

# Modular Housing Initiative Proposal

175 Cummer Avenue

Virtual Community Meeting Summary Report

Monday April 4th 7:00pm-8:30pm

## Project Background

The City of Toronto is moving forward on its plan to increase the supply of affordable housing across the city. As part of the HousingTO 2020-2030 Action Plan, the City committed to create 1,000 new modular homes in Toronto. The Modular Housing Initiative is an innovative and cost-effective way to build small-scale infill housing while providing a rapid, dignified response to connect people experiencing homelessness with homes and appropriate supports to help them achieve housing stability.

Modular housing is built off-site and transported to the site for assembly. City Council has approved the construction of the first 250 modular homes on City-owned sites in 2020 and 2021. Two sites that are part of the City's Modular Housing Initiative (MHI) were formally announced on Tuesday, February 23, 2021, including a site at 175 Cummer Avenue. On March 9, 2022, City Council directed staff to initiate a zoning by-law amendment process to permit the proposed development at 175 Cummer Avenue. The Planning and Housing Committee will consider the final Zoning By-Law Amendment report on April 27, 2022, followed by City Council at its meeting of May 11th and 12th, 2022.

## Meeting Details and Purpose

On Monday, April 4, 2022, from 7 p.m. to 8:30 p.m., the City of Toronto held a virtual community meeting on the Modular Housing Initiative (MHI) for the 175 Cummer Avenue site. Three public community meetings were held regarding this site in 2021 while the City pursued a Minister's Zoning Order (MZO) to permit the proposed development. On March 9, 2022, City Council directed City staff to proceed with a City-initiated zoning by-law amendment. The meeting was hosted virtually using Webex software. The focus of this community meeting was primarily on the proposed amendments to the zoning by-law to permit the proposed development, and the associated steps in the planning process. In addition, City staff provided project updates such as the selection of a housing provider. The meeting was also intended to answer questions and gather feedback from attendees regarding the proposed rezoning.

## Notice of Community Meeting

The meeting was widely advertised using multiple channels. On Wednesday, March 23, and Thursday, March 24, community stakeholders were notified via email of the upcoming meeting, as were all residents and interested individuals who had signed up to the project listserv. The City's website at [www.toronto.ca/175cummer](http://www.toronto.ca/175cummer) was updated to notify visitors of the proposed meeting. Over 3,800 notices were distributed by Canada Post to residents' homes starting March 28, 2022.



Figure 1: Map of notice and brochure distribution for modular supportive housing planned for 175 Cummer Ave. A yellow star marks the location of the project site at 175 Cummer Ave.

## Meeting Format and Participation

Hosted on the City's WebEx platform, participants could join the meeting either online or by phone to listen to the presentation, ask questions, and provide feedback. The meeting included a presentation noting project updates from Abi Bond, Housing Secretariat, and Matt Armstrong, City Planning. The presentation provided a comprehensive overview of the proposed project, the process so far, and heavily focussed on the planning context and rezoning application being brought forward to permit the proposed development.

Participants were invited to ask questions and provide verbal or written feedback through the Webex Q&A function. City staff responded to questions, and LURA Consulting facilitated the meeting and recorded feedback.

This report was prepared by LURA Consulting, the independent facilitator retained by the City of Toronto to undertake the public consultation regarding Phase Two Modular Housing Initiative projects. This summary is not intended to be a verbatim transcript of the meeting.

The meeting was attended by approximately 220 participants. Thirty-four questions and comments from participants were addressed during the meeting - both through live callers and by reading submitted questions aloud. Thirty-five questions were submitted through the question-and-answer function with an additional twenty-five comments submitted. Due to the high volume of participants, not all questions

submitted were answered live, and not all participants who had raised their hand and entered the queue were called upon. Community members are welcome to submit their questions and comments to the Community Liaison office, managed by LURA Consulting, at [communityliaison@lura.ca](mailto:communityliaison@lura.ca) or 647-578-8580.

## Feedback Summary

The following is a thematic summary of feedback received through the community meeting on April 4, 2022, with responses provided by City staff. While the focus of the City staff presentation was mainly on the proposed rezoning of the subject site, questions from participants varied widely. Many participants expressed support for the proposed development as a method of addressing issues of homelessness and indicated that the location was a good selection, while others raised concerns related to the development's relationship with the surrounding neighborhood. There were also several questions raised and concerns expressed about the planning approval process for the project, why a MZO was not made, as well as who will live in the building, and what supports will be provided. A summary of questions and feedback, as well as answers, is provided below.

### Site Selection and Concerns about loss of Greenspace

Some participants raised concerns regarding the loss of greenspace on the site where the modular affordable supportive housing building at 175 Cummer Ave. is to be placed. One participant suggested improvements be made to open greenspace to the south of Willowdale Manor which would be accessible to all residents of the current and future building on the site. Participants inquired about the process for selecting this site and asked for details on this process. Some participants questioned the site selection, suggesting there are better opportunities for development along Yonge Street.

### Response to Feedback

In terms of site selection, staff indicated that a number of sites were considered across the City with a number of criteria including conformity with the City's Official Plan, proximity to amenities, social services, transit, and availability of City-owned land.

Concerns about the loss of greenspace at 175 Cummer Avenue were responded to by highlighting that the site is designated as *Neighbourhoods* in the City's Official Plan, and current zoning label is RM, residential multiple, which permits residential dwellings, including apartment buildings. The site is not owned as nor operated as a park. The staff noted that there will remain a significant amount of open green space around the proposed modular development particularly to the west and south. Any improvements to other nearby green spaces in the community would be reviewed by the City should a property owner make an application to make improvements. Those with an interest in such improvements were invited to contact Councillor Filion's office.

### Zoning and Planning Process

Several participants raised questions about the planning process underway at this site. Participants wanted to know why a MZO (Minister's Zoning Order) was not made, whether the City had inquired as to the status of the MZO, and what the next steps would be now that the City is leading the zoning by-law amendment. Questions also were raised about the possibility of an appeal of a decision by City Council on this site to the Ontario Land Tribunal (OLT) and what the impact of such an appeal would be on the timelines.

Participants also wondered if the delayed timelines as a result of pursuing a MZO would have an impact on project funding from the Federal government, and if the City could take steps to move the process along more quickly, such as through the Committee of Adjustment. Many asked if the City should have taken a different approach from the start in order for the development to happen more quickly. Participants asked questions about what zoning can and cannot permit, and expressed preference for seniors being housed in the new building and asked why the City cannot identify the building for seniors through zoning.

One participant requested an answer as to why the drawings presented did not show a wheel-trans accessible pick-up and drop-off area, and whether the City making a decision on its own rezoning application was a conflict of interest.

One participant commented that the group they represent will be pursuing a challenge at the Ontario Land Tribunal.

### Response to Feedback

City staff noted that about 8,000 people are currently experiencing homelessness, and there is an urgent need to create safe affordable homes. Staff indicated that the MZO request was made as it was expected to be the fastest route to approval, and that MZOs had been made by the Province of Ontario for other modular supportive housing sites in Toronto. Staff indicated they do not have an answer as to why an MZO was not made, and that following direction of City Council on March 9, 2022, they were now proceeding with the rezoning process to permit the proposed development. Staff noted that the impact of a possible appeal cannot be forecast, but that if there is a City Council decision in favour of the proposal and an appeal is filed, it would add time and take much longer for the site to become operational. There would also be a possibility that no appeal is filed, and, in that case, the site development would advance more quickly.

It is important to note that this site was not funded by the Rapid Housing Initiative. This project is part of the City's Modular Housing Initiative (MHI), which includes a combination of city capital funding and federal funding through the Affordable Housing Innovation Fund, provided through CMHC. All parties remain committed to the funding of this project.

Staff stressed that the City cannot zone for specific characteristics of people, including age, race, religion or any other individual characteristics. From a planning perspective, an apartment use is either permitted or it is not. Once the rezoning is in place, the operator can work with the Housing Secretariat to define the population group to be housed in supportive housing facilities. Staff also advised that the proposal conformed with the Provincial Policy Statement, the Provincial Growth Plan and the Toronto Official Plan. Among the relief sought to the zoning by-law included the apartment use (the current zoning limits an apartment use to seniors), minimum front yard setback, parking spaces, dimensions of bicycle parking, and permitting a pergola in the front yard.

Responding to questions about wheel-trans access, the wheel-trans pick up and drop off are part of the site plan. For the purpose of this presentation a simplified site plan drawing was shown. The issue of accessibility is very important to the City, and the proposal will ensure that sufficient space for wheel-trans pick-up and drop-off is included at all the new sites. Staff also stated that it is not a conflict of interest for the City to undertake rezoning to land within its boundaries and on property it owns.

City staff noted that honest feedback is appreciated and that in making these recommendations to City Council, they must take into consideration several perspectives. These perspectives include local

community members, City Staff, City Council, and City-wide issues, such as housing. It was noted that there is a severe housing crisis, and a need to provide deeply affordable supportive housing solutions.

### Support for creating permanent housing for people experiencing homelessness

Many attendees voiced support for the project and recognized the need to help vulnerable residents including those experiencing homelessness to access safe, affordable housing. Some participants self-identified as being from the Willowdale neighbourhood and expressed a need for more affordable and supportive housing stock within the neighbourhood. One participant identified themselves as a member of a housing advocacy group, while others did not identify their relationship to the local context. Some participants expressed disappointment in the delays seen at the project site and highlighted the impact on people experiencing homelessness whose homes would be built in the project. Participants also asked what else the City has done or could have done to expedite the process to create the new development. Many referenced a city and country-wide housing crisis as evidence of the need for more action in building affordable housing.

Participants also expressed interest in the existing modular supportive housing sites and asked for information about their status. City staff were able to comment that there are two operational modular supportive housing sites in the City, and there is a lot of information about them on the City webpage at <https://www.toronto.ca/community-people/housing-shelter/affordable-housing-developments/map-of-affordable-housing-locations/>.

### Response to Feedback

Members of City staff responded to questions about what else the City can do to expedite this development, including statements about the urgency and scale of the need for affordable housing. Staff indicated there are many sites under development. Earlier in March, an additional \$200 million federal investment was announced through Phase Two of the Rapid Housing Initiative (RHI) to create at least 427 additional affordable and supportive homes in 12 months. The City is on track to create almost 2,100 supportive housing units by the end of 2022. The City is also providing 1,000 new Canada Ontario Housing Benefits to support affordability for people moving into rental housing. There are also projects under the Housing Now Initiative to create more affordable homes

At this site, all options to achieve planning approval were considered. Given the nature of the changes proposed to permit the development, it is the opinion of City Staff that a rezoning process is necessary. There are eight other projects underway across the city right now. They are a mixture of acquisition of buildings and renovation of those buildings, alongside the development of other modular sites. Since additional funding has been received from the federal government under Rapid Housing Initiative Phase Two, more projects will be added to the eight rolling out later this year.

### Tenant Selection

Several participants raised questions and comments about who the future residents of the building at 175 Cummer Avenue will be. Participants requested certainty and assurances about who future tenants would be and asked if families with children are being considered. Questions were also asked about what proportion of the City's population experiencing homelessness could be housed at the project.

Several participants wanted to know more about the percentage of Toronto's homeless population that would be served by this site, and the expected timeline for their move in.

## Response to Feedback

City staff informed participants that the City will select a qualified and experienced non-profit housing provider through the City's Request for Proposal process to manage the property and provide support services for residents with 24/7 staffing. The City will continue to work with the selected housing providers to identify tenants that are a good match for the supports provided on-site. City staff also stated that the City will solicit proposals from organizations with specific experience working with seniors and older adults exiting chronic homelessness and establishing connections with other seniors-focused services in the area.

Tenants will be selected through the Coordinated Access program that matches potential tenants and their needs to the support services available on-site provided by the selected housing operator. The future tenants will include people who are either experiencing homelessness or at risk of homelessness.

This approach considers the dynamic experiences of homelessness that people may go through. Community members cannot choose who their future neighbors will be. The City, as part of its RFP process, will select a non-profit organization that can demonstrate they are financially sound and viable, have sufficient operating funding to provide support services and have the experience and capability to successfully operate the project, including the provision of supports. Additional funding from provincial resources will be available to ensure these modular homes are affordable to future residents and appropriate support services are provided on site to meet the needs of residents.

City of Toronto staff told participants that the earliest this site would be occupied is the end of 2022. Pending the decision of the Planning and Housing Committee and of City Council, the City will proceed with the proposed development. The City will issue a Request for Proposals (RFP) in the near future to select a non-profit housing operator. 59 people experiencing homelessness will be housed in this facility. With over 8,000 people in Toronto experiencing homelessness this site will be a part of a bigger initiative to create over 2,000 new supportive homes by the end of 2022.

## Public Engagement

One participant asked the project team why disrespectful language was being allowed during the meeting.

Some participants asked why the participation in the meeting was not limited to the local community. Another comment received was that there should be an opportunity for a local vote and for specific consultation and outreach to the residents of the Willowdale Manor and the residents and families of the Cummer Lodge. Staff were asked if that due to the current rezoning issue, if people who had already applied to the Community Liaison Committee would need to reapply.

## Response to Feedback

It was noted by staff that the intent of public meetings is to allow participants to speak freely and share their concerns. It was acknowledged that most participants in this meeting were being respectful, and any derogatory or discriminatory language would not be tolerated.

The City of Toronto rezoning process and public meeting process is open to the public at large. Community members are welcome to submit their questions and comments to the Community Liaison office, managed by LURA Consulting, at [communityliaison@lura.ca](mailto:communityliaison@lura.ca) or 647-578-8580. City staff noted that in making recommendations to City Council on planning applications, they must take into consideration several perspectives. These perspectives include local community members, City Staff,

City Council, and City-wide issues, such as housing. It was noted that there is a severe housing crisis, and a need to provide deeply affordable supportive housing solutions.

Staff assured everyone that if they had already applied to the Community Liaison Committee, they would not need to again. Once an application is received, staff will be in touch once the CLC is ready to begin.

### Community Impact

Participants expressed concerns about potential safety impacts on their neighbourhood, specifically for seniors and school children. This included concerns about the impacts of harm reduction services being provided at the site. Some participants also noted the impact on the quality of life of seniors at Willowdale Manor.

Participants noted that additional infrastructure, such as TTC bus routes, may be necessary to support the existing community and future tenants.

### Response to Feedback

City staff responded to concerns by expressing that, based on experience in Toronto and other communities with supportive housing, the City does not anticipate any increased public safety issues in the neighbourhood as a result of the new homes. The property will be managed by experienced non-profit housing providers who will be responsible for ensuring that community concerns are addressed. A Community Liaison Committee will also be established for this site which will create a channel for communication between the housing provider and the local community and to collaboratively develop solutions to any problems that may arise.

City Staff noted that they are not aware of any planned TTC upgrades for this area but that the TTC undergoes a yearly process to examine service upgrades based on residents' input. Comments can also be received by Councillor Filion's office.

### Next Steps

On April 27, 2022, The Planning and Housing Committee at the City of Toronto will consider the proposed rezoning. Members of the public have an opportunity to submit written comments or register to speak at the meeting. Information was shared with attendees on where to find information about how to register to speak or submit a written comment to the Planning and Housing Committee. This information is also posted on the development application sign. If the matter advances to City Council, then City Council will consider the report at its meeting of May 11 and 12, 2022. Members of the public may provide written submissions to City Council.

LURA Consulting will continue to respond to inquiries received through the email address and phone number as well as provide updates through the project webpage, community bulletins and email listserv.