



**DISABILITY JUSTICE
NETWORK** of ONTARIO

Subject: Recommendations of the City of Toronto's Accessible Housing Working Group (AHWG)

9 October 2024

Dear Mayor Chow and Members of City Council

We write to you in strong support of the Accessible Housing Working Group (AHWG)'s recommendations on changes the City of Toronto's Affordable Housing Design Guidelines to incorporate principles that work towards a Universal Design Approach.

Disability Justice Network of Ontario is a proud member of the Accessible Housing Network, engages in accessible wider housing advocacy around the Province, and is a Disability organization led by Disabled People focused on building a world where Disabled people are free to be. Our work intersects around all areas from social assistance rates to the intersections of structural ableism and racism that tenants may face as well as supporting grassroots work by and for unhoused Disabled people. As such, we must make comment here in support of these landmark guidelines.

We strongly believe that these guidelines are an excellent first step towards combating the structurally ableist design of the wider housing stock here in Toronto, while also including in this motion clear reference to the other outstanding concern we share in Toronto's Housing sector: mass, total unaffordability of housing for almost all Disabled people in this city.

As a renter in the City of Toronto, I know the dual struggle of finding an affordable place to live here while also being let down—every, single time—but the gamut of inaccessible aspects to the apartments I've called home here (and in cities across this Province). The realities of struggling to find a place to live, only to constantly be faced with challenges in it is something all Disabled people are faced with within this city. These guidelines do not apply to private rentals as it will for city supported and public housing, but it will represent a new landmark compared to the utter failures of the Ontario Building Code, Ontario's regime of accessibility legislation, and the disinterest of other levels of government in moving this issue forward.

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Creating a world where People with Disabilities are free to be.



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As others have mentioned to you in previous correspondence, these recommendations have the potential to make Toronto a leader in accessible design and should be touted to other cities, municipalities, and jurisdictions as a new way forward. Toronto has a long history of surpassing the insufficient, bare minimums of the Province and encouraging needed change around Ontario by making decisions like these. I strongly believe that the opportunity to do this again rests with the City Council again now.

However, this is only a first step. This city must do as much as we can to ensure that—as much as we do not wish for shelters and related spaces to have to exist in this context—the City's already failing and struggling shelter system is also updated to reflect these standards. As well, more will need to be done to advance and incentivize private sector adoption of corresponding standards to these. Further, we would hope that the City will not simply advocate for equalizing rates of OW and ODSP, but instead encourage mass investment in these programs so recipients can receive doubled or more rates that reflect the realities of cities like Toronto—while also considering the same for those in other programs like OAS, CPP-Disability, WSIB, and, eventually the new (and already insufficient) Canada Disability Benefit.

First steps are always needed to build towards wider, lasting changes when we consider accessible housing. This is that moment and I urge City Council to take it.

Respectfully,

Brad Evoy,

Executive Director, Disability Justice Network of Ontario