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Inside Toronto

January 26, 2010

by Cynthia Reason

Rexdale hub to receive nearly \$5.5 million in government funding

The Rexdale Multi-Service Community Hub received a cash influx of \$2.73 million times two this week, thanks to a joint federal and provincial government funding announced Monday.

John Baird, federal minister of Transport and Infrastructure, Brad Duguid, Ontario Minister of Energy and Infrastructure, and **Etobicoke North Councillor Suzan Hall** joined with United Way President and CEO Frances Lankin to make the funding announcement Monday morning at the downtown offices of the United Way. The funding will also see \$2 million go towards a community hub in North York,

"We want to provide a shot in the arm to communities right across the country so we can put people to work - whether it's trades people, whether it's building materials, whether it's architects, engineers, you name it," Baird told a standing room only audience, consisting of strong contingent of Rexdale service providers. "We also want to provide a long-lasting legacy, and I can think of no better way to do that than partnering with the United Way on this important community hub initiative."

The United Way community hubs initiative is part of their ongoing Building Strong Neighbourhoods Strategy, which aims to respond to the growing trends of poverty and population growth in Toronto. Launched five years ago, the goal, said Lankin, is to create opportunities for better lives for everyone.

As such, the United Way has committed to raising \$1 million in capital costs, as well as \$150,000 a year for ongoing operating costs at eight hubs across the city in priority areas in need - those at Rexdale and Bathurst-Finch included.

The 62,000 sq. ft. proposed facility in Rexdale will be located at the site of the old Father Henry Carr school building on Panorama Court (near Finch West and Kipling avenues). The hub will bring together at a central location service providers - including Rexdale Community Health Centre, Albion Neighbourhood Services, Rexdale Legal Clinic, Microskills, Rexdale Women's Centre and Delta Family Services, among others - and local residents to offer a range of social services and programs, as well as to provide community accessible space (including a shared gymnasium) in a neighbourhood deemed under-served.

With an estimated project cost of \$8.19 million to bring the old school building back up to standard, **Hall said the announced funds mark a "significant investment" in moving the initiative forward.**

"By allowing residents to locally access the resources and services they need, the community will grow and prosper," she said, noting that the city has pledged an additional \$1 million in funding and the United Way and other partners have committed to covering the remaining costs.

"I am very excited to be moving forward with these much anticipated projects...I know how important it is to our community to move ahead on an initiative like this. These community hubs will achieve lasting change and advanced prosperity, opportunity and liveability for residents."

Safia Ahmed, the executive director of Rexdale Community Health Centre and future tenant of the Rexdale Multi-Service Community Hub, called Monday a "remarkable day for the residents of Rexdale."

"Everyone is very giddy and excited about this funding," she said. "Today our wish came true."

The \$2.73 million in federal hub funding comes from the national \$4-billion Infrastructure Stimulus Fund, under Canada's Economic Action Plan, while the matched contribution from the government of Ontario will come from the two-year, \$32.5 billion infrastructure commitment laid out in the 2009 provincial budget.