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Innovative Housing Information Report to Council

Report Number: INFO-2020-13

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Distribution Date: April 23, 2020

In accordance with the Procedure By-law, any member of Council may make a request to the Town Clerk that this Report be placed on an upcoming Committee of the Whole agenda for discussion.

Purpose

The purpose of this report is to provide to Council an overview of various innovative housing options for the Town of Newmarket.

Background

In May 2019, the Province of Ontario released Bill 108 as part of the Province's "More Homes, More Choice: Ontario's Housing Supply Action Plan". Among the changes from Bill 108 were amendments to the Planning Act that focused on increasing the supply of housing by requiring Official Plan policies to authorize the use of additional residential units by permitting:

- the use of two residential units in a detached house, semi-detached house or rowhouse; and
- the use of a residential unit in a building or structure ancillary to a detached house, semi-detached house or rowhouse

As stated by the province, the goal of these policies is to increase the availability and variety of affordable and accessible housing.

In December 2019, the Province released a document entitled "Build or buy a tiny home, Ontario Building Code Information" which detailed the process of developing a 'tiny home'. This document provided practical information on the benefits of tiny homes, and the process of building a tiny home. The province stated that innovative designs,

construction techniques and materials can bring construction costs down and make homes more accessible.

To further support the diversification of affordable and innovative housing within the Town, this report has been prepared to provide a preliminary overview of innovative housing options for the Town of Newmarket, including:

- detached accessory dwelling units
- tiny homes
- alternative building materials
- passive house design

Please note that the items listed above are not exclusive of one another, and may be used in conjunction with one another. For example, a tiny home may be built using alternative building materials, or may be built using passive house design.

Please be advised that any information in this report is considered preliminary, and further research will be required should the Town wish to pursue a specific direction.

Discussion

Detached Accessory Dwelling Units

What is it?

A detached accessory dwelling unit can be described as a self-contained dwelling unit that is located on a lot that **also** contains a separate main dwelling. These dwelling units are commonly referred to as secondary suites, garden suites, granny suites, coach houses, laneway suites or in-law suites. Detached accessory dwelling units must comply with the health and safety requirements of Ontario's Building Code, and must have necessary servicing such as water and wastewater.

Why is it desirable?

- Diversifying existing housing stock
- Providing supplementary income to homeowners
- More efficient use of existing infrastructure
- A means for homeowners to aide family members
- Requires less energy to operate, benefiting



both the homeowner and the environment

What are some of the potential barriers?

- Site servicing issues
- Access for emergency services
- Difficulties adhering to building code
- Community resistance and compatibility concerns

How can it be implemented?

Currently, the Town of Newmarket's Zoning By-law 2010-40 permits accessory dwelling units (ADU's) to be located within a detached or semi-detached dwelling. These units must be fully contained within the main dwelling on the lot. The Town does not currently permit ADU's to be located in an accessory building or structure located on the same lot.

As discussed above, the Province of Ontario has implemented regulations that permit the use of a residential unit in an ancillary building. Amendments to the Town's Official Plan and Zoning By-law would be required to permit detached accessory dwelling units. Further research will be required to identify the Town's process for implementing detached accessory dwelling units. To respond to the new legislation, this research is anticipated to be part of the Town-wide Official Plan Review project.

Tiny Homes

What is it?

A 'tiny home' can be described as a small, private, self-contained dwelling unit, intended for year-round use. Tiny homes contain kitchen, dining, bathroom, and sleeping areas. A tiny home can either be the only home on a lot, or a separate structure on a property that already has an existing house (as discussed above).

Campers, recreational vehicles, cottages and other structures used on a seasonal basis are not considered tiny homes. Tiny homes may also be grouped in communities or villages, consisting of multiple tiny homes on one lot, to create a small-scale neighbourhood-type community. Tiny homes must comply with the health and safety requirements of Ontario's Building Code, and must have necessary servicing such as water and wastewater.



Why is it desirable?

- Diversifying existing housing stock
- Requires less energy to operate, benefitting both the homeowner and the environment
- Easier maintenance for the homeowner
- More affordable than conventional living accommodations. Prices can range anywhere from \$20,000 to \$100,000, depending on variables such as size, features, efficiency etc.
- May be built on small parcels of land which cannot otherwise accommodate conventional housing
- May use existing services and infrastructure, dependent on location
- Can be built relatively quickly

What are some of the potential barriers?

- Site servicing issues
- Community resistance and compatibility concerns
- Difficulties adhering to building code
- Lack of demand



How can it be implemented?

Currently, the Town of Newmarket's Zoning By-law 2010-40 does not explicitly prohibit tiny houses, as long as the development meets the applicable zone standards (minimum setbacks, maximum coverage and height etc.). However, the Town's zoning does not permit multiple detached dwellings on a single lot. As such, only one tiny house would currently be permitted per lot. In addition, a tiny home cannot be smaller than the minimum required size set out in Ontario's Building Code, which is 17.5 square metres (188 square feet). The Building Code also sets out minimum room sizes in dwelling

units, which vary depending on whether the rooms and spaces are separated by walls or if the unit is open-concept.

Amendments to the Town's Official Plan and Zoning By-law would be required to permit multiple tiny house dwelling units on a lot. The Town may also consider developing a Town-led pilot project or partnership which looks at developing a tiny house community.

Alternative Building Materials

What is it?

For the purposes of this report, an alternative building material refers to an economically efficient material used for construction, which replaces conventional building materials. Alternative building materials are often up-cycled or re-used products, reducing waste and minimizing negative environmental impacts.

An alternative building material that has gained popularity in recent years are upcycled shipping containers. Shipping containers have gained popularity due to their durability, availability and cost effectiveness for residential, industrial and commercial developments. Shipping containers can be used in addition to traditional building materials, or can act as the main component of a building.

Why is it desirable?

- Strength and durability of the material
- Used containers are often less expensive than finished structures built using traditional labour-intensive means such as bricks and mortar
- Upcycling shipping containers are considered a sustainable building material, as it reuses existing materials and does not create additional waste



What are some of the potential barriers?

- Difficulties adhering to building code
- Difficulties adhering to urban design requirements
- Potential compatibility concerns
- Community resistance
- Size of construction site to accommodate forklift or crane necessary to place shipping containers or other large up-cycled structures

How can it be implemented?

Currently, the Town of Newmarket's Zoning By-law 2010-40 does not prohibit the use of shipping containers or other alternative building materials in residential development. Although the use of shipping containers is not restricted by zoning, the buildings are still required to meet building code requirements. The Town may consider providing information to residents on the benefits and drawbacks of using alternative building materials, such as shipping containers, in residential development.

Passive House Design

What is it?

Passive house design is an energy-efficient building standard that focuses on reducing the amount of energy required for a residential home. Passive buildings consume less heating and cooling energy than conventional buildings, through efficient design, materials and construction standards. There are various companies across the country that specialize in building and designing houses using passive design.

Why is it desirable?

- Energy efficient, benefitting both home owner and the environment
- Increased comfort and improved air quality
- Cost savings in the long-term
- Environmental benefits, reduced emissions

What are some of the potential barriers?

- Initial construction costs are higher than conventional construction costs
- Generally more appropriate for new construction rather than retrofits due to costs
- Lack of knowledgeable designers in local area
- Lack of public interest/knowledge on the subject



How can it be implemented?

There are no zoning restrictions to passive house design. Home owners are currently able to design their homes using passive house design. Although there are no legislative barriers to passive house design, the design standard is not commonly used. This may

be due to the initial start-up costs or an overall lack of knowledge on the subject. The Town may consider exploring passive house design through the NEER project (retrofits) and/or pursuing an educational campaign on the benefits of passive design with a passive house advocacy group. Further research into either option is required.

Conclusion

In 2019, the province released legislation focused on housing in Ontario. The province has stated the goal of these policies is to increase the availability and variety of affordable and accessible housing. There are various directions the Town can explore when looking at diversifying housing stock and increasing affordable housing, some of which will be explored through the next Official Plan Review and/or as otherwise directed by Council.

Business Plan and Strategic Plan Linkages

- Long-term Financial Sustainability
- Environmental Stewardship

Consultation

- Building Department

Human Resource Considerations

None.

Budget Impact

None.

Attachments

None.

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