

## Re: Housing Strategy 2020-2030

Summary of Advice from the Planning Review Panel meeting held April 13, 2019

### Executive Summary

The Planning Review Panel is a representative group of 32 randomly selected Torontonians that help the City Planning Division guide growth and change in Toronto. They have been asked by the Chief Planner to work together over the course of two years to provide City Planning with informed public input on major planning initiatives. Members are tasked, in particular, with helping to ensure that these initiatives are aligned with the values and priorities of all Torontonians.

#### Advice re: Housing Strategy 2020-2030

The City of Toronto is in the early stages of drafting a new 10-year housing strategy for 2020-2030. Panelists were presented with the latest research on Toronto's current and projected housing challenges and asked to provide input on principles that the City should use as guidance when selecting actions for the strategy. They were also asked to brainstorm a list of possible actions that the City could take to address Toronto's housing challenges, and select the ones they considered most promising.

- Most Panelists agreed that an important principle for the housing strategy is to move people along the housing spectrum towards ownership or stable rentership as much as possible. They felt this will encourage greater housing stability for more people, while opening space in affordable units for those most in need.
- Most Panelists also agreed that the housing strategy should prioritize the needs of the most vulnerable in Toronto's population, including low-income people, the homeless and people at risk of homelessness, the elderly, and people living with disabilities.
- Most Panelists agreed that resources should be invested across the housing spectrum in order to help ensure people can move between points on the spectrum if their circumstances change. A few Panelists disagreed with this prioritization and felt that the City should instead make highly targeted investments to get more out of the City's limited resources by investing more in a few areas where the greatest impact would be felt.

In terms of specific ideas to address housing, there were five ideas that the Panelists felt were most strategic for the City to pursue:

1. Continue to develop inclusionary zoning as a policy tool to create more purpose-built affordable homes;

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2. Use existing land and buildings more creatively and efficiently;
3. Explore cheaper construction methods and materials;
4. Invest in programs that encourage home ownership; and
5. Encourage and incentivize new ways of living together.

## Detailed Summary

The City of Toronto is in the early stages of drafting a new 10-year housing strategy for 2020-2030. The plan will provide an updated response to the most recent trends and changes in the city's housing market. Toronto's current housing challenges include long waitlists for supportive and affordable rental housing, limited stock of purpose-built rentals, aging and rundown rental stock and repair backlogs, and diminishing overall housing affordability. In the future, Toronto's housing challenges are likely to worsen without intervention, with steep population growth and an aging population driving greater demand for all types of housing.

Sherri Hanley and Mercedeh Madani from the Affordable Housing Office presented to the Panel. They explained the City's role in providing and enabling a spectrum of housing options. They also reviewed the successes and failures of the City's previous 10-year housing strategy, Housing Opportunities, noting that the City did not meet their previous target number of new affordable units. They then presented the findings of the latest research on Toronto's current and projected housing challenges, which will inform the City's approach in the new strategy.

City staff noted that there is ample research and public input articulating what the City's current and future housing challenges are, and that their primary decision will be how to select and prioritize appropriate actions to address the challenges. The Panel was asked to suggest possible actions that the City could take to make housing more affordable and accessible. They were then asked to select a set of principles that the City should use to help them prioritize the actions to include in the strategy.

## Discussion

The Panel began with a brainstorm of actions they felt the City ought to explore, and then narrowed down their large list to 1-2 actions they felt were the most promising. The Panel broadly agreed on several actions the City should include in the new strategy:

1. Continue to explore the use of inclusionary zoning to create more purpose-built affordable homes. The Panel felt that this policy, which is already in the process of being developed by the City, will help to generate more affordable housing stock.
2. Use existing land and buildings more creatively and efficiently. For example:
  - Change zoning by-laws to enable people to more easily split lots and build new homes or units (though one Panelist noted that the City should ensure any non-compatible land uses are mitigated);
  - Provide incentives to encourage renting out unused space in single-family homes;
  - Repurpose vacant or under-utilized buildings for shelters; and
  - Implement penalties for vacant units.
3. Explore cheaper construction methods and materials, such as modular construction, to keep costs down and improve affordability, especially for non-market housing provided by the City and non-profits.

- Some Panelists suggested the City should also use more sustainable and high quality building materials to reduce maintenance and repair costs, and use more renewable energy sources to reduce energy costs long-term.
- 4. Focus on moving people up the housing spectrum, such as by investing in rent-to-own programs or providing interest-free loans for qualifying home buyers.
- 5. Encourage and incentivize new ways of living together, such as co-living for seniors and students, as well as co-operative housing.

For a full list of ideas proposed by the Panel, see Appendix A.

In the next section of the activity, the Panelists were asked to review a provided list of housing principles that the City could use to help prioritize amongst different possible housing actions. Each table of Panelists were then asked to pick 1-2 principles from the list that they felt the City should use. Panelists could create a new principle if they felt something was missing from the list provided. For a full list of the principles used in this activity, see Appendix B.

- Many Panelists agreed that an important principle should be to move people along the housing spectrum towards ownership or stable rentership as much as possible. This was not a provided principle, but was partially captured in principle 17 (Help people own their homes). Panelists felt that higher rates of home ownership will result in greater housing stability for more people. They noted that aside from the greater security it provides, housing ownership is often linked to greater feelings of dignity as people move out of poverty. Panelists also noted that helping people move to this stage of the spectrum ensures that space is opening up in affordable rental units for people who really need it.

However, some Panelists disagreed with this emphasis on ownership, saying that ownership is not a realistic goal for everyone and it is more important to help renters make ends meet. They felt that it was more important to lower the number of people most in need before helping people own homes, even if it means that fewer people move from being renters to being owners.

- Most Panelists also agreed that the housing strategy should prioritize the needs of the most vulnerable in Toronto's population, including low-income people, the homeless and people at risk of homelessness, the elderly, and people living with disabilities. This encompassed principles 1 (Serve the city's most needy), 13 (Help people at risk of losing their housing), 20 (Focus on the needs of the elderly), 21 (Reduce as much homelessness as possible), and 23 (Address the needs of mobility-impaired Torontonians). A method for determining who is the most vulnerable was not altogether clear and would have required more deliberation, but was thought to be important to ensure those most in need are prioritized.
- Most Panelists agreed that resources should be invested across the housing spectrum. They felt that investing across the housing spectrum would enable people to move along it, with the option to move into more secure housing as it became available or be

able to access supportive or affordable housing if their circumstances change. One Panelist suggested that social housing should be thought of as a 'stop along the way' rather than an end point, an idea which requires investments in affordable options at other points of the spectrum that people could feasibly move into. This perspective was encompassed by principle 2 (Invest in all points across the housing spectrum).

However, some Panelists disagreed and felt investments should instead be targeted as per principle 9 (Make highly targeted investments). These Panelists thought that this emphasis would enable limited dollars to have the greatest impact in strategic areas.

## Appendix A: Brainstormed Housing Actions

- Develop better systems for communication between government entities who are working on housing
- Collect better data more regularly to better anticipate demographic changes and demand to prioritize future building needs, and share that information with the public
- Provide more accurate cost projections, including maintenance
- Remove cap on Toronto Housing Allowance subsidies
- Prioritize criteria that are essential to ensure safe, stable housing before providing 'nice to have' criteria that address more aesthetic and less essential needs.
- Explore models of co-ownership and co-living and other social forms of living.
- Provide incentives and support to encourage people to rent out parts of their homes
- Regulate zoning restrictions to allow plots to be split more easily
- Explore financial tools to help individuals (not developers) who want to invest in Toronto real estate projects
- Explore alternative methods and materials of construction like modular housing
- Redefine "affordable" rent and market housing to better reflect the actual affordability of the stock
- Increase supply of rent-geared-to-income subsidized housing
- Explore revenue tools to raise additional funds to improve and maintain Toronto Community Housing
- Introduce inclusionary zoning
- Focus on affordable family-sized units and accessible units. Ensure mixed-income buildings to avoid stigmatizing lower-income residents in affordable units.
- Introduce other incentives to developers to build more affordable rental stock
- Provide more funding for co-ops
- Provide interest-free loans as an incentive to purchase homes
- Provide opportunities for retired folks with skills to volunteer to help address housing issues in Toronto, such as through Habitat for Humanity

- Integrate affordable housing throughout all neighbourhoods in the city
- Implement modest taxes or fines on empty units, as well as better property tax enforcement for those who avoid paying their property taxes
- Expand + support rent-to-own programs
- Re-use public buildings for shelter, particularly in response to seasonal demands
- Make use of vacant hotels to address demand
- Adhere to/update building codes
- Introduce rent control
- Use more private sector partnerships for better execution of publicly funded housing projects.
- Explore use of modular or pre-fab temporary shelters
- Ensure buildings incorporate community-centered design principles -- especially in dense high-rise communities

## Appendix B: List of Potential Principles Provided to Panelists (Activity 2)

1. Serve the city's most needy
2. Invest in all points across the housing spectrum
3. Help the most people possible
4. Build as many units as possible
5. Build the kinds of units/housing people want
6. Help everyone equally
7. Protect the taxpayer
8. Create as many new city-owned units as possible
9. Make highly-targeted investments
10. Help create mixed income neighbourhoods
11. Help create denser neighbourhoods

12. Help create more single family homes
13. Help protect people who are at risk of losing their housing
14. Use the power of the market
15. Create as much housing supply as possible
16. Prioritize repairs of existing city-owned housing
17. Help people own their homes
18. Help renters make ends meet
19. Focus on families with kids
20. Focus on the needs of the elderly
21. Reduce as much homelessness as possible
22. Make housing more environmentally sustainable
23. Address the housing needs of mobility-impaired Torontonians