

June 24, 2021

Planning & Housing Committee
City of Toronto

By email

Dear Mme. Chair and Members of the Planning & Housing Committee,

Re: PH.25.9 – Affordable Ownership Review

We are writing to express our support for the proposed review of the Affordable Homeownership Program and Policies.

The unanticipated and unprecedented run-up of real estate prices over the course of the COVID-19 pandemic have added even greater urgency to ensuring that the City's programs and policies regarding affordable homeownership are relevant and impactful. In spite of the massive wealth and diversity in the City of Toronto, we have become the 5th least affordable city in the world and 2nd only to Vancouver in being the least affordable city in North America. As a City, we are witnessing an ever-increasing rate of income and wealth inequality – a trend that threatens the quality of life and prosperity of the region for all who live here.

Throughout our history as a country, homeownership has been a proven pathway for generations of families to have a secure place to live, build careers, build community, and build wealth to pass on to their children. Historically, our housing policy has favored homeownership. Decades of pro-ownership policies and incentives have led to 68% of today's Canadian households enjoying the benefits of homeownership.

Not everyone benefited from this history.

In Toronto, individuals who are racialized or who have been disadvantaged through disability, Crown Wardship, or other factors are more likely to be multi-generational renters, lower income, and have limited opportunities to build generational wealth.

The concerns extend beyond race and traditional forms of exclusion. They are also generational. The escalation of real estate prices over the last decade has left our young people with limited prospects of homeownership if they are not fortunate enough to have parents who are able to provide significant financial assistance.

Affordable homeownership has been demonstrated by Habitat for Humanity and others as a powerful avenue through which greater income and wealth equality can be realized both at the level of individual households and within equity-seeking communities.

We are heartened to see the number of players – both non-profit and for-profit – who are turning increased attention to how we can create equity-building housing options for those who have been left behind. We are also heartened by the possibilities that may be created through the future inclusionary zoning policy, future neighbourhood revitalization projects, transit-oriented development and other initiatives to create bridges to homeownership. We are equally encouraged by the staff report on the proposed affordable homeownership review and its attention to taking an equity-lens to the issues at hand.

As part of the City’s review, we would urge not only an examination of current programs and policies but also reconsideration of the targets for affordable homeownership. The HousingTO 2020-2030 plan was developed before the heightened attention to systemic racism that has arisen since June 2020. It also could not have anticipated the COVID-19 pandemic, its impact on housing affordability and the stark contrast between the “housing haves” and “have-nots” that became so evident over these last 18 months. The existing HousingTO plan provided a framework of investments through which 120,000 affordable housing units will be created or renovated / refurbished. Only 4,000 (3%) of these targeted units are affordable ownership. It is timely to revisit what our aspiration as a City should be with respect to supporting pathways to ownership – and how we get there.

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In closing, we are ready, willing and able to roll up our sleeves and help in whatever way we can in support of this important policy work – and its implementation.

Yours sincerely,



Ene Underwood
CEO

cc. Abigail Bond
Valesa Faria
Erik Hunter