

Application of the City of Toronto's Multi-Tenant Housing Licensing Framework and Other Regulatory Requirements to Refugee Houses

Context

On July 24, 2024, City Council adopted [Item - 2024.MM20.30](#), directing Municipal Licensing and Standards, with the Housing Secretariat and Toronto Shelter and Support Services, to provide clarity on the application of the City of Toronto's Multi-Tenant Housing Licensing Framework and associated requirements to refugee houses, and to develop a public document or bulletin outlining this application.

Interpretation Bulletin

What is a Refugee House?

Over the last 30 years, a number of Refugee Houses have been established in Toronto to provide temporary shelter and/or housing and support services for refugee claimants. Refugee Houses provide residents with wrap-around supports such as settlement services, referrals to community resources, housing and income assistance, study/work permit assistance, healthcare access etc. Refugee House residents typically live communally as a single housekeeping unit sharing meals, household duties, and participating in resident activities. These properties are non-profit community agencies.

Guidelines for Refugee House Operators re: Multi-tenant Housing Framework

Toronto's new Multi-tenant housing (MTH) framework took effect on March 31, 2024. The framework put new rules in place to ensure consistent standards and regulatory oversight for MTHs, protecting the safety of tenants and responding to neighborhood concerns. The new regulations are outlined in [Chapter 575](#) of the Toronto Municipal Code where MTHs are defined as: buildings where four or more rooms are rented out to separate people who have exclusive use of a kitchen or washroom (but not both), and where they do not live together as a single housekeeping unit.

Refugee Houses typically operate as single housekeeping units, with residents jointly occupying the house and sharing use of/responsibility for common areas, household activities and responsibilities (e.g. meals, chores, maintaining the household). Refugee Houses that operate as single housekeeping units would not meet the definition of a multi-tenant house under the Chapter 575 and would not require an MTH license or be subject to requirements for MTHs under the City's Zoning By-law (e.g. rules related to the maximum number of dwelling rooms permitted).

If the property use and/or living arrangement changes, it is the responsibility of the refugee house operator to determine whether the changes would meet the definition of an MTH and therefore require an MTH license and/or building permit, and to act accordingly.

Guidelines for Refugee House Operators re: Provincial Codes

The Ontario Building Code (OBC) and Ontario Fire Code (OFC) define "rooming house" slightly differently than the definition of an MTH in Chapter 575. The main definitional difference is that these codes include provisions for building height and size restrictions, as well as occupancy requirements (rather than room number requirements). Similarly to Chapter 575 however, these provincial regulations also exclude dwelling units that are operated as a housekeeping unit that is used/intended to be used by one or more persons, and usually containing cooking, eating, living, sleeping and sanitary facilities. As such, Refugee Houses that operate dwelling units as housekeeping units would not meet the definition of a "rooming house" in the OBC or OFC

If a Refugee House property use changes, it is the responsibility of the operator to determine whether the new property use meets the definition of a "rooming house" under the OBC or OFC and to act accordingly. Additionally, if a Refugee House undertakes renovations, it is the responsibility of the

operator to determine whether they need a building permit to undertake the work. Information on building permits can be found at [“When Do I Need a Building Permit”](#) on the Toronto Building Website.

Note that all residential properties, including Refugee Houses need to meet the legal requirements for smoke and carbon monoxide detection, as detailed in the OBC and OFC. If a Refugee House operator is unsure of the code requirements they should seek the professional advice of a fire safety or code compliance consultant.

Other Relevant Considerations and Requirements

The City of Toronto is working to build on the existing Refugee House model which has proven to be an effective approach to support the needs of refugee claimants in the midst of Toronto’s housing crisis. Work to acquire and secure funding for additional refugee houses is underway and it is expected that there will be an increase in the number of these properties. Future funding agreements between the City and Refugee Houses may include clauses and/or attestations that clarify requirements for Refugee House operators to ensure regulatory compliance with Chapter 575, the OBC and the OFC and ensure resident safety in the delivery of services at these properties.

Resources and References

- [MTH Framework](#)
- [Ontario Building Code](#)
- [Ontario Fire Code](#)
- [Building & Construction – City of Toronto](#)

Contact Information

Questions about the multi-tenant house framework can be directed to the Multi-Tenant Houses team at multitenanthousing@toronto.ca or 416-394-8178.