

Increasing Affordable Rental Housing Stock

RIGHTS
REVIEW

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Right to
Housing
in Toronto



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Right to Housing Toronto (R2HTO) is a network of individuals and organizational supporters that are working to ensure that the City of Toronto takes a rights-based approach to its housing planning and policy.

The work of R2HTO is guided by a Steering Committee that consists of ACORN Canada, Advocacy Centre for Tenants Ontario (ACTO), Centre for Equality Rights in Accommodation (CERA), Centre for Independent Living in Toronto, Colour of Poverty – Colour of Change, Federation of Metro Tenants' Association (FMTA), Jane Finch Housing Coalition, Maytree, West Scarborough Community Legal Services, and housing advocates Joy Connelly and Ingrid Palmer.

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Executive Summary

Toronto has experienced a housing boom over the past few decades, mainly in the form of new condominiums that are out of reach for many of the city's residents living on low- to moderate-incomes. The supply of affordable rental housing options remains alarmingly low despite the City of Toronto's commitments to the right to housing recognized in its Housing Charter and its 10-year housing plan.

The asking price of a one-bedroom rental unit in Toronto has risen by almost 10% over the course of the last year, which is the steepest increase across the country. Indigenous peoples, seniors, young people, lone parent families, Black households, racialized communities, newcomers, people with disabilities and many more are struggling to afford to live in this city. They face significant hardships in finding and keeping a home. The inability of many residents to sustainably pay rent without disruption is also at odds with their need for tenure security, a vital component of the right to housing. Many of Toronto's low-income residents face the risk of eviction and homelessness.

It is the responsibility of all levels of government to create more affordable housing supply. Both federal and provincial governments have financial resources that they can marshal to directly fund construction or provide loans and incentives to help local governments and other housing providers to create more affordable housing. The province can also leverage its jurisdiction over municipalities to empower them to create more supply through enabling legislation and regulations.

The City of Toronto also has a mix of tools to increase the housing supply. However, its fiscal resources are limited – notably, a combination of property taxes, licensing proceeds and user fees fund an increasingly complex set of urban services, including creating and managing affordable housing stock. In addition, it can use incentives such as exemptions from various development charges and planning instruments such as zoning to ensure new housing supply is affordable. As Toronto's population continues to grow, so will the demand for affordable rental options. A comprehensive response to increasing the supply of affordable rental housing in Toronto is therefore needed – one that is rooted in a rights-based approach that considers the needs of all residents.

This Rights Review will examine many of the City of Toronto's efforts to increase affordable housing options.¹ It also showcases insights from civil society on the effectiveness and shortcomings of these initiatives. Through a rights-based approach, practical recommendations are offered to guide the City's policies to ensure low- to moderate-income Torontonians can access affordable places to call home.

¹ R2HTO will also publish a Rights Review on protecting the affordable housing stock that is equally important in solving the housing affordability crisis.



Right to Housing Principles

Our recommendations for the City of Toronto are based on the following right to housing principles:

- 1** The City must use all available revenue tools and assets to act with urgency to build affordable housing for low- to moderate-income renter households.
- 2** The City should consider and explore all policy and zoning options to increase the supply of affordable and deeply affordable rental housing stock.
- 3** The City must engage with impacted communities and those opposing affordable housing developments to build cohesive neighbourhoods rooted in a shared understanding of the benefits of inclusive communities.
- 4** The City must leverage all available avenues to encourage cooperation with different orders of government to build affordable rental housing stock.

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Recommendations for the City of Toronto

1 Use maximum available resources to build affordable housing for those in most need

PRINCIPLE 1: The City must use all available revenue tools and assets to act with urgency to build affordable housing for low- to moderate-income renter households.

Recommendations for the City of Toronto:

- Explore a wider set of revenue raising tools dedicated specifically for affordable housing.
- Further leverage existing assets such as public lands and properties to increase deeply affordable housing options.
- Ensure CreateTO programs consider and respond to the challenges faced by non-profit housing providers in order to promote the growth of non-profit affordable housing developments.
- Expand efforts to integrate affordable housing needs in as many initiatives involving public lands and redevelopment and use of public properties.
- Provide support for organizations working with marginalized communities in need of affordable housing to access federal and provincial programs.

2 Maximize the use of available policy tools to increase the supply of affordable housing

PRINCIPLE 2: The City should consider and explore all policy and zoning options to increase the supply of affordable and deeply affordable rental housing stock.

Recommendations for the City of Toronto:

- Prioritize development incentives such as expedited approval processes towards building affordable rental and deeply affordable housing options.
- Expand exemptions of development charges for non-profit housing providers that are not registered as charities.

- Encourage redevelopment of vacant commercial buildings into residential use, with prioritization for affordable housing.
- Make the inclusionary zoning program more robust.
- Continue to leverage zoning to promote more density in a balanced form that retains affordability and promotes complete neighbourhoods.
- Continue to explore architectural innovations such as modular housing to cost effectively and rapidly deliver on new, deeply affordable housing initiatives.
- Adjust the application process of the Open Door Program to better address the needs of non-profit housing providers and to better facilitate their participation in the program.

3 Ensure meaningful engagement and effective participation from tenant residents

PRINCIPLE 3: The City must engage with impacted communities and those opposing affordable housing developments to build cohesive neighbourhoods rooted in a shared understanding of the benefits of inclusive communities.

Recommendations for the City of Toronto:

- Encourage communities impacted by the housing affordability crisis to engage in civic action to have their voices heard.
- Provide creative consultative opportunities for lower income households to be involved in the policy decision-making processes.
- Develop engagement strategies within neighbourhoods that encourage inclusive community building.
- Develop a robust engagement plan with communities across Toronto to promote the benefits of zoning changes and respond to misinformation campaigns by highlighting benefits of mixed-income neighbourhoods.
- Work with the Ontario Human Rights Commission, civil society organizations and specialty legal clinics to counter opposition to affordable housing developments.

4 Advocate for the prioritization of building affordable rental housing by all orders of governments

PRINCIPLE 4: The City must leverage all available avenues to encourage cooperation with different orders of government to build affordable rental housing stock.

Recommendations for the City of Toronto:

- Continue to engage with the provincial government to increase funding for affordable rental housing projects.
- Make full use of avenues - public and private - to advocate for provincial housing and land use laws and regulations that enable the City to deliver on its housing mandate as opposed to restricting it.
- Advocate for increased federal investments to fund the creation of deeply affordable rental housing options that meet the needs of lower income Torontonians.

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