



October 8, 2024

City Council
City of Toronto
Committee Room 1, City Hall
100 Queen Street West
Toronto ON, M5H 2N2

RE: Agenda Item PH15.6 - Increasing the City's Supply of Accessible Affordable Housing

Dear Mayor Chow and City Councillors,

The Centre for Independent Living in Toronto (CILT) is pleased to express our strong endorsement for the recommendations detailed in Agenda item PH 15.6: Increasing the City's Supply of Accessible Affordable Housing.

Since its expansion by City Council in 2022, CILT has been an active participant in the Accessible Housing Working Group (AHWG), alongside representatives from disability and seniors organizations. The AHWG has engaged extensively with a diverse group of stakeholders, including experts in housing accessibility, builders experienced in universal design, members of the disability community, architects, and housing policymakers, to identify the systemic obstacles faced by disabled Torontonians in obtaining accessible housing. Moreover, we have examined innovative and effective universal design features currently utilized in multi-unit housing projects across Canada and internationally, which can be easily integrated into new and existing rental properties without significant additional costs.

CILT, along with our fellow AHWG members, urges City Council to fully support the report's recommendations. The report calls for bold and immediate measures to actualize the right to accessible housing through actions tied to the City's Housing TO Action Plan. It outlines seven key recommendations that, if implemented, can considerably enhance housing outcomes for low-income disabled tenants in planned City housing developments, both now and in the long term. One pivotal recommendation that we advocate for includes incorporating a comprehensive set of universal design features within Toronto's Affordable Housing Design Guidelines, applicable to 100% of new affordable housing units led or supported by the City (detailed in Attachment 1 of the report).

These features were meticulously selected to address the access needs of individuals with

varying abilities, optimizing the units' usability and adaptability while minimizing the need for extensive renovations as tenants' accessibility requirements evolve. This approach will enable more residents to age in place as their needs change, thereby reducing substantial renovation costs to the city's capital budget and lowering healthcare expenditures due to fewer unnecessary hospitalizations and long-term care admissions resulting from unsuitable housing.

By adopting this plan, City Council will contribute significantly to the sustainable management of the City's new public housing stock over the upcoming decades and fulfill its human rights commitment to accessible housing.

To date, Toronto is significantly lagging in developing the accessible housing necessary for our city's growing and changing population. With over 570,000 residents with disabilities, comprising approximately 27 percent of the population (Statistics Canada, 2022), and an estimate of over 470,000 seniors projected to nearly double by the 2040s, it is crucial to recognize that our city's demand for accessible housing will surge over the next 20 years. Failure to construct multi-unit rentals at scale will result in a severe housing crisis. Toronto City Council has the opportunity—and responsibility—to lead in this critical initiative and advocate for similar efforts at the provincial and federal levels, as well as among non-profit and private market builders.

Amid our current housing crisis, a growing number of disabled and senior residents are becoming precariously housed or homeless, while others are being placed in long-term care institutions due to the lack of accessible housing. Currently, there are over 500 individuals on TCHC's centralized waitlist for an accessible unit and over 800 on the supportive housing waitlist administered by CILT, with many applicants facing waits exceeding 15 years. Tragically, many will not survive long enough to secure an accessible unit.

This dire situation represents a profound failure by all levels of government to uphold disabled residents' right to adequate housing, as protected under domestic and international human rights agreements. You hold the power to take decisive action and approve these recommendations, marking a critical first step towards resolving this crisis. We ask that you adopt these recommendations and lay the foundation needed, now.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Wendy Porch', with a stylized, cursive script.

Wendy Porch M. Ed.

Executive Director, CILT