

YWCA to build family shelter on Oakdale Drive

Scott Rosts

Niagara This Week - St. Catharines | Dec 03, 2015

ST. CATHARINES — When the Niagara Region started the Burgoyne Bridge construction two years ago, it left the YWCA Niagara Region scrambling to find new shelter for families.

The agency had used a home near the western edge of the bridge for two years as a family shelter, but when the cranes went up and the houses came down, they were forced to find some temporary solutions. Now, the YWCA is embarking on a project to bring the families back under one roof. The agency announced Monday it will build its first emergency and transitional housing shelter for families at 182 Oakdale Ave. in St. Catharines.

“We’ve been scattered and finding opportunities to fill the gap, so this will be great to bring everyone back together,” said YWCA Niagara executive director Elisabeth Zimmermann.

And it will also be much more than a 24-unit shelter with a mix of family, single, transitional housing and emergency housing units. With some additional office and community space, it will be a home to provide more programs and support services.

The YWCA will be looking for some community support to help with the project. They recently launched a \$1.5-million “Y the W” capital campaign, which has a nice foundation thanks to a \$150,000 donation from Gatta Homes Inc. The custom home builder had actually owned the property and had intended to build a 24-unit condo before ultimately putting a halt on the project.

“They came with a proposal and right off the hop it seemed right,” said Pietro Mastromatteo, structural engineer with Gatta Homes. “We said ‘it’s time we give something back.’”

In addition to the donation, they’ve also handed over much of the documentation and planning and environmental studies that were completed for the project. Zimmermann said the YWCA is utilizing the footprint Gatta Homes designed, noting Quartek Group Inc. and Mountainview Homes, among others, have been key to moving the development forward.

The location, said Zimmermann, is perfect. Right next door is a City park, with greenspace and trails accessible nearby. She said they’re also going to look at trying to build a community garden on site.

“It’s going to be an enhancement for the community as well as supporting the services we’re already doing. We’re excited about working with the city and the region to build this,” she said, later adding that she was thrilled they were able to find such a large, vacant plot of land for the development in the City of St. Catharines.

Niagara Regional Chair Alan Caslin joined other community leaders for the announcement, saying it is a major need given the long waiting list for affordable housing in the region.

“One more unit in Niagara is one more family off the list,” said Caslin.

St. Catharines Mayor Walter Sendzik described it as “great news for our community.”

“The YWCA is taking a leadership role to provide not only the service but the opportunity for women and children in crisis to be able to have a safe place and provide that haven for them, this is going to be the location for them to serve the community for decades to come,” he said.

Zimmerman said the goal for the project is to break ground as early as next spring, with hopes that the facility would become fully operational within a two-year period. Information on supporting the capital campaign to help build the facility is available online at <http://www.ywcaniagararegion.ca/about/y-the-w-campaign/> or by calling Nicki Inch at 905-988-3528, ext. 3237.



From left, Nigel Scott, architect with Quartek Group; Chris Tiller, general manager with Gatta Homes; Elisabeth Zimmermann, executive director YWCA; Pietro Mastromatteo, structural engineer with Gatta Homes; Niagara Regional Chair Alan Caslin; Cheryl Selig, Quartek Group; Barb Wiens, family shelter building committee; June Mergl, honorary co-chair Y the W capital campaign; St. Catharines Mayor Walter Sendzik.



Scott Rosts is group managing editor for Niagara this Week. Email him at srosts@niagarathisweek.com or follow on [Twitter](#) and [Facebook](#).