

Affordable Rental Housing Design Guidelines



City of Toronto
Affordable Housing Office

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Purpose

The Affordable Housing Design Guidelines have been generated to provide a simple framework for non-profit housing groups, designers and governments to assist developers and non-profits receiving funding for affordable rental housing.

The guidelines will cover the following areas:

- General Building Considerations
- Building Exterior
- Building Interior
- Residential Unit Design

These guidelines can be used in a variety of buildings and units. The specific programming and design specifications of individual user groups should also be consulted. This document should be reviewed in conjunction with the City of Toronto Affordable Housing Office's Affordable Housing Accessibility and Aging in Place Guidelines.

Duty to Accommodate

Inclusive design is a basic human right and is protected by the Human Rights Code. The housing provider has the duty to accommodate tenants as defined by the Human Rights Code. Planning and designing in advance for accommodating tenants changing physical needs is not only more efficient for a landlord but provides a higher level of stability and dignity for tenants. It also is more efficient and cost effective to prepare in advance. For example, roughing-in the structure in bathroom walls for grab bars costs much less during construction than installing them over the life of a building.

These guidelines address aging in place and the needs of persons with disabilities. Many people, particularly seniors may have few, if any disabilities at the start of their tenancy but may become disabled in some way during their residence.

Useful links:

Ontario Human Rights Commission:

http://www.ohrc.on.ca/sites/default/files/attachments/Policy_and_guidelines_on_disability_and_the_duty_to_accommodate.pdf

Centre for Equality Rights in Accommodation

http://www.equalityrights.org/cera/?page_id=76#code

Design: Affordable Rental Housing Design Guidelines

1. Overview

- 1.1. The purpose of this document is to outline design guidelines for new affordable rental housing developments. The guidelines address requirements for unit mix, size, distribution location, accessibility, adaptability, site circulation, landscaping, and other building design issues.
- 1.2. Affordable rental housing units will be rented at, or below, 80 percent of CMHC's average market rent for the City of Toronto for a minimum of 20 years.

2. Durability

- 2.1 Durable materials are preferred for rental housing units since they reduce the long term maintenance costs for the owner/operator.
 - 2.1.1 As a minimum the following fixtures, hardware and materials and finishes should be designed to be durable:
 - a. Cabinet and door hardware, kitchen counters, doors, windows, cabinetry and closets,
 - b. Interior finishes in common areas and high traffic areas within the units,
 - c. Cabinetry within units should meet the requirements of the most current version of the AWI/AWMAC Architectural Woodwork Quality Standards.
 - 2.1.2 Flooring:
 - a. No vinyl flooring or carpeting should be utilized.
 - b. Flooring within suites, except washrooms and kitchens, should be long lasting wood and/or engineered wood with an acoustic subfloor to minimize sound transmission, particularly from impact between suites.
 - c. Flooring in washrooms and kitchens should be linoleum resilient flooring with integral resilient base. It should be laid with an acoustic subfloor to minimize sound transmission, particularly from impact between suites.
 - d. Flooring in amenity spaces and corridors should be linoleum resilient flooring (or comparable) with integral resilient base. It should be laid with an acoustic subfloor to minimize sound transmission, particularly from impact.
 - 2.1.3 Walls in common areas should be abuse resistant. They should be painted with a high performance coating.

3. General

- 3.1. General
 - 3.1.2 The general intent of the guidelines is to provide functionally efficient, sustainable, design excellence and cost effective affordable rental housing buildings.
 - 3.1.3 Design buildings and landscaping that are indistinguishable from surrounding market buildings and landscaping provided in terms of expression, quality and character. This applies to balconies and window coverings. If surrounding market housing has these features, so should the affordable rental buildings.
 - 3.1.4 Provide central heating and cooling to every housing unit with individual controls.

- 3.1.5 All doors should have lever handles throughout the building.
- 3.1.6 Activation devices for building entries should be suitable for persons with varying disabilities (e.g. buttons, fobs, card access).

3.2. Unit Mix, Size and Location

- 3.2.1. 40% of all housing units should contain one bedroom and should be no less than 525 sq ft (48.7 sq m) in area. The average of all one bedroom affordable units will be no less than 590 square feet (55 sq m) (+/- 5%). Bachelor units are not acceptable.
- 3.2.2. 40% of all units should contain two bedrooms and should be no less than 650 sq ft (60 sq m) in area. The average size of all two bedroom units should be 725 square feet (+/- 5%).
- 3.2.3. 15% of all units should contain three bedrooms and should be no less than 900 sq ft (84 sq m) in area. The average size of three bedroom units should be 1000 square feet (+/- 5%).
- 3.2.4. 5% of all units should contain four bedrooms and should be no less than 1100 sq ft (102 sq m) in area. The average size of all four bedroom units shall be 1175 sq ft (+/- 5%)
- 3.2.5. Family Units:
 - a. Larger family units are preferred either on the ground floor with direct access to a street with front outdoor space; or
 - b. In building types that don't permit this configuration, family units can also function well on a podium (above grade) with an outdoor terrace.
 - c. Family units should have proportionately larger living, dining and storage areas.
 - d. Outdoor private amenity spaces such as patios, balconies and terraces are key features for family suites.
- 3.2.6. Bedrooms should be a minimum of 100 sq ft (9.3 sq m) with a minimum dimension of 9 ft and include operable windows to the exterior.

3.3. Common Space

- 3.3.1. Building entrances/waiting/lobby areas should provide:
 - a. Comfortable areas for tenants to sit, socialize and wait for vehicular pick-up.
 - b. Comfortable seating and space to accommodate persons with mobility devices.
 - c. Clear sightlines to the vehicular entrance and arrival area.
 - d. Areas around elevators should have additional space for people to wait either in seating provided or on mobility devices. Where space is tight, pull-down chairs might be considered.
- 3.3.2. Main entries should provide automatic door openers on both the exterior entrance and related vestibule doors.
- 3.3.3. Amenity space and washrooms should be accessible to seniors and persons with varying disabilities. Provide automatic door openers in these rooms.

3.4. Garbage Chutes

- 3.4.1. Provide automatic door openers on each residential floor for easy access and accessibility.

3.5. Laundry Facilities

- 3.5.1. Laundry facilities should not be located below grade. They should be well-lit and comfortable including space to sit and socialize. Visibility to hallways and other common space is important for security.
- 3.5.2. Provide automatic door openers to laundry rooms.
- 3.5.3. Provide laundry tubs and folding tables that accommodate persons in mobility devices.
- 3.5.4. Family units (3 and 4 bedroom units) should include a washer and dryer. Appliances should be Energy Star and water efficient.

3.6. Storage Facilities

- 3.6.1. Include storage facilities for strollers, bicycles and mobility devices (with electrical outlets for battery charging).
- 3.6.2. If storage lockers are provided, wire-type enclosures are preferred for security purposes.
- 3.6.3. All units should have storage facilities either in the unit or elsewhere in the building.
- 3.6.4. Refer to Section 3.9.1 for storage provided within units.

3.7. Hallways

- 3.7.1. Sufficient space should be provided to allow those on mobility devices to turn around.
- 3.7.2. Mitigate against the length of long corridors by designing elevator lobbies and individual unit entries with various design features including: well-lit and well designed lighting, colour, size and configuration.
- 3.7.3. Elevator waiting areas on each floor should be considered as gathering places including design features such as: lighting, distinctive in design and large enough for several residents to wait comfortably. Wall surfaces around the call buttons should be durable and easy to maintain.
- 3.7.4. Floors should be non-slip and easy to clean. Sound transmission should be minimized between corridors and units. Carpeting should not be used.

3.8. Unit Entries:

- 3.8.1. Entries to units from corridors should be easily identifiable (design, lighting, recessed, numbering, shelf).
- 3.8.2. Interior door width should accommodate people in mobility devices.
- 3.8.3. Doors must have peepholes for safety.

3.9. Unit Design

- 3.9.1. Units should provide adequate storage, proportionate to the size of the unit. Family units should have:
 - a. Additional storage space including walk-in storage with shelving, front closet space near the entrance, linen closet and kitchen pantry.
 - b. Space to store strollers and bicycles.
 - c. The additional storage space should be in addition to minimum unit floor space.
- 3.9.2. Buildings that provide homes for families should design/provide space in the unit for study and play space.
- 3.9.3. Durable window coverings should be provided.

3.10. Kitchens

- 3.10.1 Open design to dining area allows flow, spaciousness and continuity. When kitchen counters or islands are adjacent to dining areas, consider low wall enclosures on and around the counter to allow space to conceal small appliances, with electrical outlets and adequate counter space for food preparation.
- 3.10.2. Provide kitchen pantry and adequate storage.
- 3.10.3. Double door fridges with bottom freezer are recommended particularly for persons with disabilities.

3.11. Bedrooms:

- 3.11.2. Direct natural light with operable windows to the outdoors.
- 3.11.3. Consider designing two bedroom suites so that bedrooms are on either side of living spaces.

3.12. Bathrooms

- 3.12.2. Locate bathroom doors off entry vestibules or corridors within a unit wherever possible.
- 3.12.3. Second bathroom in larger family suites should be 3 piece fixtures.
- 3.12.4. Consider the height and type of bathtubs for units targeted for seniors and persons with disabilities.
- 3.12.5. Consider the Duty to Accommodate, under the Ontario Human Rights Code when designing bathrooms.
Link: Ontario Human Rights Commission:
http://www.ohrc.on.ca/sites/default/files/attachments/Policy_and_guidelines_on_disability_and_the_duty_to_accommodate.pdf

3.13. Balconies

- 3.13.2. Access through the balcony should be from living/dining rooms.

3.13.3. Minimize the height of thresholds to allow easy access to balconies.

3.14. Health and Safety

3.14.2. Follow best current practice in the design and construction of the affordable rental housing units to prevent the spread of bedbugs and other pests including:

- a. Provide additional caulking around all perimeter walls of every unit to reduce the ability of bugs to travel between units.
- b. Installing diatomaceous (silica-based) earth between units.
- c. Caulk, foam, seal, paint and otherwise fill any cracks and holes in the walls (between units and corridors), ceilings and floors. The same protection should be provided between rooms within a unit.
- d. During construction, keep the site and particularly open wall cavities clean. Be alert for any evidence of animal/pests and take immediate action to eliminate.
- e. Install hard wood floors (wood, tile, linoleum, etc) instead of carpets or rugs.

4. Fully Accessible Units

All affordable housing buildings will have fully accessible units. The following guidelines will apply to fully accessible units.

4.1.1. A target of 5% of total units should be fully accessible.

4.1.2. It is desirable to have fully accessible units provided in a range of unit sizes, including one bedroom, two bedrooms, and three bedroom units. These units should be scattered throughout the building with other non-accessible units.

4.1.3. Exterior routes to buildings, entranceways and common areas within buildings should meet accessibility requirements.

4.1.4. All rooms should have a clear floor turning space of at least 1500mm x 1500mm square.

4.2. Doorways

4.2.1. In common spaces, entry doors should have power door operators.

4.2.2. All doors should have flush thresholds or a maximum height difference less than 6mm.

4.3. Accessible Kitchens

4.3.1. Designed to be as open as possible.

4.3.2. Cupboards can be mounted on a track system or on legs that are adjustable in height.

4.3.3. It is recommended that designers consider providing under-counter storage with drawers (on full extension glides) moveable on wheels to free up counter space for working spaces.

4.3.4. Accommodate the installation of double door fridges.

4.3.5. Accommodate a separate stove top and wall oven.

4.3.6. Accommodate the future installation of stove tops with a height of 860mm, front controls, clear knee space below and 300 mm on each side of stove top at same height for ease of

cooking and safe operation.

- 4.3.7. Accommodate the future installation of wall ovens with doors that swing sideways and with front controls.
- 4.3.8. Kitchen sinks should be a maximum of 860mm above finished floor, have open knee space below, insulated pipes or should shallow cupboards under sink.
- 4.3.9. Provide a minimum of 765 mm (30") width for future installation of refrigerators and stoves.
- 4.3.10. Kitchen storage should be accessible from a seated position.

4.4. Accessible Bathrooms

- 4.4.1. Where provided, bathtubs should have edged seating around tub and non-slip surface.
- 4.4.2. Shower controls should be lever type, easy to control and at the appropriate height for someone seated.
- 4.4.3. Install mixing valves that limit the water temperature.
- 4.4.4. Shower head should be hand held or adjustable to variety of heights.
- 4.4.5. Bathrooms should have a clear floor turning space of at least 1500mm x 1500mm square.
- 4.4.6. Flooring should be slip resistant and preferably ceramic tile (or comparable).
- 4.4.7. Provide raised toilet seats with a minimum height of 450mm +/- 10mm.
- 4.4.8. Provide storage options for bathroom supplies at a variety of heights.
- 4.4.9. Sinks should be 860mm above finished floor, have a clear space below and insulated pipes or shallow cupboards below.
- 4.4.10. Units with two full bathrooms should have one bathtub and one roll-in shower.

4.5. Balconies:

- 4.5.1. If provided, balcony thresholds should be level or a maximum of 6mm high.

5. **Adaptability:**

- 5.1 Adaptable features allow units to be easily modified in the future to meet peoples' changing needs over time allowing them to age in place or to accommodate different needs. This will be more cost effective and efficient over the long term, bearing in mind the Human Rights Code.
- 5.2 All units which are not fully accessible should consider the following measures for future adaptability:
 - 5.2.1 Adjustable height kitchen counters.
 - 5.2.2 Hallways that are a minimum of 1100 mm in width.
 - 5.2.3 Plumbing rough-in for future walk-in or roll-in shower.

5.3 Units should provide the following measures for future adaptability:

- 5.3.1 Consider electrical rough-ins at accessible suite entry doors for the future installation of power door operators.
- 5.3.2 Roughing in blocking from 500mm to 1200mm above finished floor along entire length of bath tub/shower and all walls adjacent to the water closet for the future provision of grab bars.
- 5.3.3 Provide flush door thresholds to accommodate persons with disabilities.

6. Site & Landscape

6.1. Exterior Landscaped Open Space

- 6.1.1. Design, configuration and detailing of exterior open space should be carefully considered with respect to the use and tenant population, including active and passive activities for toddlers, preteens, teens, adults and seniors where appropriate. This can be provided at the ground floor (ideally) or on top of a podium, terraces or roof tops.
- 6.1.2. Outdoor open spaces should offer comfort and shelter – creating sitting areas with such amenities as benches and trees to provide shade.
- 6.1.3. Provide outdoor common space that is visually connected to interior amenity space.
- 6.1.4. Provide private outdoor spaces for ground-related affordable units that are clearly identifiable as private.
- 6.1.5. Provide exterior landscaped open space that is adequately lit, usable and visible from adjacent spaces.

6.2. Site Circulation

- 6.2.1. Design of vehicular drop-off and pedestrian entrances should be clearly identifiable.
- 6.2.2. Main entrances should be oriented directly to the street and be accessible from public sidewalks.
- 6.2.3. Provide adequate drop-off area for vehicles, including accessible transit.
- 6.2.4. Location of outdoor garbage storage should be isolated from units at grade and amenity space. Garbage should be stored in the parking garage and moved up to the pick-up location just before garbage collection.

6.3. Underground Parking:

- 6.3.1. Location of parking ramps and garbage pick-up should not interfere with building or unit entrances, or any indoor or outdoor amenity space (noise, fumes, visual character, etc).
- 6.3.2. Bike storage in the underground parking garages should be secure yet visible from the elevator lobby of the underground level.
- 6.3.3. Elevators in underground parking garages should be designed with security in mind.

Elevator lobbies in the underground should be glazed, well-lit and in sight of parking.

6.4. Walkways

- 6.4.1. Exterior walkway materials should be non-slip and on a firm and level base.
- 6.4.2. Exterior walkways to entrances should be a minimum of 1200mm wide for low volume, one-way traffic, or 1800mm wide for high volume or two-way traffic.
- 6.4.3. Exterior walkways to entrances should be clearly marked and clear of obstructions.
- 6.4.4. Joints in exterior walkways to entrances should be no greater than 6mm wide and no more than 6mm high.

6.5. Lighting

- 6.5.1. Adequate exterior lighting should be provided to highlight all key way-finding signage.
- 6.5.2. Exterior walkways should be well lit.

6.6. Signage

- 6.6.1. Comprehensive way-finding and signage should be provided that includes high contrast, legible characters and symbols, raised tactile letters/numbers and Braille. Where possible, alternate auditory information should be provided.
- 6.6.2. Pedestrian, vehicular and emergency routes should be clearly identified.
- 6.6.3. All signage should be well-lit at night.

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