

March 24, 2023

Dear Mayor Gilvesy and Members of Council,

Re: United Way Oxford's Tillsonburg Transition House

Attached please find United Way Oxford's Community Improvement Plan application for our new Tillsonburg Transition House initiative. Our Board, Staff, Volunteers and Partners are so excited to see our last year of planning and research coming together and, now that we have closed on the purchase of the property, we look forward to opening to serve the Tillsonburg community as early as May 1st. From the beginning of the discussions about moving forward with this specific initiative, our Board approached this innovative and creative idea with the guiding principle of doing our best to meet the identified need in Tillsonburg and help fill a gap in the housing service continuum. We believed that we had the community knowledge to inform the solution, strong relationships and partnerships, and the ability to make a positive lasting impact in a relatively quick time-frame. Unlike our typical volunteer-led annual investments of funding for social and human programs and services, this is a long-term major investment that required us depleting a significant portion of our reserve funds that have been provided by our generous donors throughout the years. Our Board unanimously agreed that this was the right decision to best meet local needs.

As you know, United Way Oxford has purchased a property for the use of a Transition House to support those experiencing homelessness, or existing in unstable and precarious housing. The goal of transition housing is to provide supports and a stable home environment for up to 364 days to help meet people where they are at. In this case, we will have the capacity to accommodate 7 individual adults at a time. It will provide far more than just affordable housing, it provides a home as well as on-going wrap-around supports to help stabilize those living there to ensure that they have the health and well-being supports necessary to move forward to a better future. United Way Oxford is also committing annual funding to the Oxford County Community Health Centre (OCCHC) to ensure that they have highly skilled and dedicated staff available to be at the Transition House on weekdays to help build supportive relationships, navigate system services, enhance life-skills, create community connections, etc. The OCCHC has been providing staff support for a Transition House in Woodstock since 2020 and they have had tremendous success in providing a helping hand to move people forward to independence and stability. They have been assisting citizens from across Oxford County, and at present have 2 Tillsonburg citizens staying at the Woodstock House who can't wait to be our first 2 Tillsonburg Transition House residents! It is very important to note that through this strong partnership we will have the resources to help change lives.

I am writing to ask for your support for our Community Improvement Plan application. We are grateful for the various opportunities that it could provide for our Tillsonburg Transition House project. Any support that you can provide through the Community Improvement Plan will make a significant difference in this project. Our total United Way Oxford investment in the purchase of the house, renovations and furnishing is estimated to be in the range of \$725,000-\$775,000. We utilized some of our organizational reserves as the down payment and

have taken out a significant mortgage that we will be re-paying over the next decade. Above and beyond the purchase of the property, United Way has committed to covering all of the annual operating costs of the house itself along with the commitment of program funding to the OCCHC to cover the vital staff supports. The annual operating costs, after accounting for the room rental revenue that will be received from the 7 individual program participants, is anticipated to be approximately \$115,000 - \$125,000.

We have been overwhelmed by the response of the Tillsonburg community and their willingness to help us move this project forward. Local citizens and business owners are very aware of the growing numbers of individuals experiencing homelessness in Tillsonburg and have been incredibly generous to jump in to help us help their community! It speaks to the generosity of the community and the deep compassion for those who are vulnerable and struggling. It also underscores the understanding of the need to have a Tillsonburg solution for Tillsonburg citizens, as it is not acceptable to require people to leave their home community in order to receive supports. In the coming weeks, we will publically recognize the leadership, support and generous donations of products and services to help us ensure the success of this project. We are also committed to ensuring that this is a Tillsonburg project and we are doing business locally to ensure that the community benefits from our spending on this initiative. As a 100% local charity, and the largest non-government funder of human and social services, every single dollar we raise annually is from Oxford County donors and used to support services across Oxford County. The generous support for our annual campaign allows us to continue to fund many vital programs, some of which are directly related to additional programs for those who are marginalized or dealing with mental health and addiction struggles.

In addition to requesting Town Council's support of our Community Improvement Plan application, I would like to request that the Town considers granting \$15,000 towards the one-time cost of renovations and furnishings. As you can appreciate, there are many unexpected costs with a project of this magnitude. We are fortunate to have received financial support from the County of Oxford to help offset some of the necessary renovations, but those expenses continue to grow as we work to ensure that the house is adequately renovated to meet the needs of our new housing program participants. If the Town is able to help us by investing to help offset some of these unexpected costs, we would be very grateful.

Thank you for your on-going encouragement and assistance throughout this journey. While we will be doing the appropriate recognition at a future date, I would like to recognize the contributions of Cephias Panschow, Eric Gilbert and Geno VanHaelewyn who helped move our efforts forward with their professional guidance. Additionally, we have had the opportunity to connect with your Affordable and Attainable Housing Committee on a number of occasions and they have been very supportive of the role that transitional housing can have on helping to address local housing needs and fill a gap. A special recognition and appreciation must be extended to Committee Member Cedric Tomico, as he has stepped up to champion this initiative and lend his expertise to see it through to completion. I truly do not think we could have done this without him, and certainly not as effectively, efficiently or affordably. This project is an example of how it takes a village!

Thank you for your consideration. Sincerely,



Kelly Gilson
Executive Director
United Way Oxford