluctance to have a purpose-built library as, if you no longer need it in the future (with the evolving nature of society), it could not be easily converted to housing.

Howard asked about the land that was leftover where the Oxford Hills purchased for Plank Line access – could it be rezoned residential and restricted to build townhouses only? Julie noted that the challenge is that applications for development only come forward based on what the developer wants to do. Council could reject a developer’s plans, so it is important to consider how this would play out in the appeal process. David noted if you want to have a say in the process, you need to own the property. Further conversation took place regarding settlement boundaries and responsible planning.

The Committee discussed how we can encourage and provide incentives to developers to build affordable homes. If there was a development that had basic, smaller starter homes they could sell out immediately, but how can we make this happen?

Peter noted that he believes that the province is attempting to correct urban problems and is painting the province with the same paintbrush – this is only complicating matters for rural areas.

David suggested that if money were no object, it would make more sense from a housing perspective to purchase a whole section of 5-6 townhouse units. We could make 500 to 600 square feet, 1-bedroom apartments which are geared to provide housing for the local workforce. Paula asked if the 25, one acre lots on the north side of Mount Elgin Road could be developed into similar blocks of condos/townhomes? It was noted that the land on the old Layton property would accommodate the most parking.

The Committee questioned who would own the two upper and two lower apartments surrounding the library. It was suggested that the Township or the developer could own the property and collect rent for the library/community centre/child care space. If the Township were to own the property, a property management company would need to be contracted. David stressed the need to have the means to maintain the affordability of this – could we bring in community partners or obtain funding from the province or County?

David will reach out to Mr. Heckford and Mr. Graydon regarding what options this Committee could look at. He noted that with the HST no longer being charged for purpose-built rental properties, this could provide incentive for developers.

Julie noted that in another meeting regarding drainage for phase 6, the engineer suggested that the initial stormwater management pond (parcel of land we own) be removed, and the pipe be upsized to go down along the road towards the new stormwater management pond. The thought was, if they upsize the pipe and take away the easement, this block of land could be filled in and developed. On this land, they could potentially build a 3-story senior's apartment building, housing the library on the main floor. The issue is that the developer would have to agree to this, and amend the subdivision agreement. We would have to take parking into consideration as well – it could happen underground if the land is not filled in.

The province is also moving forward with a proposed definition of affordable housing for the purpose of development charge discounts and exemptions. This definition would take local incomes into account in determining which units should be eligible for developmental charge discounts and exemptions. The Committee will want to comment on that definition when it comes out.

Discussion Items

Minister Paul Calandra re: Responding to the Housing Affordability Task Force's Recommendations

The Committee discussed the Task Force's Report and Recommendations. David will draft a letter on behalf of the Committee explaining their collective comments and concerns to be forwarded to the Task Force.

A brief summary of the contents of the letter is provided below:

- Housing Committee is in support of:
 - Inclusion or exclusionary zoning with leeway for municipality to force a developer to have a certain percentage for market rentals/affordable housing.
 - Increased density to save agricultural land.
- Financial support for housing should be shared equally between federal, provincial and municipal governments – overall funding for Oxford's affordable housing 68% came from the County and 32% came from provincial/federal funding combined.
- Instead of providing scholarships for training, grants and other funding should be provided based on merit versus participation.
- Concerns regarding limited ability to appeal – as the tribunal is swamped we need to draw a line between appeals that are frivolous and reasonable.
- Report lacked comments about improving or status quo of the building code – we need to focus on quality versus quantity/speed.
- Limited parking requirements – in rural areas this will not work.
- SWOX has already demonstrated a willingness to build more – we have seen this with ARUs, granny flats. We are already thinking outside the box.
- How can we encourage more basic developments – focus on higher density or smaller but to build starter homes with finishes that aren't as high-end.
- Province needs to assess land in the province on the basis of its ability to produce crops – forget about the land classifications – prioritize those areas that have the best ability to produce crops to remain agricultural land.
- Develop high speed rail to maximize infrastructure (either third rail solution or along 400 series highway corridors).

Discussion took place regarding if developers in Mount Elgin would consider severing land in phase 5 to build semi-detached homes to build more affordable homes? Howard will reach out to the developers to discuss this further.

2024 Budget

The Committee did not have any budget considerations for 2024.

Next Meeting

David will be attending the housing focus group at the Oxford County office on November 7th from 1-3 p.m. He will provide an update at the next meeting.

Directives

- Assist the Township and provide recommendation on taking a leadership role with respect to the consideration of various housing options within the Township and the County of Oxford;
- The SWOX Housing Opportunities Committee acts as a resource, information gathering and advisory body to Township Council on housing needs within the community;
- Monitor and obtain information on the local housing market and identify trends and emerging housing needs in the community and recommend action where appropriate;
- Provide advice and make recommendations regarding affordable housing initiatives and priorities within the community;
- Explore options for facilitating outside partnerships/involvement for new housing;
- The committee will not be directly involved in providing social housing within the community (this is an upper tier responsibility). However, may consider facilitating discussion in this regard should the opportunity arise with available land or interest from developers.

Adjournment

Resolution No. 3 Moved by Howard Leaver
 Seconded by Peter Ypma

RESOLVED that the Committee adjourn at 12:59 p.m. to meet again on December 5, 2023 at 1:00 p.m.

DISPOSITON: Motion Carried