



**MORE NEIGHBOURS
TORONTO**

Dear Members of the Planning and Housing Committee,

RE: PH 2.9 - Villiers Island - Affordable Housing Update

About More Neighbours Toronto

[More Neighbours Toronto](#) is a volunteer-only 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 committed to counterbalancing the anti-housing agenda that has dominated Toronto's politics, created an affordability crisis, and 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.

Position

More Neighbours Toronto is pleased that the City will explore increased densities to support more affordable housing opportunities on Villiers Island. **City-owned land is one of the most valuable assets that we have to address the housing crisis with real, long-term housing solutions.** Toronto has a responsibility to use this land to promote dense, walkable communities with affordable housing options.

The planning intent for Villiers Island is for a unique and inclusive community, yet the adopted Precinct Plan has less than one-third the density of The Annex and the affordable housing target is limited by this density. The City must learn from the Housing Now program and make affordable housing the most important civic priority on city-owned land. This means allowing flexibility to deal with the economic realities of planning and building over long timeframes, including how changing interest rates and fluctuations in the supply chain introduce uncertainty and increase costs. Rather than thinking about how much affordability can be squeezed out in a neighbourhood with a "character" that was proposed many years ago in a very different construction cost environment, City Planning should focus their efforts on the affordability that they want to achieve in a housing crisis, and what sort of height, density, and neighbourhood character is most likely to reliably get us there. **This will likely mean moving far beyond the minimum 30% increase in density that is proposed for exploration if that is required to meet affordability targets.**

In addition to being largely city-owned, Villiers Island is unique because of the lack of current occupants in many areas. This presents a rare opportunity for the City and Council to truly

innovate without fear of political consequences from existing residents. Many of the building design guidelines and car-centric requirements are driven by the fears of those who already live in existing neighbourhoods. Here, the City and WaterfrontTO have a chance to see what new buildings can be when they prioritize the needs of the future residents who will actually live in them. **These future residents should be considered stakeholders and the City should consider relaxing its own rules where reasonable in order to demonstrate what a complete community can be when all residents' needs are valued.**

City Planning should also consider the densities needed to support future businesses and city services in the area. Complete communities need to have libraries, parks and retail within walking distance and they also need enough residents to support them. In a time of stretched operating budgets, high density neighbourhoods with lower per capita service costs are supporting the often wealthier low density neighbourhoods. Until this regressive taxation can be addressed, the best course of action is to share this responsibility across more high density neighbourhoods.

Of course, making a complete and walkable community also requires transit connections. We encourage the City to continue working with upper levels of government to secure transit funding. Both provincial and federal governments have expressed a desire to support housing solutions and this area is one of the best investments that they can make. **The more housing and affordability that is in this neighbourhood, the stronger that the case for federal and provincial funding becomes.**

Thank you for reconsidering housing and affordability in this plan, so that city-owned land and the rest of the area can be put to the best use possible.

Regards,

Colleen Bailey
More Neighbours Toronto