



**MORE NEIGHBOURS
TORONTO**

Dear Members of the Planning and Housing Committee,

RE: PH.30.2 - Expanding Housing Options in Neighbourhoods - Garden Suites - Final Report

About More Neighbours Toronto

[More Neighbours Toronto](#) is a new volunteer-led organization of housing advocates that believe in building more multi-family homes of all kinds for those who dream of building their lives in Toronto. We advocate for reforms to increase our city's ability to build more homes in every neighbourhood. We are a big-tent organization with members across the political spectrum who are nevertheless committed to counterbalancing the anti-housing agenda that dominates Toronto's politics, created an affordability crisis, and has cost burdened a new generation of aspiring residents. We are firmly committed to the principle that housing is a human right and believe Toronto should be inclusive and welcoming to all.

Summary Of Position

More Neighbours Toronto supports the legalization of garden suites (item PH.30.2). Allowing garden suites as-of-right city-wide will:

- Provide a housing option suitable for families, multigenerational households, seniors looking to age-in-place, renters and those seeking accessible or at-grade housing.
- Make more efficient use of land and existing infrastructure within Toronto's Neighbourhoods, many of which have remained static or lost population in recent decades.
- Allow infill housing that better supports local retail and low-carbon modes of transportation for more complete communities that are in line with the TransformTO climate goals.
- Offer a starting point for neighbourhood change that is homeowner-driven and that can benefit smaller and innovative developers.

In addition to staff recommendations, we encourage the establishment of pre-approved designs that would allow expedited building permits and reduced costs for homeowners

Position

Garden suites provide one much-needed option for families, seniors and those seeking at-grade housing

Recent census data demonstrate that [young families are leaving Toronto](#), likely frustrated by the challenge of finding suitable housing in a city where construction of detached and semi-detached houses has decreased over the last decade. Young people unable to find suitable housing of their own are [living with parents or roommates further into their 20s or 30s](#).

Meanwhile, [66% of households aged 70+](#) are estimated to be overhoused. These include seniors who might wish to remain close to family, friends and existing social supports, but whose Neighbourhoods have few smaller, accessible housing options available. The COVID-19 pandemic also increased interest in aging-in-place and community support for seniors.

Garden suites have the potential to help all of these groups. Families may find ground-level garden suites a more suitable option than apartments. Multi-generational households could gain additional space and seniors could downsize to a smaller building without moving outside of their communities. In addition, at-grade garden suites can be designed with accessibility in mind for those with disabilities. Finally, garden suites would provide rental options in areas of the city that are predominantly occupied by homeowners.

Garden suites are part of vibrant and complete communities

This item would legalize garden suites throughout Toronto's residentially zoned land. The City's recent [Neighbourhood Change and Intensification Bulletin](#) estimates that 70% of this land is zoned only for detached or semi-detached buildings and that these areas are more likely to have declined in population, as well as having lower diversity of income levels and immigration status. Toronto's Official Plan opens by stating its grounding in principles of diversity and opportunity. However, later commitments to limit impacts on Neighbourhoods present a challenge to these principles by setting extreme limitations on built form in Neighbourhoods. Diversifying housing options, including garden suites, is one step toward Toronto living up to its stated principles.

In addition to matters of principle, more housing options would make better use of existing infrastructure and public investment in these Neighbourhoods. As faster-growing areas have begun to bus students to other areas of the city due to school overcrowding, more options should be made available to live closer to where schools have capacity. Similarly, water and transport infrastructure can be used more efficiently.

Garden suites support Toronto's TransformTO goals

Gentle density also supports local retail and more walkable neighbourhoods. Transit will have more potential users, making service improvements and investments in public transit more

cost-effective. This is in line with the TransformTO aims to reduce long trips by more efficient land use planning and for 75% of school or work trips under 5 km to be made by walking, cycling or public transit.

In addition, smaller-scale buildings like garden suites can make better use of low-carbon materials. We support the report's suggested contest for pre-approved designs that meet the Toronto Green Standard measures, Passive House design and Net Zero emissions.

Garden suites are one piece of Toronto's plans for the future

Garden suites are a natural extension of existing programs and the ongoing Expanding Housing Options in Neighbourhoods (EHON) initiative. The recommendations are based on existing ancillary structures and incorporate what has been learned from other cities and Toronto's legalization of laneway housing. It was noted at the last Planning and Housing Committee that construction of laneway housing has been slow but increasing year-over-year. Garden suites remain just one step in the City's larger strategy, but an important one. Neighbourhoods cannot be stagnant. As infill housing accumulates, it will provide new options for current and future residents in our growing city, in areas that previously limited new building types.

However, regular review remains important to identify potential limitations and adjustments that can be made as Neighbourhoods evolve. In addition to welcoming pre-approved designs, garden suites also provide an opportunity for innovation. With frequent concerns about the prevalence of larger developers and towers at development meetings, garden suites offer homeowners the chance to innovate within their own neighbourhoods, as well as for smaller development firms to exhibit new ideas. We hope that the city will include these considerations when reviewing design guidelines.

We would also like to note the efforts that City Planning staff made during consultation. In addition to meeting with More Neighbours, there were several city-wide public consultations to develop recommendations. There was also a survey that received good response. Staff then put out a Youtube video explaining the draft by-law that resulted from consultation and allowed further comments on the draft by-law. Throughout a challenging pandemic, there have been multiple opportunities for both written and verbal feedback.

Given this extensive consultation process and the pressing need for housing options outlined above, we encourage the committee to move forward without delay on the implementation of garden suites. The advocates of More Neighbours Toronto encourage you to accept the recommendation of City Planning staff and **adopt item PH30.2**.

Sincerely,

Colleen Bailey,
More Neighbours Toronto