



Updated Community Engagement Approach

January 2023

City of Toronto Land Acknowledgement

Toronto is the traditional territory of many nations including the Mississaugas of the Credit, the Anishnabeg, the Chippewa, the Haudenosaunee and the Wendat peoples and is now home to many diverse First Nations, Inuit and Métis peoples. We also acknowledge that Toronto is covered by Treaty 13 with the Mississaugas of the Credit.

Inputs to this Report

There are many contributors to this report, including residents that have participated in Housing Now consultation activities to date and shared their feedback on the engagement process; the staff at CreateTO, City Planning, and the Housing Secretariat working together to deliver the Housing Now Initiative; and the team from Third Party Public Inc. retained by CreateTO to support the community engagement and consultation process on several Housing Now sites. Many resources were drawn on to inform this report, including City Planning's Equity & Inclusion Toolkit *Making Spaces* (2021), City of Toronto *HousingTO 2020-2030 Action Plan & Toronto Housing Charter – Opportunity for All* (2019), the City of Toronto Shelter, Support and Housing Administration's *Proposed New Engagement and Planning Process for Emergency Shelters* (2017), City of Toronto *2022-2032 Reconciliation Action Plan* (2022), and others.

This is a living document that will continue to be updated in response to changing contexts, new learnings, and community priorities. If you have any questions or comments on what's here, please email housingnow@toronto.ca. For more information on the Housing Now Initiative see www.createto.ca/housingnow.

Community Engagement & the Housing Now Initiative

The main objective of this revised engagement strategy is to improve the engagement process and build support for the Housing Now Initiative to ensure these development projects are approved quickly, enabling the delivery of new affordable homes.

It is inspired by Toronto City Council's 2023 Housing Action Plan and the community engagement leadership shown by the Shelter, Support & Housing Administration Division. It is also informed by learnings from the Housing Now community engagement process to date.

Background:

The City of Toronto is taking action and leading the campaign for a better housing future.

On December 14, 2022, Toronto City Council approved the 2023 Housing Action Plan for the 2022-2026 term of Council. It focuses on getting more homes built or made available in Toronto as quickly as possible while also making housing more affordable.

The approved 2023 Housing Action Plan will begin the process of updating the City of Toronto's planning rules and regulations to meet or exceed the target of building 285,000 homes over the next 10 years. It also advances the comprehensive HousingTO 2020-2030 Action Plan (HousingTO Plan), which sets the goal of establishing a pipeline to support the creation of 40,000 affordable rental and supportive homes

along with providing a blueprint for action across the full housing spectrum – from emergency shelters to rentals to ownership homes.

Since the start of the HousingTO Plan, the City has approved almost 20,000 new affordable rental homes – the 2023 Housing Action Plan builds on that work so that the City can move quicker.

The Housing Now Initiative:

The Housing Now Initiative is one important component of the Housing Action Plan.

Housing Now activates surplus City-owned land for the development of market rental and affordable rental housing within mixed-income, mixed-use, transit-oriented communities. The publicly owned properties are close to transit, providing residents with access to a range of services and employment opportunities, and contributing to combatting climate change by reducing the need for driving and energy consumption.

The explicit intent of the Initiative is to use these public lands to build as many new affordable housing units as possible, at the same time delivering other benefits such as new market ownership and rental housing, new public realm, shared community spaces, and retail opportunities.

The current community engagement process:

The current community engagement process for Housing Now includes some or all of the following activities which were implemented on Housing Now sites between 2019 and 2022 (with activities modified, as required, by public health guidelines during the pandemic):

- Meet with the local Councillor(s);
- Identify and map community organizations, stakeholders, and leaders;
- Convene Indigenous Sharing Meetings with an Indigenous facilitator (as/if relevant to each site);

- Hold meetings with community organizations, stakeholders, and leaders and/or create working groups to address site-specific issues (as/if relevant to each site);
- Send a meeting notice with a postage pre-paid reply card to households and businesses within a radius discussed with and confirmed by the local Councillor (anywhere from approximately 150 metres to up to 500 metres from the site) of the proposed Housing Now site, with the opportunity to request materials in multiple languages as/if required based on each site-specific context;
- Make available the Housing Now Initiative Discussion Guide and/or a site-specific Information Sheet and feedback form to residents (online and/or in hard copy, on request);
- Hold pop-ups in the community;
- Hang posters in the community;
- Develop and maintain a project website;
- Develop a project “site reel” video introducing the project;
- Social media outreach through the City of Toronto and CreateTO’s channels;
- Posting of “development signs” on each Housing Now site; and
- Community meetings.

Based on feedback from participants in the consultation process, CreateTO, City staff, and elected officials, opportunities for improvement include:

- A stronger focus on building support for Housing Now, including continuing to grow awareness and understanding of the housing challenges being experienced in Toronto and the ability of the Housing Now Initiative to help address those challenges;

- Being even more clear about Toronto City Council’s commitment to developing Housing Now sites, and the opportunity for residents to work with CreateTO and the City on how to support the success of the developments on each site and the communities in which they’re located; and
- Creating safe participation spaces for people with diverse perspectives and solution-focused discussions.

Proposed updates to the community engagement process:

There are five key updates proposed for the Housing Now engagement process, including:

1. A much stronger focus on the important contribution that the Housing Now Initiative makes to achieving City Council’s 2023 Housing Action Plan and campaign for a better housing future for Toronto. This includes (but will not be limited to):
 - Introducing communities to the fact that public land in their area is helping provide a better housing future for the city’s current and future residents.
 - Promoting the reasons why City Council is implementing the Housing Now program, focusing particularly on the benefits that come from living in a city where “all residents have a right to a home in a complete community with equitable access to a range of opportunities to live, work, learn and play.”
 - Understanding how the non-housing-related components of Housing Now developments (such as the public realm, community spaces and services, new retail, etc.) can best serve local community needs.
 - Answering questions about Housing Now and the proposed development.

2. Clear communication that the purpose of the engagement is not about approval of the site, the number of affordable units, or the degree of affordability that the City is striving to offer but instead about how participants can improve the proposal and support the success of the Housing Now Initiative.
3. Inviting the community and local leaders to join in planning for, championing, and welcoming the new development and gathering feedback on how to successfully integrate the Housing Now development into the neighbourhood.
4. Creating multiple mechanisms for connecting with residents who are often less likely to participate in public engagement processes, including more pop-ups, youth-led engagement, and outreach to populations most likely to be interested in accessing more affordable housing (e.g., seniors, young families, etc.).
5. Addressing misinformation and misunderstandings proactively, clearly, and concisely.

A community meeting will be held as required by the City's Official Plan for proposed Official Plan and/or Zoning By-law amendments prior to approval.

Engagement Principles & Objectives

CreateTO, City Planning, and the Housing Secretariat are committed to engaging meaningfully to inspire public confidence in, and build support for, the Housing Now Initiative as an essential step in addressing the housing crisis and supporting all communities in Toronto.

The following engagement principles provide guidance on designing, implementing, and making

decisions about public engagement for the Housing Now Initiative.

Engagement Principles

- ***Open, diverse, equitable, and inclusive.*** This means ensuring the process is open to anyone interested in the Housing Now Initiative; is reflective of Toronto's many diverse communities; is inclusive of those who need this initiative the most; and proactively minimizes barriers to participation.
- ***Timely and responsive to local and city-wide needs.*** This means ensuring that the engagement process starts early, meets all engagement objectives, and responds to the site-specific context.
- ***Transparent and accountable.*** This means being transparent about the purpose of engagement; what is open for influence, what is not; the roles of the various participants involved; and how participant feedback informs decision-making.
- ***Flexible and responsive.*** This means striving to accommodate different participant needs, including responding to how participants would like to engage.
- ***Coordinated, connected, and rooted in local context.*** This means demonstrating coordination with and connections to other relevant, concurrent processes and policies rooted in local context.

Engagement Objectives

The commitment to engage meaningfully and inspire confidence in the Housing Now Initiative is translated into action through the following objectives that every Housing Now public engagement process strives to meet:

1. Identify and give voice to equity-seeking and equity-deserving groups.
2. Identify and connect with local individuals and organizations that have the potential to become advocates and champions.

3. Build a shared understanding of the Housing Now Initiative as a necessary program with city-wide and local benefits.
4. Start early, as earning trust and building deep relationships requires time.
5. Create and hold spaces for different voices and a range of perspectives to emerge and participate in engagement activities.
6. Bring transparency to the decision-making process, starting with what is open for community influence, what is not, and why.
7. Identify community priorities and understand how the design and delivery of Housing Now investments can support community priorities.
8. Share great and clear information that anticipates and mitigates confusion, fear, and misconceptions.
9. Respect time and efforts of local communities by aligning, coordinating, and connecting with relevant plans, initiatives, and strategies.
10. Meet or exceed regulatory community engagement and consultation requirements and leave a good foundation for the next public engagement for the site that will be developer-led.

Key People to Engage

The Housing Now Initiative is relevant to a range of city-wide and local audiences. While each Housing Now site may not be relevant to every audience, project teams must consider every audience when developing site-specific engagement strategies, audience maps, and contact lists. Audiences to engage include:

1. *Indigenous communities*

Rights-Holders and potentially affected or interested urban Indigenous communities where the proposed development has a focus

on or significance to Indigenous audiences, including Rights-bearing First Nations and Métis community, Indigenous-serving organizations and agencies, and grassroots First Nation, Métis, and Inuit community members.

2. *Historically under-represented area-specific and city-wide equity-deserving audiences*

People for whom affordable housing has special significance but who are often under-represented in engagement processes, including: Indigenous communities; African, Caribbean, Black communities; communities of colour; newcomer groups; youth; elderly residents; people living with disabilities; and others.

3. *General public*

People who live in a community where the City has identified a Housing Now site, who may not be aware of the Housing Now Initiative. This could include people who use transit, parks, recreation centres, and visit local shops.

4. *Local community leaders and organizations*

Local individuals and groups that have an interest in development and change, have lived experience in the community, and are connected to local residents and businesses are important potential project advocates and champions. This could include libraries, community centres, faith-based groups, Neighbourhood Planning tables, parks “friends of” groups, tenant associations, resident associations, business improvement areas, etc.

5. *City-wide housing organizations*

Organizations and individuals who advocate around housing and City Planning policy more broadly.

Tactics

Engagement for the Housing Now Initiative is implemented through a variety of tactics.

No limits will be placed on the potential variety or number of engagement activities. They will be held where CreateTO, City Planning, and the Housing Secretariat determine that they are likely to help the community be more broadly aware of and better understand the project, or where they are likely to enhance the project. Tactics will be continuously evaluated and refined as required by each Housing Now site.

Required engagement activities include:

Create materials for sharing information

- Write information sheets and/or create display panels that introduce Housing Now to the public. This will be clear, easy to understand information about the Housing Now Initiative at-large, including why it was created and approved by City Council, who it will serve, and how it will be implemented.
- Develop a Frequently Asked Questions document that identifies questions and provides concise responses that directly address them.
- Create site-reels / videos. Short one to two-minute videos to help promote and introduce the public to the process.
- Use City and CreateTO-owned social media channels to raise awareness about Housing Now, promote engagement activities, and provide an easy way to sign-up for updates and access project materials online.
- Develop site-specific websites. Provide a “one-stop-shop” for all site-specific project materials.
- Connect internally with staff and elected officials on the materials.

Engage Indigenous Voices

- Connect with Indigenous voices on a city-wide basis (and/or site-specific basis, as appropriate) for focused discussions exclusively on Housing Now. This will continue to happen through the City’s existing engagement with Indigenous partners about the City’s HousingTO 2020-2030 Action Plan, with other tactics introduced where necessary.

Connect with and establish relationships with local community leaders, organizations and networks

- This could include phone calls and/or one-on-one or small group conversations with local leaders and organization representatives with the potential to become advocates and local champions.

Approach people in places where they already congregate in their community

- Have brief one-on-one and small group discussions about the Housing Now Initiative and development in their community (e.g., pop-up events at recreation centres, libraries, transit stations, local events, etc.). This could include City of Toronto / Housing Now tents to get people’s attention and provide a specific and consistent landmark for people to look for in their community.

Hold a community meeting

- Convene a community meeting and/or support the convening of a community meeting by City Planning, as required for proposed Official Plan and/or Zoning By-Law amendments. The key purpose of the meeting is to create a forum for City Planning staff to share their perspective on how the new proposed development aligns with the Official Plan (and other regulatory inputs and/or directions, as relevant) with the community prior to development approval.

Optional engagement

Support community-led engagement

- Recruit and retain people from the local community that have established relationships within the community to share information and assess interest in housing that is more affordable (e.g., youth, local community leaders, etc.).

Share information in local publications

- Share information in local newspapers, organization newsletters and websites, etc. including in different languages spoken in the local area. Have members of the project team interviewed by local publications.

Connect with schools

- Connect with teachers in local schools, colleges, and universities to identify opportunities to share information and seek feedback from students and their families.

Connect with places of worship

- Connect with leaders in places of worship and explore opportunities to raise awareness about the Housing Now Initiative in their community.

Civic-literacy partnerships and activities

- Identify and partner with organizations working in the area that focus on sharing information about topics related to the Housing Now Initiative and the proposed development (e.g., affordable housing, urban planning, community services and facilities, transportation, etc.). Work with identified organizations to plan and conduct seminars, working groups, etc. to share information and increase civic literacy about topics related to the Housing Now Initiative.

Engage city-wide leaders

- Have city-wide leader engagement. Connect with city-wide leaders and advocates from a range of sectors, including, housing. City-wide

leaders could be convened separately and/or together to share their insights into city-wide and local priorities.

Engagement Impact

The Housing Now engagement impact will be assessed and documented, including the depth and the breadth of the engagement process and the change in civic literacy and participation.

These categories of engagement impact are informed by Making Space: Centering Equity in Planning, developed specifically to ensure the City of Toronto's engagement is inclusive and equitable.

All residents have a right to a home in a complete community with equitable access to a range of opportunities to live, work, learn and play.

Toronto Housing Charter