



Age-Friendly Housing: Solving Ottawa's Housing Problem Means Providing Affordable and Accessible Options for Older Adults

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Ottawa Has a Housing Problem

In January 2020, the City of Ottawa declared a housing crisis and homelessness emergency. Ottawa's over 65 population is expected to reach 25% by 2035. Current senior housing options are financially difficult or out-of-reach for many older adults. Twenty-five percent (25%) of older residents (65+) are renters, with 54% of those spending 50% of their income on housing. This shows the huge shortage of available and affordable rental units. In 2020, the average rent in Ottawa increased by 8% and with an increase of 13.5% over the previous two years. The social housing waiting list for available housing is over 12,000, with seniors making up over 40% on this list.

Housing is a basic human right. The Housing Committee of the Council on Aging of Ottawa (COA) calls for immediate attention to the lack of suitable/adequate age-friendly housing options for older adults with low- (under \$25,000) to modest/moderate-incomes (\$25,000-\$70,000) in the Ottawa Region.

The Council on Aging of Ottawa recommends that the City of Ottawa address the following specific housing needs for older adults who are in the low- to mid-income bracket, which would allow older adults to live independently as long as possible:

- 1. Increase** the number of available and affordable housing options, including rental units, to match older adults' demographic place in our city. This means ensuring that 18% of new units are suitable for older adults right now and moving to 25% by 2036. These units must be in walkable and connected neighborhoods and near amenities such as transportation, shopping, and other community services. In addition, our new Official Plan needs to establish and adhere to a consistent income-to-rent ratio for rental housing targets, linked to the City's 10-year Housing and Homelessness Plan.
- 2. Incorporate** the principles of universal design in all new builds and ensure 20% of all retro fit units are accessible. In addition, the City needs to support and advocate for the development of common standards of accessibility (building codes) across all levels of government.
- 3. Invest** in innovative building models that encourage connections and relationships such as NORCs (Naturally Occurring Retirement Communities), supported independent living communities, affordable retirement and assisted living residences, multigenerational housing, co-housing, co-living, and coach/mini houses.
- 4. Facilitate** the coordination of public health services with health teams, community organizations and stakeholders to expand the range of home and community care support services to promote and protect the health of older adults.
- 5. Appoint an Older Adult Advocate** whose mandate would include housing in the list of issues affecting older adults, leading to the development of a comprehensive housing plan to meet the diverse housing needs of older adults including elements of physical, emotional, social and health needs.

To achieve these goals, the city must **commit** to progressive funding for affordable housing stock that is beyond investments from federal and provincial grants. We strongly recommend that the City prioritize affordable housing in all city budgets and commit at a minimum \$30 million a year, beginning in 2023, with increasing investments in the following years to build and acquire affordable housing, mixed income housing and supportive housing units.

Affordable and accessible housing must be central to city planning and needs to be considered as part of the public good in much the same way as schools, libraries, hospitals, and community centres. The city must look at its land first to see if it is suitable for affordable housing before city land is sold to private developers.

The city must also use strategies such as strong inclusionary zoning, anti-renoviction and anti-displacement policies, providing tax credits, and working with partners such as non-profits, churches, and co-ops, as well as leveraging funding from the provincial and federal governments. In addition to strategies already in place, our city councillors and city planning department need to work with developers and residents to craft Community Benefits Networks and Plans that meet the needs of both developers and residents in the provision of affordable housing.

Benefits to the City of Ottawa

The City of Ottawa's vision in our Official Plan is to become one of the most liveable mid-sized city of over one million people in North America. With a growing percentage of its population over age 65, developing a full spectrum of **age-friendly housing that has affordable, accessible, appropriate, and available** options for older adults is essential to achieving this vision.

Establishing long term sustainable ways to help all residents find affordable and suitable housing is vital.

The needs of older persons change over time, sometimes incrementally, other times suddenly and often not linearly. There are immense benefits to the City in providing high-quality **appropriate, adequate, accessible, and affordable housing for older adults** by including the full spectrum of options from aging-in-place to congregate living and long-term care. These would create a healthier, more vibrant, and more equitable city inclusive of diversity in which all residents enjoy an excellent quality of life.

Evidence shows that it is more cost-effective for the city and better for the health and quality of life of older adults and their families to enable older people to live in their own community as long as possible. Supporting housing for seniors will affirm and respect the equal place that older adults have in our society. When the housing needs for older adults are met, they are in a better position to give back to their communities.

Age friendly housing is good for all ages. Young renters, low-income families and people with disabilities have housing needs and preferences that may be the same as older adults. Thus, while supporting age friendly housing is essential for older adults, it is also beneficial to all ages.



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