

For immediate release – Multifaith Housing Initiative urges delay on Ottawa’s urban boundary line expansion decision in face of COVID-19 pandemic

OTTAWA | FRI., MAY 8, 2020 – Due to the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic, Multifaith Housing Initiative (MHI) is urging the City of Ottawa to delay its vote on the proposed urban boundary expansion.

MHI – an Ottawa-based affordable housing charity – says more information and community consultation is required before elected officials decide whether to expand Ottawa’s urban boundary. The first major decision on the matter is set to take place at a Mon., May 11 joint meeting of the Planning Committee and the Agriculture and Rural Affairs Committee (ARAC), where city staff will recommend the expansion of Ottawa’s urban boundary by up to 1,650 hectares.

Council is subsequently scheduled to debate the topic for final consideration at its next regular meeting on Wed., May 27.

“This vote is simply too important,” said MHI Executive Director Suzanne Le. “The urban boundary expansion is, unquestionably, the most consequential decision council will make this term. This choice will impact Ottawa for generations. Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, the affordable housing sector has been unable to meet to digest the impact this might have on affordable housing in the future of this city. Delegations at the May 11 committee meeting are already limited to people who have reliable internet access and are comfortable using Zoom. Further, media attention has been consumed by COVID-19, and the boundary line expansion has not been able to receive a level of public attention and scrutiny appropriate for a decision of this significance. At a time when the rest of the city, and its people, are largely on pause, I fail to see the need for this vote to go ahead while we are still in the midst of a pandemic.”

The city predicts Ottawa will welcome 402,000 new residents by 2046, bringing the population up to 1.4 million people. An estimated 195,000 new residential units will need to be built to accommodate the growth.

On May 11, the joint committee will be asked to choose between three options: maintain the current Official Plan intensification target increase but offer no further policy intervention on achieving the majority of growth through intensification; hold the urban boundary line; or – as staff recommends – choose a “balanced” option of expanding the boundary by 1,350-1,650 gross hectares.

“From the recommendation, it appears that our elected officials are being asked to support an arbitrary target – and then worry later about the details of precisely when and where the growth will happen – without clear financial details,” Le commented. “After reviewing the staff's report, we’re not convinced the council has been given the benefit of sufficient information to make a decision on the boundary line. MHI certainly doesn’t have enough information to understand the potential impact on affordable housing, to take a position as an organization.”

ABOUT MHI

Multifaith Housing Initiative is an affordable housing charity based in Ottawa, Canada. Founded in 2002, MHI is dedicated to providing safe, affordable, and well-maintained housing in inclusive communities. It currently operates housing facilities on four sites, including the Haven, a 98-unit facility in Barrhaven. Its next project – Veterans’ House in Rockcliffe – is currently under construction and is scheduled to open in December 2020.