

Housing Strategy and Action Plan

City of Cambridge

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The Housing Strategy and Action Plan is the result of a collaborative process and would not have been possible without the active involvement of City staff. We would like to thank the City of Cambridge team for their direction, input, and assistance throughout this study.

City of Cambridge

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Executive Summary

This Housing Strategy and Action Plan (the Strategy), along with the associated Housing Needs Assessment, has been developed to better understand current and future housing challenges and to identify actionable solutions that respond to the evolving needs of its residents. The Strategy was developed through a collaborative process involving City of Cambridge staff, Council, and community stakeholders. The resulting Strategy provides a foundation for updating the City's Official Plan and guiding housing-related decisions through into the future.

The Housing Needs Assessment examined demographic, economic, and housing market trends to identify gaps across the housing continuum. It included both quantitative analysis and qualitative input from residents and stakeholders. The assessment explored local housing supply, affordability, and suitability, and provided the evidence base for the Strategy.

The following key insights were identified within the Housing Needs Assessment:

- There is a need for an **increased supply of rental units to match renter household growth** and increase affordability for these renters
- There is a need for an **increased supply of community housing, including supportive units**, to meet the demand for affordable and supportive housing accommodations in the City
- There is a need for **affordable housing for young households** looking to work and form new households
- There is a need for **suitable and affordable housing options for aging households** in Cambridge
- There is a need for **diverse housing types to provide options for households** looking to start or grow their family



// Executive Summary

The **Housing Strategy and Action Plan** is built around a set of clearly defined goals, desired outcomes, and actionable steps that respond directly to the housing needs identified in the Housing Needs Assessment. It includes a range of initiatives that span planning policy updates, incentive programs, partnerships, and advocacy efforts.

Each action is designed to be measurable and implementable, providing the City of Cambridge with a practical roadmap to guide housing decisions, investments, and collaborations over the coming decades.

The Strategy focused strategic actions within three goals:

- Promote a **growing and diverse housing supply through intensification and innovation**
- Expand access to **affordable and suitable housing** for households in all stages of life
- **Protect and scale affordable and community housing** to meet community needs

To support immediate progress on Cambridge's housing goals, the Strategy identifies a set of **high priority actions**. These actions focus on initiatives that are both impactful and feasible in the short term, including updates to planning policies, development of educational resources, and targeted support for non-profit housing providers.

High Priority Actions

The following actions are considered high priority for the City and should be pursued in short-term.

#	Action
1.1.2	Develop educational website and materials to support development, including information on development applications, additional residential units, and development-ready lands
1.1.3	Review and update Official Plan policies for affordable housing and establish affordable housing targets
1.1.4	Develop a monitoring program to measure the success of municipal housing initiatives and targets
2.1.2	Designate and pre-zone strategic lands near education, employment, and transit hubs for suitable, affordable housing
3.1.3	Offer technical assistance and an application concierge service for non-profit and co-op housing providers
3.2.1	Explore the use of a rental replacement policy for redevelopment projects involving rental housing
3.3.2	Partner with Waterloo Region and advocate with upper levels of government for increased funding to deliver housing that meets local needs

For a complete list of recommended action, please see the appendix of this report.

1 Introduction

The City of Cambridge, as a part of one of the fastest growing regions in the country, is expected to continue recent trends of population growth. This growth is coming from a variety of factors and has led to diverse emerging household needs in the local housing market.

The Housing Needs Assessment provides a clearer picture of both current and future housing needs in the City of Cambridge. This report aims to understand where gaps exist across the housing continuum and what might be driving those challenges.

This Housing Strategy and Action Plan (the Action Plan) aims to address those identified gaps through concrete strategies and actions. This Action Plan give decision-makers, stakeholders, and community members a clearer understanding of the local housing landscape, highlight key issues, and offer practical policy ideas to support future planning.

Ultimately, the Action Plan provides a foundation for updating the City's Official Plan and outlines approaches to ensure a diverse range of housing options are available to meet the needs of residents in the future.

Study Purpose

A Housing Needs Assessment (HNA) provides a systematic and quantified analysis of housing needs in a community. This assessment aims to link the supply of housing with the need for housing.

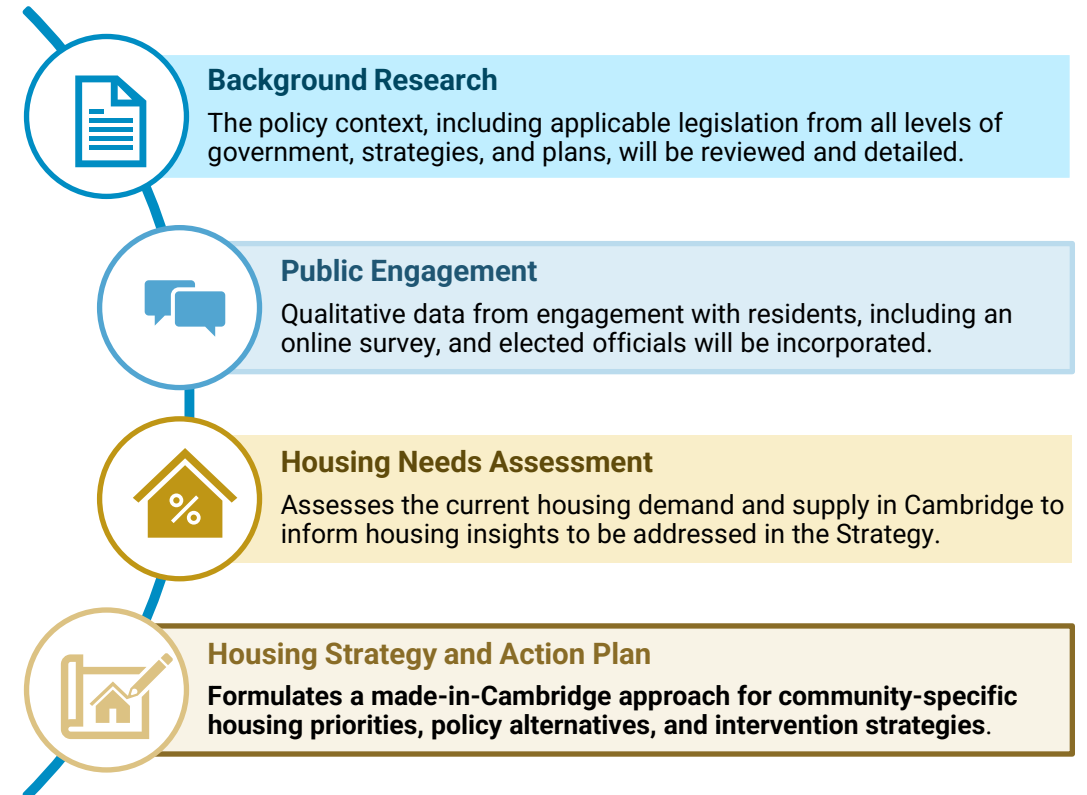
HNAs include an assessment of local conditions, including an analysis of the local policy framework as background research, and provide an opportunity for qualitative data to be collected from the residents of Cambridge through public engagements such as a resident survey.

Housing Needs Assessments help all levels of government understand the local housing needs of communities, including how they may relate to infrastructure priorities, by providing the data necessary to determine what kind of housing needs to be built and where. The Housing Strategy (Strategy) has been developed to respond to the identified housing needs outlined in the Housing Needs Assessment.

The Strategy provides actionable steps to address the housing needs in the community by setting clear goals, identifying desired outcomes, and setting into place strategies with proposed actions.

The HNA completed as a part of this study addressed the requirements of these reports as a part of federal funding requirements, including the Housing Accelerator Fund. Once an HNA has been completed as a federal program requirement, a community will not be required to complete a new one for other Housing, Infrastructure and Communities Canada programs, other than to update it every five years.

The following components have been completed for this study:



Housing Strategies in the Ontario Context

While Housing Strategies are non-statutory at the local municipal level, they provide a policy foundation for future planning decisions and help guide investment, infrastructure planning, and development approvals. Municipalities may develop implementation plans, performance indicators, and monitoring frameworks to track progress toward housing objectives and adjust over time.

Housing Strategies in Ontario operate within a well-defined legislative and policy framework that guides land use, housing development, and growth management at the provincial and municipal levels. These strategies are shaped by and support the implementation of key planning tools and policy directives.

The connections between provincial and municipal planning frameworks and Housing Strategies are outlined on this page.

Provincial Planning Legislation

The **Planning Act, 1999 (the Act)** provides the legislative basis for land use planning in Ontario. The Act enables the preparation of Official Plans, consistent with the **Provincial Policy Statement**, and Zoning-By-laws by municipalities, among other planning tools.

Municipal Planning Tools

Official Plans (OPs) are long-range policy documents that outline how the municipality should be developed over time. OPs sets out land use policies to guide future growth, infrastructure investment, and community development.

Zoning By-Laws (ZBLs) are regulatory tools that implement the policies of the Official Plan. ZBLs control how land can be used, what types of buildings are permitted, and the performance standards that are required.

Other planning tools, such as **Community Improvement Plans (CIPs)** or **Secondary Plans**, can be utilized to provide more detailed land use direction or support strategic goals.

Housing Strategies often identify issues such as housing supply gaps, housing affordability concerns, or needs for specific populations, and recommends updates to Official Plan policies to address these challenges.

Housing Strategies may recommend zoning changes to support new housing forms, encourage higher densities, or allow a wider range of housing options in existing neighbourhoods.

Housing Strategies may identify the need for targeted investment and propose CIPs to encourage housing types that are deemed a priority or recommend new or updated Secondary Plans in areas with significant growth potential or strategic housing opportunities.

2 The Current State of Housing

This section outlines the existing landscape of housing in the City of Cambridge, drawing on findings from the Housing Needs Assessment. It presents key trends related to population, household characteristics, housing supply, and affordability across both market and non-market housing.

The section also highlights Key Housing Insights that help illustrate the most pressing issues and emerging patterns in the local housing system. This information provides important context for the development of the Housing Strategy.

This section includes the following sub-sections:

- *The Housing System*
- *Housing Needs Assessment Key Findings*
- *Key Housing Insights*

The Housing System

The Housing Continuum

Organizing the Housing Stock

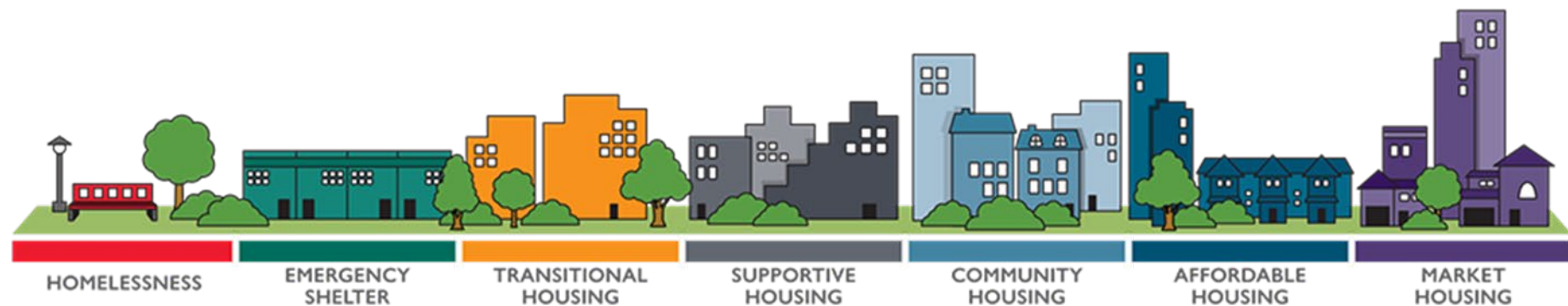
The housing system in the City of Cambridge can be viewed as a continuum where, ideally, the housing stock responds to a range of needs in a community. The continuum organizes the housing stock based on a variety of options that should be available within a community. These options include emergency shelters, transitional housing, rent-geared-to-income housing, below-market rental housing and homeownership, and market-rate rental and ownership housing.

Meeting Needs Along the Continuum

The housing continuum acknowledges that the housing needs in a community are not always met in the private housing market. Instead, the full range of needs must be met by various players working together in the housing system. This is particularly true when addressing housing needs for households with low incomes and those with unique housing needs, including but not limited to seniors, youth, newcomers to the region, and people requiring supports (health, wellness, accessibility, etc.) to live well in their homes.

This strategy considers approaches the City of Cambridge, in partnership with the Region of Waterloo as applicable, can take to ensure this full spectrum of housing is available in proportion to the demographic make up and housing needs in the region.

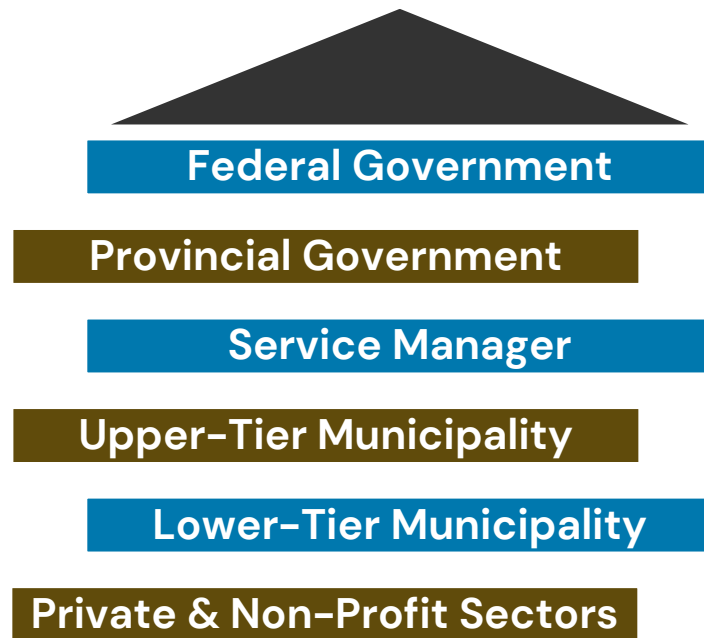
THE HOUSING CONTINUUM



Source: Canada Mortgage and Housing Corporation

// The Housing System

This section details the roles and responsibilities of governments, housing developers, and providers in the region. These descriptions aim to summarize the dynamics at play in the current housing system in the City of Cambridge. Throughout the pillars and actions in this strategy, the roles of governments and housing developers or providers are referenced, demonstrating how each plays a critical role in addressing housing needs based on their capabilities and resources.



Government

Federal Government: The Federal government, through Canada Mortgage and Housing Corporation (CMHC), provides mortgage insurance and delivers a range of funding programs that support the development of affordable rental housing. These programs include the National Housing Strategy Co-Investment Fund and the Rental Construction Financing Initiative.

In 2017, the Federal government launched the *National Housing Strategy (NHS)*, which outlines Canada's long-term vision for ensuring that all residents have access to adequate housing. This NHS is tied to funding for a variety of initiatives, such as the Canada Housing Benefit, repairs and retrofits for social housing, investments in supportive housing, and measures to improve access to homeownership.

More recently, in 2024, the Federal government released *Solving the Housing Crisis: Canada's Housing Plan* as part of Budget 2024. This plan commits new investments to increase housing supply, preserve and develop affordable housing, support renters, and address homelessness.

Federal initiatives unveiled in recent years, including the Housing Accelerator Fund and the Canada Housing Infrastructure Fund, provide direct funding to municipalities to support local housing development. Build Canada Homes, another recently developed program, is a key federal initiative aimed at accelerating the construction of new housing across the country. It focuses on increasing housing supply quickly by supporting large-scale projects and streamlining processes to reduce delays. The program works in partnership with provinces, territories, municipalities, and private sector developers to deliver homes that meet affordability and sustainability goals.

// The Housing System (*continued*)

Provincial Government: The Ontario government plays a broad role in housing through legislation, regulation, and funding. It sets the overall housing policy direction for the province and supports municipalities in addressing housing needs by providing transfer payments and funding to Service Managers for housing and homelessness programs. Provincial housing priorities, including definitions of affordable housing and guidance on housing policy, are outlined in the *Provincial Planning Statement, 2024 (PPS 2024)*.

The Province also equips municipalities with legislative tools to support local housing needs. In 2019, the Province introduced both the *More Homes, More Choice: Housing Supply Action Plan* and the *Community Housing Renewal Strategy* to help expand housing options, including community housing. In 2023, the *Building Faster Fund* was introduced to provide direct financial support to municipalities that meet housing supply targets established by the Province.

Service Managers (or Consolidated Municipal Service Managers): Service Managers are tasked with developing policies that support the creation and sustainability of affordable housing. Their responsibilities include preparing housing and homelessness plans, coordinating and allocating housing-related funding, delivering housing and homelessness programs, managing a range of housing types (including supportive and emergency housing), and tracking progress toward housing goals. The Region of Waterloo, an Upper-Tier Municipality is the Provincially designated Consolidated Municipal Service Manager for the City of Cambridge.

Upper-Tier Municipality: An upper-tier municipality, such as the Region of Waterloo, is a regional government made up of multiple lower-tier municipalities within its geographic boundaries. While local municipalities are responsible for most day-to-day services, regional governments typically oversee broader services such as arterial roads, and certain health and social services.

Lower-Tier or Local Municipality: Under the *Municipal Act, 2001*, local municipal governments are responsible for local policy-making and service delivery. This includes creating Official Plans and zoning by-laws that align with provincial policy. Municipalities manage many services that residents rely on daily, such as strategic land use planning, approvals for subdivisions and condominiums, and maintenance of local roads.

Housing Developers and Operators

Private and Non-Profit Sections: Private developers, builders, and property owners play a vital role in expanding the housing supply in Cambridge. They drive the delivery of market-rate housing and can also collaborate with municipalities or non-profit organizations to support the development of affordable housing options.

The non-profit and co-operative housing sector, including local housing corporations, is a cornerstone of affordable housing in municipalities across Ontario. These organizations provide housing and support services, raise awareness of housing challenges, and advocate for housing and homelessness initiatives.

Key Trends in Housing

The Housing Needs Assessment has identified key trends and challenges shaping the current and future housing conditions in the City of Cambridge. The findings highlight the mismatch between existing housing supply and the needs of current and future residents of Cambridge. This assessment analyzed the **demand** and **supply** housing indicators in the community, identifying mismatches and level of **affordability** of the current housing market.

This analysis serves as a foundation for evidence-based decision-making, informing municipal strategies and housing policies, including this Housing Strategy aiming to address these housing needs.



Housing Demand assesses indicators impacting the demand for housing in the City, including population and household trends



Housing Supply assesses the existing stock of housing in the City, residential development trends, and housing market trends



Housing Affordability assesses affordability indicators such as core housing need or the shelter costs for households in the City

Building on these trends, Key Housing Insights were identified to outline how the demand for housing is not currently being met by the supply within the housing stock in Cambridge. By comparing current housing availability, affordability, and suitability with projected needs, this analysis identified potential shortfalls across housing types, tenure options, and affordability levels for a range of household compositions and income levels.

The following **Key Housing Insights** were identified through this Housing Needs Assessment:



There is a need for an **increased supply of rental units to match renter household growth and increase affordability for these renters**



There is a need for an **increased supply of community housing, including supportive units, to meet the demand for affordable and supportive housing accommodations in the City**



There is a need for **affordable housing for young households looking to work and form new households**



There is a need for **suitable and affordable housing options for aging households in Cambridge**



There is a need for **diverse housing types to provide options for households looking to start or grow their family**

// Key Trends in Housing // Housing Demand Summary

Housing Demand Overview

The demographic profile for the City of Cambridge is used to describe the demand for housing. The demand-side characteristics examined include:

- **Population trends**, including population growth, age, race, Indigenous identity, immigration, mobility and incidence of low income.
- **Household trends**, including income, tenure, age, size, type, mobility, immigration, race, Indigenous identity, and activity limitations.
- The **economic context** of the community, including labour and industry characteristics and unemployment and participation rates.

Housing Demand Trends

- The Waterloo Region has experienced rapid population growth in recent years, including the City of Cambridge. This **growth has been driven by an increase in renter households** in the City.
- The **population of Cambridge is aging**. The proportion of the population aged 65 years and older is considerable, leading to higher average ages than the Region, and has grown in recent years. **Households led by young adults are decreasing**.
- Population growth in the Waterloo Region has led to an **increase in households of a diverse range of sizes** in Cambridge. One-person and four- or more-person households were the fastest growing household sizes in recent years.

Supporting Data

Housing Indicator	2016 (#)	2021 (#)	Δ 2016–2021 (%)
Population	129,920	138,480	+6.6%
Population Aged under 15	23,825	24,475	+2.7%
Population Aged 65+	18,895	22,160	+17.3%
Indigenous Population	2,540	2,575	+1.4%
Immigrant Population	26,090	31,830	+22.0%
Households	48,240	51,270	+6.3%
Owner Households	34,080	35,315	+3.6%
Renter Households	14,160	15,955	+12.7%
One-Person Households	11,015	11,870	+7.8%
Two-Person Households	15,515	16,295	+5.0%
Three-Person Households	8,525	8,860	+3.9%
Four+ Person Households	13,180	14,235	+8.0%
Couple with Children	16,350	17,065	+4.4%
Couple without Children	12,240	12,645	+3.3%
Maintainer Aged under 25	975	815	-16.4%
Maintainer Aged 65+	10,600	12,800	+20.8%
Median Household Income	\$77,757	\$93,000	+19.6%

// Key Trends in Housing // Housing Supply Summary

Housing Supply Overview

The housing stock profile for the City of Cambridge is used to describe the supply of housing in the community. Supply-side characteristics are examined, including:

- The **existing housing stock**;
- **Housing starts and completions**;
- **Non-market** (Supportive, transitional, and emergency) **housing stock** characteristics; and
- **Market housing supply**, including ownership and rental prices and vacancy rates.

Housing Supply Trends

- The housing stock in Cambridge was **older than region-wide trends** and **predominantly large, single-detached dwellings**, the most expensive dwelling type available.
- Cambridge had the **lowest share of dwellings located in apartment buildings** relative to comparable municipalities in the region. Apartment dwellings and row houses were the most likely to be deemed unsuitable for the household occupying them.
- While housing completions and starts in Cambridge have historically been predominantly single-detached dwellings, there has been a **recent shift to more dense residential built forms**.

Supporting Data

Housing Indicator	2016 (#)	2021 (#)	Δ 2016–2021 (%)
Total Dwellings	48,240	51,270	+6.3%
Single-Detached Dwellings	28,135	29,110	+3.5%
Semi-Detached (Duplex)	3,675	3,730	+1.5%
Row Houses	5,645	6,325	+12.0%
Apartment (< 5 Storeys)	7,960	8,895	+11.7%
Apartment (5+ Storeys)	2,620	3,020	+15.3%
Other Dwellings	200	195	-2.5%
1960 or Before	11,585	11,650	+0.6%
1961 to 1980	12,960	13,155	+1.5%
1981 to 2000	13,795	14,230	+3.2%
2001 to 2021	9,895	12,225	+23.5%
Major Repairs Required	2,755	2,660	-3.4%
Bachelor	110	205	+86.4%
One-Bedroom	4,750	5,210	+9.7%
Two-Bedrooms	9,680	10,540	+8.9%
Three Bedrooms	22,160	22,370	+0.9%
Four- or more-Bedrooms	11,540	12,945	+12.2%
Not Suitable	2,170	2,995	+38.0%

// Key Trends in Housing // Housing Affordability Summary

Housing Affordability Overview

This analysis assesses indicators of housing affordability in the community and the relationship between the demographic profile in the community and what housing is available in the City of Cambridge. Affordability indicators are assessed, including:

- Proportion of the population **spending 30% or more on shelter costs**;
- Prevalence of **core housing need**; and
- **Affordability of existing ownership and rental housing** market.

Supporting Data

Housing Indicator	2016 (#)	2021 (#)	Δ 2016–2021 (%)
Households Assessed ¹	48,175	51,170	+6.2%
STIR 30% or more	10,920	10,840	–0.7%
STIR 50% or more	3,770	3,370	–10.6%
Households Assessed ¹	47,230	50,430	+6.8%
In Core Housing Need	5,460	4,705	–13.8%
Average Resale Market Price ²	2019 (\$)	2024 (\$)	Δ2019–2024 (%)
All Dwellings	\$459,200	\$747,000	+62.7%
Single- and Semi-detached	\$476,500	\$778,110	+63.3%
Townhouse	\$381,500	\$651,700	+70.8%
Apartment	\$281,000	\$490,700	+74.6%
Rent Price – CMHC Average	2019 (\$)	2024 (\$)	Δ2019–2024 (%)
All Unit Sizes	\$1,128	\$1,732	+53.5%
Bachelor	\$763	\$1,243	+62.9%
One-Bedroom	\$1,029	\$1,630	+58.4%
Two-Bedrooms	\$1,178	\$1,819	+54.4%
Three+ Bedrooms	\$1,079	\$1,109	+3.1%

¹ – Please see the glossary for details on the households assessed for STIR and Core Housing Need.

² – Data collected from Waterloo Region Association of Realtors (WRAR)

Housing Affordability Trends

- The **loss of affordable housing units**, particularly on the rental market, has left many low-income households without options for housing.
- Renter households were **more likely to be facing housing affordability issues and be in core housing need relative** to households who owned their homes. Renter households were much more likely to be living in unsuitable housing in core housing need.
- The lack of new rental supply, and high prices for new supply introduced, has tightened the rental market in Cambridge, leading to **dramatic increases in rent prices and low vacancy rates** over the last decade.
- The **price of the ownership market in Cambridge has steadily increased** in the last decade for all dwelling types.

3 The Future of Housing

This section outlines the strategic framework for the Housing Strategy and the goals that will guide action over the coming years in the City of Cambridge.

This section includes the following sub-sections:

- *Ongoing Initiatives*
- *Strategic Framework*
- *Goals and Desired Outcomes*
- *Strategies, including proposed Actions*

Ongoing Initiatives

The Housing Accelerator Fund (HAF) is a federal initiative aimed at increasing the supply of housing across Canada. While the City of Cambridge does not directly build housing, it plays a key role in creating the conditions that enable development. Through HAF, the federal government is providing funding to help municipalities remove barriers, streamline approvals, and accelerate the pace of housing construction. Below are the nine (9) initiatives that were included in the HAF Action Plan submitted by the City of Cambridge.



1. Fast tracking Municipal Lands Program for Affordable and Attainable Housing

This initiative includes selection and preparation of development-ready sites to build affordable homes.



2. Digital Twin Technology and Using Technology to Accelerate Approvals

This initiative includes leveraging emerging technologies to improve development application submissions and speed up approval process.



3. Additional Residential Unit (ARU) Assistance Program *(Launched in 2024)*



4. Comprehensive Zoning By-law and Form Based Zoning

This initiative includes modernizing the City's existing planning regulations to allow more density and a variety of housing types in the City.



5. Delegation of Authority Enhancements *(Completed in 2024)*



6. Online Pre-application Guide and Submission Portal Work

This initiative includes improving the City's online services to make it easier to apply for development permits and reduce approval times.



7. Expand Affordable Housing Community Improvement Plan (CIP)

This initiative includes updating the City's CIP to include incentives for future affordable housing developments.



8. Strategic Growth Areas Secondary Plans

This initiative includes expanding allowances for medium- and high-density housing in mixed-use areas near major transit stations through Secondary Plans.



9. Housing Needs Assessment and Encouragement of Development

This initiative includes the development of a HNA that uses data and research to describe the current and future housing needs in the City.

Strategic Framework

This section details the framework for the Housing Strategy and the associated recommended strategies and actions to address housing needs identified in the City of Cambridge.

Strategy Components

The framework for this Housing Strategy is made up of the following components:



Goal

Goals articulate what the City wants to achieve through the associated strategies, focusing on a specific area identified through the Housing Needs Assessment.



Desired Outcomes

Desired outcomes describe the results or changes that are desired through the goal. Each goal comes with three desired outcomes.



Strategy

Strategies are recommended approaches that the City may take to address the identified housing needs and achieve the desired outcomes outlined.



Proposed Actions

Proposed actions are concrete steps that the City can take to implement the strategies.

Overview of the Housing Strategy

Component			
Goal	<i>Promote a growing and diverse housing supply through intensification and innovation</i>	<i>Expand access to affordable and suitable housing for households in all stages of life</i>	<i>Protect and scale affordable and community housing to meet community needs</i>
Desired Outcomes	• Increase the supply of housing to meet the demands of a growing population in Cambridge • Increase the diversity of housing types to reflect the trends in household composition in Cambridge households • Stimulate the development of purpose-built rental housing, including units suitable for both singles and family-size households	• Provide more options for young households to form households and start families • Increase the supply of accessible, age friendly housing units designed to assist aging in place • Reduce the number of young adult and older adult households experiencing housing difficulties	• Ensure all residents, particularly renters and low-income households, have access to secure, affordable, and suitable housing • Maintain and grow the existing stock of affordable and community housing • Improve housing conditions for the most vulnerable households through access to affordable, suitable, and adequate housing
Strategies	1. Encourage the development of diverse housing types through municipal planning tools and incentives. 2. Facilitate infill and gentle density in established neighbourhoods by expanding permissions and streamlining development approvals for multi-unit residential uses, including additional residential units. 3. Incentivize and encourage innovative housing forms such as co-housing and modular housing that serve diverse household needs and income levels.	1. Support housing options for youth and young adults by incentivizing affordable rental and ownership units near employment hubs, schools, and transit. 2. Encourage family-oriented and multigenerational units in medium- and high-density developments through municipal planning tools or incentives. 3. Support age-friendly housing through accessible design, downsizing options, and retrofit supports.	1. Prioritize the development of housing that addresses identified needs, including deeply affordable and community housing units, through partnerships, incentives, and municipal planning tools. 2. Protect and renew existing affordable housing by exploring demolition protection bylaws and supporting non-profits and co-ops in acquiring and upgrading aging stock. 3. Expand the supply of community and supportive housing by prioritizing municipal land and leveraging federal and provincial funding for the development of these housing types.



Goal: Promote a growing and diverse housing supply through intensification and innovation

The City of Cambridge is experiencing population and household growth, but the existing housing supply has not kept pace with the scale or diversity of that growth.

Recent trends show that one-person and larger family households are expanding the fastest, yet the local housing stock remains dominated by older, single-detached dwellings that are often unsuitable or unaffordable for many residents. At the same time, the rental market has become increasingly strained, with a limited number of purpose-built rental units forcing many renters into the less stable secondary market.

To address these pressures, this goal focuses on expanding and diversifying the housing supply, for both ownership and rental options, through intensification and innovation, with the goal of better matching the available housing options in Cambridge to its evolving population.



Desired Outcomes

Increase the supply of housing to meet the demands of a growing population in Cambridge

- To meet the housing demand of a growing city, the supply of housing in Cambridge needs to increase to match the expected growth. This will include an increase in housing supply across the housing continuum, in a range of housing types and sizes.

Increase the diversity of housing types to reflect the trends in household composition in Cambridge households

- Trends from recent years in Cambridge indicate diverse household sizes have experienced growth, including one-person and four-or-more person households. Currently, the housing stock in Cambridge is not providing suitable and affordable options for all household sizes. Efforts to create a housing supply that responds to the needs of all households would support the projected growth of Cambridge.

Stimulate the development of purpose-built rental housing, including units suitable for both singles and family-size households

- Households who rent their homes in Cambridge have disproportionately faced housing affordability issues historically. This, in part, has been due to the lack of purpose-built rental supply in Cambridge. Increasing the existing stock, and variety in size of units, will improve renter household outcomes in Cambridge.



Strategy 1.1

Encourage the development of diverse housing types through municipal planning tools and incentives.

A lack of variety amongst the housing stock in the City of Cambridge has made it difficult for households to find homes that match their income, household size, or unique needs at their stage of life. Encouraging a broader range of housing types, including duplexes, triplexes, townhouses, low-rise apartments, and mid-rise buildings, can help fill this gap.

This strategy focuses on updating planning frameworks to better align with current and projected needs. Municipal tools, such as zoning by-law amendments, along with strategic targets can be used to support the development of diverse housing types in strategic locations. Local municipalities across Ontario have utilized municipal tools to enable forms of housing that fall between traditional single-detached homes and high-rise apartments, helping to create more complete, inclusive communities.

Proposed Actions

The following actions are recommended to implement this strategy:

#	Action
1.1.1	Review and update Official Plan policies for affordable housing and establish affordable housing targets
1.1.2	Develop a monitoring program to measure the success of municipal housing initiatives and targets
1.1.3	Develop educational website and materials to support the development application process, including information on development applications, additional residential units, and development-ready lands

Background

In 2021, the housing stock in Cambridge was predominantly made up of single-detached dwellings, which accounted for nearly 60 percent of all dwellings in 2021. At the same time, the share of dwellings in apartment buildings (23.2%) and row houses (12.3%) was notably lower than comparable municipalities in the region. This lack of diversity in the housing stock limits the availability of more affordable options for smaller or lower-income households.

Between 2016 and 2021, one-person and four-or-more-person households were the fastest-growing household sizes (+7.8% and +8.0%, respectively). However, much of the existing housing stock in Cambridge is not well suited to these households, either due to size or cost. This mismatch contributes to issues of housing suitability and affordability and suggests a need to diversify the forms of housing being built to better align with shifting household composition.

Strategy 1.1



Action 1.1.1

Review and update Official Plan policies for affordable housing and establish affordable housing targets

By establishing housing targets that identify the number and types of units needed to meet current and future demand, the City of Cambridge can provide a clear framework to guide housing growth and investment. These targets can encompass a variety of housing forms including ground-oriented, multi-unit, and purpose-built rental options, which reflect the community's needs.

Setting clear targets will help align municipal planning with the activities of the overall housing market, informing decision-making and encouraging a coordinated effort across the housing sector to achieve a diverse and balanced housing supply.

Strategy 1.1



Action 1.1.2

Develop a monitoring program to measure the success of municipal housing initiatives and targets

By developing a monitoring program to track the outcomes of municipal housing initiatives and targets, the City of Cambridge will be able to assess progress towards achieving a diverse housing supply. This program can collect and analyze data on housing developments in the pipeline, completed housing, affordability levels, and housing diversity to inform evidence-based decision-making.

Regular reporting enables the City to continuously improve on its housing initiatives, build transparency across the housing sector, and ensure accountability in implementing the City's overall housing objectives.

Case Study Spotlight

[City of Guelph – Affordable Housing Strategy and Affordable Housing Monitoring Report](#)

The City of Guelph has incorporated housing targets into its planning framework to support a more diverse and affordable housing supply. The Affordable Housing Strategy identifies that approximately one third of all new housing units should be affordable to low- and moderate-income households. This includes both ownership and rental units, with a particular emphasis on increasing the supply of purpose-built rental housing and smaller, more attainable ownership options. The targets are intended to support compact growth near transit and services, diversify unit types, and ensure new development responds to a range of household needs.

To measure progress, the City prepares an annual Growth Management and Affordable Housing Monitoring Report. The report tracks indicators such as housing tenure, average rents and prices, new unit production by type and size, and the share of units considered affordable based on income thresholds. The monitoring framework assesses how new development is aligning with policy direction, highlights gaps in the market, and identifies where additional municipal intervention may be needed.

Strategy 1.1



Action 1.1.3

Develop educational website and materials to support development, including information on development applications, additional residential units, and development-ready lands

The City of Cambridge can create an accessible online platform and provide supporting materials to help landowners, builders, and developers navigate the development process with greater ease. This resource can include information on development applications, additional residential units (ARUs), and development-ready lands.

By improving access to clear and consistent information, this action will enhance the understanding of municipal processes among landowners and the housing sector, encourage participation in housing development, and contribute to a more efficient and collaborative development environment.

Case Study Spotlight

[Bruce County – ARU Toolkit and Housing Concierge](#)

Bruce County developed a comprehensive online ARU Toolkit and Housing Concierge service to educate homeowners and developers about Additional Residential Units (ARUs).

The toolkit includes step-by-step guidance on planning, approvals, construction, and management of ARUs, while the concierge offers personalized support. These resources simplify the development process, promote housing diversity, and encourage gentle intensification.



Strategy 1.2

Facilitate infill and gentle density in established neighbourhoods by expanding permissions and streamlining development approvals for multi-unit residential uses, including additional residential units.

Gentle density can be a powerful approach to increasing housing supply while maintaining neighbourhood character. Across Ontario, municipalities have responded to housing pressures by revising local zoning to allow multi-unit forms such as triplexes, fourplexes, and additional residential units (ARUs) on low-density lots.

This strategy focuses on removing regulatory barriers to infill housing and providing clearer, faster approval processes. Municipalities can support gentle density by aligning local policies with the *Planning Act*'s recent direction on as-of-right permissions for ARUs and by offering planning support or technical assistance to property owners. Ensuring compatibility with existing infrastructure and public amenities will help reinforce complete community goals while accommodating more residents within existing urban boundaries.

Proposed Actions

The following actions are recommended to implement this strategy:

#	Action
1.2.1	Expand the Additional Residential Unit (ARU) Assistance Program (HAF Initiative #3)
1.2.2	Develop a pre-approved design catalogue / guidelines for ARUs and low-rise multiplexes

Background

The City of Cambridge has experienced steady population growth in recent years, with population growth in Cambridge (+6.6%) exceeded provincial growth (+5.8%) between 2016 and 2021. While development trends in recent years indicate more dense housing types are being built, increasing density in existing neighbourhoods offers opportunities for incremental growth. Restrictive zoning, among other obstacles, may be limiting the extent of infill development and the introduction of gentle density.

The City has begun to encourage the development of additional residential units (ARUs), but the scale of multi-unit residential development in established areas currently remains limited. Overly-restrictive zoning constraints and time-consuming approval processes make it more difficult to add affordable or rental options within the urban boundary.

Strategy 1.2



Action 1.2.1

Expand the Additional Residential Unit (ARU) Assistance Program (HAF Initiative #3)

The City of Cambridge's Additional Residential Unit Assistance Program provides eligible property owners with financial support of up to \$10,000 to help offset the cost of building new legal secondary suites, basement apartments, or accessory dwelling units. To further increase the supply of affordable and diverse housing, the City is encouraged to review and expand its existing program to enhance its impact.

By conducting this review, the City can identify where the existing program may be falling short, such as limited uptake or barriers to participation. It can then determine how to adjust eligibility, funding levels, and eligible costs to improve accessibility and effectiveness of the program. Potential areas of expansion can include increasing the level of financial assistance, broadening the eligibility criteria, and extending eligible costs to cover items such as permitting and utility upgrades.

Strengthening this program will encourage more homeowners to participate, promote gentle density in established neighbourhoods, and contribute to a wider range of housing options across Cambridge.

Case Study Spotlight

City of Kingston – ARU Incentive Program

Kingston launched an ARU Incentive Program to accelerate housing supply and affordability. Funded by \$1.25M from the Housing Accelerator Fund, the program offers forgivable loans and grants for property owners creating ARUs. Incentives include up to \$40,000 for detached units, \$30,000 for interior units, plus additional grants for accessibility, servicing upgrades, and rough-in installations. These measures reduce financial barriers, encourage gentle density, and diversify housing options.

Strategy 1.2



Action 1.2.2

Develop a pre-approved design catalogue / guidelines for ARUs and low-rise multiplexes

To streamline approvals and encourage the development of new units, the City of Cambridge can develop a catalogue of pre-approved design options and supporting guidelines for ARUs and low-rise multiplexes. Providing standardized designs will help reduce approval timelines, lower design costs, and give property owners and builders greater certainty in pursuing residential development.

This catalogue and guideline can draw inspiration from, and align where appropriate, with the federal government's design catalogue, adapting it to create suitable models that reflect the city's unique context, character, and housing needs. By establishing clear and efficient design pathways, this initiative has the potential to accelerate the delivery of diverse housing options in established neighbourhoods.

Case Study Spotlight

City of Mississauga – CMHC Housing Design Catalogue Coordination

Mississauga worked with CMHC to coordinate the Housing Design Catalogue that provides pre-approved plans for Additional Residential Units (ARUs) and low-rise multiplexes.

This resource simplifies the design and permitting process by offering standardized, code-compliant templates for homeowners and builders. The catalogue reduces costs, accelerates approvals, and promotes consistent, high-quality development.



Strategy 1.3

Incentivize and encourage innovative housing forms such as co-housing and modular housing that serve diverse household needs and income levels.

Emerging housing forms or models, such as co-housing, modular construction, tiny homes, and shared ownership models, are gaining traction across Ontario as lower-cost, flexible solutions that respond to shifting housing preferences and economic realities. These models offer opportunities to address affordability challenges and create more inclusive housing options for students, seniors, newcomers, and one-person households.

This strategy aims to create the policy and incentives needed to scale up these approaches in Cambridge. Municipalities can support innovation by piloting innovative housing projects, making municipally owned land available for alternative housing models, and adjusting zoning regulations that may prevent non-traditional housing types. Promoting awareness and partnerships with community organizations can also accelerate uptake and reduce stigma associated with new forms of housing.

Proposed Actions

The following actions are recommended to implement this strategy:

#	Action
1.3.1	Investigate an incentive program for prefabricated or modular housing construction
1.3.2	Review zoning regulations to permit shared and communal living models, such as co-housing and rooming houses, through the zoning by-law

Background

The rising cost of housing in Cambridge has created significant affordability challenges for a growing share of the population. Between 2015 and 2024, the average price of dwellings increased significantly across all housing types (+174.7%), while household incomes did not keep pace (household incomes grew by +8.6% between 2015 and 2020 in Cambridge for all households). As a result, more households are struggling to access housing that meets their needs at a cost they can afford.

Conventional housing supply, both rental and ownership, has not been sufficient to meet these needs. The growing gap between income and housing costs points to the need for more flexible and lower-cost forms of housing that can serve a range of residents and living arrangements.

Strategy 1.3



Action 1.3.1

Investigate an incentive program for prefabricated or modular housing construction

Prefabricated and modular housing can help scale up the delivery of homes more quickly and increase cost effectiveness, while also enabling innovative design and construction approaches. These building methods can shorten construction timelines and improve quality control.

To support and encourage this form of development, the City of Cambridge can investigate the creation of an incentive program tailored to the unique characteristics of modular and prefabricated construction. This will include gathering information on best practices from other jurisdictions, assessing financial and regulatory tools that lower barriers to entry, and identifying ways to address the higher up-front capital requirements typical of modular projects.

Case Study Spotlight

[City of Toronto – Modular Housing Initiative](#)

Toronto's Modular Housing Initiative accelerates affordable housing delivery by using prefabricated construction methods. Modular units are built off-site and assembled quickly on serviced land, reducing timelines and costs compared to traditional builds.

The program targets supportive housing for vulnerable populations, with projects completed in under a year from approval. Funding partnerships with CMHC and provincial programs make this approach financially viable.

Strategy 1.3



Action 1.3.2

Review zoning regulations to permit shared and communal living models, such as co-housing and rooming houses, through the zoning by-law

To expand access to diverse and affordable housing options, the City of Cambridge is encouraged to review *City of Cambridge Zoning By-law No. 150-85*, as amended, to permit shared and communal living models, such as co-housing and rooming houses, through the zoning by-law. This review will identify and remove regulatory barriers that may be limiting the development of these housing forms, which are often deeply affordable and meet the needs of lower-income households. The review will also ensure that appropriate standards are in place to support safety, livability, and compatibility of these housing models within existing neighbourhoods.

As part of this review, the City should also engage directly with residents and operators who live in, manage, or seek access to shared and communal housing, including existing rooming houses that may currently operate outside formal permissions. By updating zoning regulations, the City can facilitate innovative housing solutions that respond to a range of household types and income levels, foster social connection, and make more efficient use of existing housing stock.

Case Study Spotlight

[Town of Perth – Linden Housing Co-operative](#)

The Linden Housing Co-operative in Perth revives the co-op housing model to provide affordable, community-oriented living. Designed as a shared ownership structure, the project offers residents private units with access to communal spaces, fostering collaboration and reducing costs. Zoning flexibility was critical to enable this innovative housing form, which blends affordability with social sustainability. Linden demonstrates how municipalities can support co-housing and communal living through zoning reforms.



Goal: Expand access to affordable and suitable housing for households in all stages of life

Households at all stages of life in the City of Cambridge are facing growing barriers to stable and appropriate housing.

Younger adults are forming households at lower rates than in the past, constrained by high costs and limited affordable options. At the same time, Cambridge has seen the fastest growth in older adult households in the Region, many of whom live on fixed incomes in homes that may not support aging in place. Both younger and older households are overrepresented in core housing need and more likely to lack access to housing that is affordable, suitable, and adequate.

This pillar responds to those challenges by focusing on the development of housing that meets the needs of residents at different life stages, helping to ensure that all households in Cambridge can thrive in the community.



Desired Outcomes

Provide more options for young households to form households and start families

- Declining rates of household formation for younger households indicate that this is becoming more difficult in Cambridge. Increasing the supply of housing, particularly in areas that support household formation, will improve housing outcomes for young households in Cambridge.

Increase the supply of accessible, age friendly housing units designed to assist aging in place

- The population of Cambridge is aging. The proportion of the population aged 65 years and older is considerable, leading to higher average ages than the Region, and has grown in recent years. These trends point to the need for increased housing options, such as affordable rental, smaller ownership and rental options, and/or programs targeted at promoting aging in place.

Reduce the number of young adult and older adult households experiencing housing difficulties

- Households led by adults aged 65 years and older or 25 years and younger were the most likely to experiencing difficulties finding accessible housing that met their needs. Developing housing that is affordable, suitable, and adequate would reverse these trends and allow younger and older adults to remain in the community.



Strategy 2.1

Support housing options for youth and young adults by incentivizing affordable rental and ownership units near employment hubs, schools, and transit.

Younger adults in Cambridge are forming households at lower rates than historical trends, in part due to the high cost of housing and limited affordable options near key amenities and services.

This strategy aims to expand access to affordable rental and entry-level ownership opportunities in well-connected areas in Cambridge. Across Ontario, municipalities have used tools such as strategic zoning to support youth-oriented housing near transit corridors, post-secondary institutions, and job centres. Incentivizing the development of smaller, affordable units in these locations will help young adults transition into stable housing, support workforce retention, and contribute to complete communities.

Proposed Actions

The following actions are recommended to implement this strategy:

#	Action
2.1.1	Designate and pre-zone strategic lands near education, employment, and transit hubs for suitable, affordable housing

Background

Younger adults in Cambridge have experienced difficulty forming new households in recent years. In 2021, very few households in Cambridge were maintained by individuals under 25 (1.6%) and headship rates for this age group have declined over time (from 5.9% in 2016 to 4.9% in 2021). Younger households were also the most likely to fall below multiple core housing need standards, including affordability, suitability, and adequacy (19.2%, almost double the City-wide rate of 10.4%).

Cambridge plays a significant role as an employment hub within the Region of Waterloo. However, many young workers face barriers to forming households due to limited availability of affordable housing near jobs, education, and transit. Without appropriate housing options, younger residents may be forced to leave the community or delay major life transitions like family formation.

Strategy 2.1



Action 2.1.1

Designate and pre-zone strategic lands near education, employment, and transit hubs for suitable, affordable housing

To proactively support the development of affordable and suitable housing, the City of Cambridge can identify, designate, and pre-zone strategic lands located near major education, employment, and transit hubs. Pre-zoning these areas will streamline the development process by reducing the need for site-specific amendments and providing greater certainty for housing partners and builders.

This approach will help to ensure that well-located lands are ready for development. It can encourage mixed-income and transit-oriented communities while aligning housing growth with access to jobs, learning opportunities, and transportation options.

Case Study Spotlight

City of Hamilton – Residential Zones Project

Hamilton’s Residential Zones Project introduces pre-zoning along major corridors and transit routes, including the future LRT corridor, to enable higher-density housing and mixed-use development. This initiative simplifies approvals by reducing reliance on site-specific amendments and provides certainty for developers. The project supports affordable housing and aligns growth with transit access and employment hubs.

By proactively designating and pre-zoning strategic lands, Hamilton demonstrates how municipalities can streamline development and foster transit-oriented, mixed-income communities



Strategy 2.2

Encourage family-oriented and multigenerational units in medium- and high-density developments through municipal planning tools or incentives.

As household sizes diversify in the City of Cambridge, there is a growing need for housing that can accommodate families and multigenerational living arrangements, especially in denser developments where larger units are often in short supply.

This strategy focuses on encouraging developers to include more family-sized and flexible units within medium- and high-density residential developments. In jurisdictions across Ontario, municipalities have introduced family-friendly housing policies in Official Plans, minimum unit mix requirements, and guidelines for including family-appropriate housing in higher density housing types. By promoting a range of unit sizes, Cambridge can improve housing outcomes for growing families and support long-term housing stability within higher-density neighbourhoods.

Proposed Actions

The following actions are recommended to implement this strategy:

#	Action
2.2.1	Develop guidelines for medium- and high-density residential development, including guidance for unit mix
2.2.2	Promote the inclusion of adaptable units that support multigenerational living in medium-density developments

Background

Recent growth in the City of Cambridge includes an increase in both smaller and larger household sizes. One-person (+7.8%) and four-or-more-person (8.0%) households grew faster than any other household size between 2016 and 2021. These two household sizes tend to have vastly different income levels and housing needs, yet both face challenges in finding housing that is suitable and affordable.

The housing stock in Cambridge has historically been dominated by single-detached homes (56.8% of housing supply in 2021), which are often unaffordable to lower- or middle-income families. At the same time, medium- and high-density developments, typically containing dwellings that may be more affordable, have tended to offer smaller units. This has limited the available options for larger families or multigenerational households. This mismatch between the types of households forming and the housing that is being delivered has created a gap in the existing market for affordable, suitable housing for families.

Strategy 2.2



Action 2.2.1

Develop guidelines for medium- and high-density residential development, including guidance for unit mix

To promote well-designed and inclusive communities that meet the needs of current and future residents, the City of Cambridge can develop guidelines for medium- and high-density residential developments to provide clear direction on built form, design, and unit composition. These guidelines will ensure the City helps to increase its supply of higher density housing, where new developments can respond to diverse household needs.

These guidelines can include recommendations for a balanced mix of unit sizes and types to accommodate a variety of household needs, including singles, families, and seniors. It can include considerations for building designs, such as height and setbacks. Establishing clear unit mix guidance will help to ensure new developments can meaningfully contribute to complete neighbourhoods, meeting household needs and aligning with the City's broader housing goals.

Case Study Spotlight

[City of Ottawa – Residential Growth Management Strategy](#)

The Ottawa Residential Growth Management Strategy establishes that future growth up to 2046 must be accommodated through intensification in the built-up area while also ensuring an appropriate range and mix of housing types and sizes. It specifically recognizes that many new units to date in high-density forms have been small (studio or one-bedroom) and identifies the need to shift toward more “large-dwelling” units (three or more bedrooms) to serve families. The policy framework importantly stresses that housing choice must not only be about location and density but also unit-size composition. Unit-mix guidelines for medium and high density should include explicit targets or minimums for larger units, integrated with built-form and location criteria, to ensure new developments respond to families, seniors and larger-household types.

Strategy 2.2



Action 2.2.2

Promote the inclusion of adaptable units that support multigenerational living in medium-density developments

The City of Cambridge can encourage the inclusion of adaptable units in medium-density residential developments to accommodate multigenerational living arrangements, supporting household needs and promoting family-sized and flexible units. These units can be designed with flexible layouts and features that allow for changing family compositions over time, such as accessible design elements or spaces that can be converted to serve different functions as the needs of family households evolve.

By promoting adaptable, family-oriented housing in denser developments, the City can help address the shortage of larger units, enable families to live and age together in their communities, and expand housing options beyond traditional single-family homes. This approach can effectively support the creation of neighbourhoods that reflect Cambridge's growing diversity and changing demographic trends.

Case Study Spotlight

[CMHC Universal Design Guide for Multi-Residential Buildings](#)

CMHC's Universal Design Guide promotes adaptable housing in multi-residential developments to support aging in place and multigenerational living. Key features include wider doorways, step-free entrances, reinforced bathroom walls for future grab bars, and flexible layouts for additional bedrooms or shared spaces. These design principles reduce costly retrofits and ensure long-term usability for diverse households. By integrating universal design early, developers create functional, inclusive, and sustainable housing.



Strategy 2.3

Support age-friendly housing through accessible design, downsizing options, and retrofit supports

As the population of Cambridge ages, there is an increasing need for housing options that enable older adults to remain in their community safely, comfortably, and independently.

This strategy promotes both the development of new age-friendly housing and the adaptation of existing homes to meet the needs of seniors. Municipalities across Ontario have made efforts to encourage the creation of compact, barrier-free housing units, such as accessible apartments, ground-level suites, and smaller-scale multi-unit developments, that are designed with universal accessibility principles. These homes allow older adults to downsize while remaining in familiar neighbourhoods and close to essential services, which can also help free up larger units for growing families. Promoting accessibility retrofits in existing homes and improving access to on-site services within multi-unit developments assists existing aging populations find suitable and affordable accommodations.

Proposed Actions

The following actions are recommended to implement this strategy:

#	Action
2.3.1	Explore a local renovation program with community partners to assist low- and moderate-income households with essential home repairs and accessibility modifications
2.3.2	Incorporate age-friendly and accessible design considerations in Additional Residential Unit program

Background

Cambridge is experiencing a demographic shift toward an older population. As of 2021, 16.0% of the population was aged 65 or older, a proportion that has grown steadily and is now higher than the region-wide average. Many older adults live in housing that is too large, inaccessible, or costly to maintain, and they may face challenges downsizing within their existing communities.

Low-income rates and core housing need are disproportionately high among these older adult-led households. Without more age-appropriate housing options, such as smaller, accessible units, many older residents will face continued challenges in securing housing that supports their changing physical and financial needs.

Strategy 2.3



Action 2.3.1

Explore a local renovation program with community partners to assist low- and moderate-income households with home repairs and accessibility modifications

To enable older adults to age safely and comfortably in their homes, the City will explore the creation of a local renovation program in collaboration with community partners and housing organizations. This program could provide financial, technical or educational assistance to low- and moderate-income households to complete home repairs and accessibility modifications. Potential eligible work could include installing ramps, widening doorways, upgrading bathrooms, or improving energy efficiency.

By supporting aging in place and extending the lifespan of existing housing, such a program would help seniors remain connected to their neighbourhoods and social networks. Such an initiative can help the City ensure its older residents have stable and adequate housing, while also reducing pressures on the long-term care and health systems. Exploring this initiative will allow the City of Cambridge to identify partnership opportunities, funding mechanisms, and delivery models that can help to enhance housing adequacy and accessibility for seniors.

Case Study Spotlight

City of London – Ontario Renovates Program

London's Ontario Renovates program provides financial assistance to low- and moderate-income homeowners for essential home repairs and accessibility upgrades. Eligible households can receive forgivable loans to address health and safety issues, improve energy efficiency, and install accessibility features such as ramps and grab bars. The program also supports the creation of secondary units to increase housing supply.

Strategy 2.3



Action 2.3.2

Incorporate age-friendly and accessible design considerations in Additional Residential Unit program

To better support aging in place and meet the needs of older residents, the City of Cambridge could incorporate age-friendly design principles into its Additional Residential Unit (ARU) program. This may include updating design guidelines and approval processes to encourage accessible features that make secondary suites more suitable for older adults or persons with mobility challenges.

By embedding accessibility and flexibility into ARU design standards, the City can enhance housing quality and livability for seniors in their community, remaining close to family, supports and services. An additional benefit of encouraging age-friendly ARUs is that they create opportunities for older adults to downsize within their own properties or neighbourhoods, freeing up larger family homes for households with children.

Case Study Spotlight

North Grenville – Barrier-Free ARU Design and Grant Program

North Grenville's Barrier-Free ARU Design and Grant Program promotes age-friendly housing by integrating accessibility features into Additional Residential Units (ARUs). The program provides financial incentives and design guidance to homeowners who build ARUs that meet barrier-free standards. Key features include step-free entrances, wider doorways, lever-style handles, and adaptable bathrooms with reinforced walls for future grab bars. These elements support aging in place and multigenerational living, reducing the need for costly retrofits later. By combining grants with clear design guidelines, North Grenville removes financial and technical barriers to inclusive housing.



Goal: Protect and scale affordable and community housing to meet community needs

As housing costs in the City of Cambridge have risen, many low-income households have been left with few affordable options.

The lack of available affordable options is most apparent on the rental market, where new supply has not kept pace with demand. The loss of lower-cost market units and the limited availability of community housing have placed increased pressure on vulnerable residents, driving up waitlists for community housing and deepening housing insecurity. These challenges are especially acute for renters in core housing need, many of whom live in unsuitable or inadequate conditions.

This goal focuses on preserving and expanding the supply of affordable and community housing, while improving the quality of existing units, to ensure that the most vulnerable residents in Cambridge have access to stable, secure, and affordable homes.



Desired Outcomes

Ensure all residents, particularly renters and low-income households, have access to secure, affordable, and suitable housing

- The loss of affordable market housing units, particularly on the rental market, has left many low-income households without options for housing. Increased housing supply, particularly housing affordable for low-income households, improves housing conditions across the continuum.

Maintain and grow the existing stock of affordable and community housing

- The existing supply of community and affordable housing in Cambridge, provided by the Region of Waterloo and non-profit housing organizations, has not met the level of demand in the community for this type of housing. Maintaining the existing stock and increasing the supply of affordable and community housing is critical to improve housing conditions for vulnerable populations.

Improve housing conditions for the most vulnerable households through access to affordable, suitable, and adequate housing

- The lack of housing that is affordable for low-income households has increased the demand for community housing in Cambridge. Protecting and improving the condition of the affordable and community stock in Cambridge can support stable and high-quality homes that improve the quality of life for the residents of this housing.



Strategy 3.1

Prioritize the development of housing that addresses identified needs, including deeply affordable and community housing units, through partnerships, incentives, and municipal planning tools.

To meet the housing needs of low-income households and those in core housing need, municipalities and regional governments must take an active role in enabling the creation of deeply affordable and community housing units.

This strategy focuses on aligning local planning tools, financial incentives, and partnerships to prioritize the development of housing that directly responds to affordability gaps. Across Ontario, municipalities have used a range of tools to secure below-market units. Collaboration with the Service Manager (Region of Waterloo), non-profit and co-operative housing providers, as well as private developers, has also proven essential to scaling up deeply affordable supply. By focusing on units that serve households with the greatest need, Cambridge can make meaningful progress toward a more inclusive housing system.

Proposed Actions

The following actions are recommended to implement this strategy:

#	Action
3.1.1	Review CIP programs (HAF Initiative #7) to consider future provision of incentives for affordable housing units
3.1.2	Offer technical assistance and an application concierge service for non-profit and co-op housing providers

Background

The housing needs of low-income households in Cambridge are growing, yet the supply of affordable and community housing has not kept pace. As of December 2023, there were over 4,000 households on the waitlist for community housing in Cambridge. The municipality has experienced a loss of housing that would be affordable for low-income households, particularly on the rental market where they would typically seek accommodations.

At the same time, core housing need is significantly higher among renter households than owners, and the share of households spending 30% or more of gross household income on shelter continues to increase. These affordability pressures point to a need for housing options that serve those with the lowest incomes, particularly renters who face limited alternatives.

Strategy 3.1



Action 3.1.1

Review CIP programs (HAF Initiative #7) to consider future provision of incentives for affordable housing units

Community Improvement Plans (CIPs) are tools that allow municipalities to provide financial or planning incentives to stimulate revitalization, redevelopment, or other community objectives in designated areas. The City of Cambridge can review its existing CIP programs to identify opportunities to strengthen its role in supporting the development of housing affordable to low-income households and those in core housing need.

This review can examine current funding levels, eligibility criteria, and geographic coverage to identify opportunities to enhance impact and help the City meet its housing objectives. Through the review, the City can make informed decisions to streamline application processes, expand incentive areas, and build partnerships to improve outcomes.

By intentionally integrating incentives for affordable and community housing into the CIP framework, the City can better align its planning and financial tools in order to meet the needs of low-income households and enable partnerships that deliver housing with the supports required for resident stability.

The City's most recent CIP program, approved by Cambridge Council in December 2024, was fully subscribed by August 1, 2025, just eight months after its launch, demonstrating strong demand and the potential effectiveness of targeted incentives in supporting affordable housing development.

Case Study Spotlight

City of Peterborough – Affordable Housing CIP

Peterborough's Affordable Housing CIP is a strategic tool designed to increase the development of affordable and community housing through financial incentives. The program targets projects that meet defined affordability criteria and contribute to the city's housing supply goals. Incentives include grants and tax increment financing to offset costs associated with planning approvals, development charges, and property improvements. By reducing upfront expenses, the CIP encourages private and non-profit developers to invest in affordable housing projects.

The Affordable Housing CIP also prioritizes developments in areas with access to transit, employment, and services, supporting complete and inclusive communities. Eligible projects may include new construction, conversions, or substantial renovations that create affordable units and may receive a standard municipal incentive of up to \$80,000 per unit.

Strategy 3.1



Action 3.1.2

Offer technical assistance and an application concierge service for non-profit and co-op housing providers

To strengthen the capacity of non-profit and co-op housing providers, which may include faith-based organizations, and accelerate the delivery of affordable housing, the City of Cambridge can establish a technical assistance and application concierge service. This service could provide dedicated support to help organizations navigate planning approvals, access funding programs, and enhance coordination of development requirements.

Through technical assistance, the City can help build the local development expertise among non-profit and co-op partners, many of whom may lack in-house planning or project management capacity. This can help to improve the quality and feasibility of proposed projects. The concierge model will streamline communication and approvals by offering a clear point of contact within the City, reducing administrative barriers and processing times.

This initiative can be designed in various ways to complement the existing City staffing and build on staff's expertise. By encouraging a coordinated and collaborative process, the City further contributes to the long-term capacity of the community housing sector, in turn helping to achieve sustained growth in affordable and supportive housing options.

Case Study Spotlight

City of Barrie – Housing Development Concierge Program

Barrie's Housing Development Concierge Program is designed to simplify the development process for affordable and community housing providers, including non-profit and co-op organizations. Acting as a single point of contact, the program offers personalized guidance throughout the planning and approval stages. Services include assistance with zoning and site plan requirements, navigating building permits, and identifying funding opportunities from municipal, provincial, and federal programs. The concierge also coordinates with internal departments to resolve issues quickly, reducing delays and administrative burdens.

This proactive approach helps housing providers focus on delivering projects rather than managing complex regulatory processes. By offering technical expertise and streamlined communication, Barrie's initiative accelerates timelines and improves project viability. The program also fosters collaboration between the municipality and housing partners, ensuring developments align with community needs and affordability goals.



Strategy 3.2

Protect and renew existing affordable housing by exploring demolition protection bylaws and supporting non-profits and co-ops in acquiring and upgrading aging stock.

A considerable amount of the affordable housing in communities across Ontario is found in aging rental stock that is increasingly at risk of redevelopment or disrepair. This has led to an increasing number of ‘reno-victions’, or evictions due to purported renovations to older units or demolition for redevelopment, in communities across Ontario. Preserving this housing is often more cost-effective than building new units.

This strategy promotes the use of municipal tools, such as rental replacement policies and targeted funding programs, to safeguard existing affordable units. Municipalities in Ontario have implemented policies to limit the loss of affordable housing during redevelopment.

Proposed Actions

The following actions are recommended to implement this strategy:

#	Action
3.2.1	Explore the use of a rental replacement policy for redevelopment projects involving rental housing

Background

As market demand increases, existing affordable units, especially those in the secondary rental market, are at risk of being lost to redevelopment or disrepair. Between 2016 and 2021, the number of rental units with monthly rent prices at or below \$1,000 decreased by 2,505 units (-32.6%). Without proactive measures, this trend could accelerate the erosion of what remains of housing that would be considered affordable for low-income households.

Strategy 3.2



Action 3.2.1

Explore the use of a rental replacement policy for redevelopment projects involving rental housing

To protect Cambridge's existing stock of affordable rental housing from being lost to redevelopment or demolition due to disrepair, the City can establish a rental replacement policy. Such a policy is intended to help safeguard a segment of the housing stock that provides secure housing for low- to moderate-income households.

This policy can explore ways to ensure that when redevelopment occurs on sites with existing rental units, those units are replaced with comparable, affordable homes within new developments or at an alternative location. The policy would outline such requirements, and could include provisions on tenant relocation assistance.

By developing a rental replacement policy, the City can balance growth and intensification with the protection of existing affordable housing stock, helping to maintain a stable rental supply across Cambridge.

Case Study Spotlight

City of Toronto – Rental Replacement Policy

Toronto's Rental Replacement Policy safeguards affordable rental housing during redevelopment. When rental buildings are demolished for new projects, developers must replace the lost units within the new development. Replacement units must match the original size and type, maintain affordability for a defined period, and offer returning tenants comparable rents. This policy applies in high-growth areas, including Major Transit Station Areas, where intensification often threatens existing rental stock. By embedding rental protection into planning approvals, Toronto balances growth with housing stability, preventing displacement and preserving affordability.



Strategy 3.3

Expand the supply of community and supportive housing by prioritizing municipal land and leveraging federal and provincial funding for the development of these housing types.

Meeting the needs of residents who require deeply affordable or supportive housing requires a coordinated investment strategy and a clear alignment of local priorities with higher levels of government.

This strategy emphasizes the City’s role in advocating for the development of supportive and community housing by identifying surplus municipal lands and championing their use for housing projects that serve vulnerable populations. Rather than solely focusing on direct delivery, the City can take a leadership role in promoting access to federal and provincial funding programs, facilitating partnerships, and influencing policy to ensure that available resources are directed toward housing that integrates affordability, accessibility, and wraparound supports.

By advocating for strategic land use and funding alignment, Cambridge can help enable developments in locations that improve access to transit, healthcare, and social services—while reinforcing its commitment to addressing core housing need through collaborative, systems-level solutions.

Proposed Actions

The following actions are recommended to implement this strategy:

#	Action
3.3.1	Partner with Waterloo Region and advocate with upper levels of government for increased funding to deliver housing that meets local needs

Background

Cambridge faces a growing need for deeply affordable and supportive housing options, particularly for residents with disabilities, older adults, and individuals experiencing homelessness or precarious housing. The existing supply of community housing, typically delivered by the Region of Waterloo and non-profit providers, has not been sufficient to meet current or projected demand.

Waitlists for community housing continue to grow, and supportive housing represents only a small share of the overall affordable housing stock. As of December 2023, there were over 4,000 households on the waitlist for community housing in Cambridge. Over half (53.4%) of these applicants requested one-bedroom units. Residents who require both housing and wraparound supports often wait years for appropriate accommodations. Without significant expansion of this supply, many of these households will remain in unstable or unsuitable living situations.



Partner with Waterloo Region and advocate with upper levels of government for increased funding to deliver housing that meets local needs

To effectively address local housing needs, the City of Cambridge can identify ways to strengthen its collaboration with the Region of Waterloo to jointly advocate to provincial and federal governments for increased and sustained funding for housing that meets the needs of its residents.

Coordinated advocacy can focus on securing capital funding, ongoing operational supports, and funding of housing stabilization programs that enable the delivery of affordable and supportive housing options. Working together, the City and the Region can align priorities, share data and expertise, and present a unified voice to upper levels of government to ensure funding programs effectively reflect the realities of local housing markets and community needs. By building strong intergovernmental partnerships, the City can help unlock additional resources, accelerate the delivery of housing, and create long-term solutions for residents facing housing instability.

Beyond funding, advocacy efforts can also extend to influencing policy and legislative frameworks that shape the provision and maintenance of affordable housing. This includes calling for reforms to planning regulations, tenant protections, rent control mechanisms, and long-term funding commitments that support the sustainability of affordable housing stock. By engaging in policy dialogue and legislative advocacy, the City can help create enabling conditions for housing providers, reduce systemic barriers, and promote equitable housing outcomes across the community.

4 Moving Forward

The Housing Strategy and Action Plan outlines a comprehensive set of strategies and actions to address identified housing needs across the community. With the strategic framework now established, the implementation phase will focus on translating these recommendations into tangible outcomes through collaboration, policy updates, and program development.

Advancing the Housing Strategy and Action Plan:

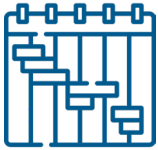
Alignment with Municipal Priorities: Actions will be integrated into existing planning processes, including updates to the Official Plan, zoning by-laws, and municipal land use strategies.

Collaboration with Key Partners: The City will work closely with regional partners, non-profit housing providers, developers, and community organizations to advance shared housing goals.

Policy and Program Development: New policies and programs will be developed or refined to support housing affordability, diversity, and accessibility.

Resource Mobilization: Funding opportunities from federal and provincial programs will be leveraged to support implementation.

Implementation Plan



Integrate Strategy and Action Plan into official planning documents

Begin incorporating strategic actions into the City's Official Plan, zoning by-laws, and other planning tools to embed housing priorities into long-term land use and development frameworks.



Engage local stakeholders and housing partners

Launch targeted engagement with housing providers, developers, community organizations, and residents to build support, gather feedback, and identify partnership opportunities.



Develop supporting materials and documentation

Create accessible educational resources, design guidelines, and online platforms to communicate the Strategy and support implementation by various stakeholders.



Initiate identified priority actions

Begin work on priority actions, identified in this report. These actions are high-impact, ready-to-launch initiatives such as zoning updates, educational and advocacy efforts, and housing targets.



Establish governance and oversight

Define internal leadership roles and establish cross-departmental teams to coordinate implementation, monitor progress, and ensure accountability.



Develop monitoring and evaluation framework

Monitoring and evaluation framework should be developed to track progress, measure outcomes, and inform future updates to the Strategy and Action Plan.

Priority Actions

Short-Term Priority Actions

The following actions are considered high priority for the City and should be pursued in short-term.

#	Action
1.1.1	Review and update Official Plan policies for affordable housing and establish affordable housing targets
1.1.2	Develop a monitoring program to measure the success of municipal housing initiatives and targets
1.1.3	Develop educational website and materials to support the development application process, including information on development applications, additional residential units, and development-ready lands
2.1.1	Designate and pre-zone strategic lands near education, employment, and transit hubs for suitable, affordable housing
3.1.2	Offer technical assistance and an application concierge service for non-profit and co-op housing providers
3.2.1	Explore the use of a rental replacement policy for redevelopment projects involving rental housing
3.3.1	Partner with Waterloo Region and advocate with upper levels of government for increased funding to deliver housing that meets local needs

Medium-Term Priority Actions

The following actions should be pursued in the medium-term by the City.

#	Action
1.2.1	Expand the Additional Residential Unit (ARU) Assistance Program (HAF Initiative #3)
1.2.2	Develop a pre-approved design catalogue / guidelines for ARUs and low-rise multiplexes
1.3.1	Investigate an incentive program for prefabricated or modular housing construction
1.3.2	Review zoning regulations to permit shared and communal living models, such as co-housing and rooming houses, through the zoning by-law
2.3.2	Incorporate age-friendly and accessible design considerations in Additional Residential Unit program
3.1.1	Review CIP programs (HAF Initiative #7) to provide incentives for affordable and community housing units

Long-Term Priority Actions

The following actions should be pursued in the long-term by the City.

#	Action
2.2.1	Develop guidelines for medium- and high-density residential development, including guidance for unit mix
2.2.2	Promote the inclusion of adaptable units that support multigenerational living in medium-density developments
2.3.1	Explore a local renovation program with community partners to assist low- and moderate-income households with essential home repairs and accessibility modifications

A Plan for the Future of Housing in Cambridge

The Cambridge Housing Strategy and Action Plan represents a critical step forward in addressing local housing challenges and shaping a more inclusive, affordable, and sustainable future. By aligning strategic actions with local priorities and leveraging partnerships across sectors, the City is well-positioned to make meaningful progress toward its housing goals.

This Strategy and Action Plan is not a final destination but a foundation for ongoing collaboration, innovation, and refinement. As Cambridge continues to grow and evolve, the Strategy and Action Plan will serve as a living document, one that adapts to changing needs and reflects the voices of its residents.

Through committed implementation and future monitoring, Cambridge can ensure that housing remains a cornerstone of community well-being and resilience.



5 Appendix

This section includes the following sub-sections:

- *List of Recommended Actions*
- *Housing Needs Assessment*

Appendix I: Recommended Actions

Recommended Actions

#	Action
1.1.1	Review and update Official Plan policies for affordable housing and establish affordable housing targets
1.1.2	Develop a monitoring program to measure the success of municipal housing initiatives and targets
1.1.3	Develop educational website and materials to support the development application process, including information on development applications, additional residential units, and development-ready lands
1.2.1	Expand the Additional Residential Unit (ARU) Assistance Program (HAF Initiative #3)
1.2.2	Develop a pre-approved design catalogue / guidelines for ARUs and low-rise multiplexes
1.3.1	Investigate an incentive program for prefabricated or modular housing construction
1.3.2	Review zoning regulations to permit shared and communal living models, such as co-housing and rooming houses, through the zoning by-law

#	Action
2.1.1	Designate and pre-zone strategic lands near education, employment, and transit hubs for suitable, affordable housing
2.2.1	Develop guidelines for medium- and high-density residential development, including guidance for unit mix
2.2.2	Promote the inclusion of adaptable units that support multigenerational living in medium-density developments
2.3.1	Explore a local renovation program with community partners to assist low- and moderate-income households with essential home repairs and accessibility modifications
2.3.2	Incorporate age-friendly and accessible design considerations in Additional Residential Unit program
3.1.1	Review CIP programs (HAF Initiative #7) to consider future provision of incentives for affordable housing units
3.1.2	Offer technical assistance and an application concierge service for non-profit and co-op housing providers
3.2.1	Explore the use of a rental replacement policy for redevelopment projects involving rental housing
3.3.1	Partner with Waterloo Region and advocate with upper levels of government for increased funding to deliver housing that meets local needs

Appendix II: Housing Needs Assessment