

Submission from Walied Khogali

Deputation to the Planning and Housing Committee – Housing Action Plan: Avenues Policy Review - February 28th 2024.

Good morning, honorable members of the council and the Planning and Housing Committee,

I am here today to express my strong support for the proposals outlined in the Housing Action Plan: Avenues Policy Review - Proposals Report, specifically under items PH10.3. This report marks a pivotal step in addressing the urgent need for more housing in Toronto, a challenge that has only intensified over the years.

Firstly, I commend the request for the Chief Planner and Executive Director, City Planning, to undertake broad public and stakeholder consultation on the proposed policy directions detailed in Attachment 1. It is essential that the planning process incorporates the voices and needs of our community, ensuring that the proposed Official Plan Amendments, expected in the fourth quarter of 2024, reflect the diverse aspirations of our residents.

Secondly, the initiative to explore proposed policy direction and mapping changes for certain City-owned sites adjacent to existing Avenues is highly commendable. These sites offer a significant opportunity to support the city's growth in a sustainable and strategic manner by delivering much-needed housing.

In this context, I want to highlight a crucial addition to our approach: the City should prioritize the development of rent-geared-to-income homes on these City-owned sites. This focus on affordable housing is not just a matter of social responsibility; it is an economic imperative. By investing in rent-geared-to-income housing, we can ensure that all Torontonians, regardless of income level, have access to safe, affordable, and quality housing. This approach will not only address the acute shortage of affordable housing but also contribute to the creation of more equitable and inclusive communities along our Avenues.

Toronto's Avenues are a critical part of our urban fabric, supporting growth and intensification. The Housing Action Plan (HAP) 2022-2026 rightly focuses on aligning the City's Official Plan with the pressing need for more housing. The Avenues Policy Review's emphasis on updating the vision for Avenues development, extending and introducing new Avenues, streamlining study requirements, and creating transition areas between Avenues and neighborhoods is both timely and necessary.

Moreover, the report's commitment to enabling more housing while advancing important city-building goals—such as increasing the housing supply, diversifying housing options, enhancing transit accessibility, and building inclusive communities—is commendable. This initiative is about more than just expanding housing; it's about improving the quality of life for all Torontonians by creating vibrant, safe, and accessible public spaces and ensuring the availability of essential community services and facilities.

However, as we move forward with this ambitious plan, we must adopt a holistic and inclusive approach. I echo the recommendations of FONTRA, stressing the importance of integrating considerations of cultural heritage value into the Avenues Policy Review. Our city's main streets are more than transit corridors; they are vibrant centers of community life, rich in history and character. It is crucial to protect this heritage through thoughtful policy and urban design guidelines to preserve Toronto's unique identity for future generations.

In conclusion, I urge the committee to advance these proposals with a commitment to sustainable urban growth, community engagement, heritage preservation, and, most importantly, the prioritization of rent-geared-to-income housing on City-owned sites. Together, we can shape a Toronto that not only meets the housing needs of today but also ensures a legacy of inclusivity and accessibility for all its residents.

Thank you for your attention, and I eagerly anticipate the positive impact these initiatives will have on our beloved city.