



# Exploring Opportunities for 4+ Units on Residential Lots in Guelph: What We Heard Report

City of Guelph – Gentle Density Study

March 22, 2024

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CITY OF  
Guelph

Making a Difference



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# 1 Introduction

Guelph is experiencing challenges with the affordability of housing, like many other municipalities across Canada. The City is working hard to help unlock and increase housing supply for the community by providing a range of housing types, including affordable housing options.

As part of this work, the City of Guelph has committed to exploring the impact and feasibility of Gentle Density through a four-unit housing type in low-density residential areas.

The aim of this project is to:

- Determine ideal lot sizes that can accommodate appropriate parking, landscaping and trees, and building setbacks requirements.
- Develop examples of best practices for new housing types through a series of site plan designs.
- Propose updates to the Zoning By-law to allow for the introduction of a new four-unit housing type in low-density residential areas.

The project is currently focused on 4 units, and will repeat this exercise with 5+ units.

For more information on the Gentle Density project, visit:

[www.haveyoursay.guelph.ca/housing-affordability](http://www.haveyoursay.guelph.ca/housing-affordability)

## 2 Engagement Overview

The Gentle Density project gathered feedback from interested parties from the development and homebuilding industry and resident groups, as well as the general public.

In February 2024, participants were invited to learn more about Gentle Density and share their feedback on how best to enable four-unit housing types in the City of Guelph. The project team gathered specific feedback on how parking, landscaping, building setbacks, and other regulations will impact the feasibility of four-unit housing.

In April 2024, the draft zoning regulations will be presented at a Statutory Public Meeting.

### February 2024

Members of the public and interested parties provided feedback on visual examples, city-wide mapping, and siting considerations.

Two (2) information sessions with the development and homebuilding industry

One (1) information session with community and resident groups

One (1) public open house

*Note: A second information session for community and resident groups was offered, but had one attendee. The project team followed up with this attendee for a one-on-one conversation.*

### April 2024

A Statutory Public Meeting will be held on **April 9th** to discuss draft zoning regulations.

Members of the public and interested parties will have opportunities to have continued conversations with members of the project team.

### June 2024

Council decision on recommended Zoning Bylaw Amendment.

## 2.1 February 2024 Engagement Summary

A total of four (4) engagement sessions were held in February 2024.

Session #1	Session #2	Session #3	Session #4
Tuesday, February 20th, 1-3pm	Thursday, February 22nd, 2-4pm	Thursday, February 22nd, 6-8pm	Thursday, February 29th, 5-8pm
Virtual information session for development and homebuilding industry	In-person information session for development and homebuilding industry	In-person information session for community and resident groups	In-person public open house
15 attendees	8 attendees	13 attendees	30+ attendees

The purpose of the engagement was to:

- Introduce the concept of Gentle Density and four-unit housing types
- Present the preliminary study, including:
  - » Where Gentle Density may occur
  - » Site demonstration plans for lots with four units using accessory dwelling units (ADU) or fourplexes
- Gather feedback on the impacts of key regulations on different groups of interest holders
- Understand opportunities and challenges related to four-unit housing types

Site demonstration plans were displayed during engagement sessions as a tool to generate feedback, and were not provided as recommendations.

## 3 Key Takeaways

Perspectives on the four-unit housing type varied depending on a participants' background, experiences, age, career and more. This section summarizes the key takeaways across all four engagement sessions of the Gentle Density project that took place in February 2024. Each session is described in more detail in the following section.

- 1. Keep requirements simple and less restrictive:** Participants, especially those from the development and homebuilding industry, wish to see regulations that are clear and allow the four-unit housing type to be efficiently implemented on eligible lots.
- 2. Parking requirements are a barrier:** Each engagement session included significant conversation around the negative impact of high parking requirements on the feasibility of gentle density. Although many residents are used to having driveways to park personal vehicles, participants are open to exploring reduced parking requirements to reduce the amount of on-site area that parking will use.
- 3. Additional Dwelling Unit (ADU) regulations:** Several suggestions were made about adjusting by-laws for ADUs to enable a four-unit housing configuration (especially on smaller lots) that is more favourable (e.g., large units, more bedrooms per unit).

## 4 Summary of Results

### 4.1 Session #1: Virtual Information Session for Development and Homebuilding Industry

In general, participants in the session indicated that a more simple and less restrictive approach would enable adoption of the four-unit housing type from a development and real estate perspective.

#### Neighbourhood typologies

The project team asked if participants, from their perspective in the development industry, understand there to be neighbourhoods or types of lots that are most likely to support four-unit housing.

Participants responded that the focus could be on “wartime” / post-war era homes that are due for renovation or replacement. One participant wondered if there were any considerations being made for new subdivisions.

#### Development charges

One participant asked what types of conversations were happening around development charges. When the project team indicated that, so far, the conversation is focused on built form and site demonstration plans, this participant mentioned that development charges have the potential to make four-unit housing cost prohibitive to developers and homeowners who wish to benefit from this new housing type.

#### Parking requirements

The requirement for four parking spaces (one per unit) was a key focus of conversation. Most participants suggested that the four-unit housing type would be more feasible with reduced parking requirements.

In particular, it was mentioned that enabling parking in the rear yard requires a lot of paving and still feels like a tight fit. The project team indicated that parking reductions could be explored and recommended, especially around higher-order transit, but that this was out of scope for the Gentle Density project.

One participant wondered if an infiltration gallery could be implemented instead of green roofs, in order to meet permeability and landscaping requirements.

#### Number of rooms permitted

A participant asked if changes to regulations around the number of bedrooms permitted in ADUs are being considered. Specifically, they mentioned that the by-laws allow for 3 bedroom basement units, but above-ground ADUs are only permitted to have 2 bedroom units.

Interior access was mentioned as another component to review and consider removing, because it could unlock some additional square footage for units, rather than being lost to interior circulation space.



## Challenges

Participants raised concerns about the demonstration plans and how to fit necessary elements on-site. Participants were reminded that the site demonstration plans were a visualization tool for discussion and to generate feedback only, and should not be considered as recommendations by the project team. In addition, several of these considerations are not in-scope for the Gentle Density study and would be addressed on a site-by-site basis.

- Consider where snow storage and waste bins would be in these site plans.
  - » Project team response: These site plans assume an appropriate number of bins relative to units, and a pathway from a communally accessible area to the curb.
- Bike storage will need to be managed and included in demonstration plans.
  - » Project team response: The requirement for bike storage is not a factor until buildings with 10 or more units.
- Access to private outdoor amenity space is a challenge.

## Opportunities

Participants were excited about opportunities for co-housing and co-ownership models, but mentioned that the potential fees for development charges and parkland dedication (if applicable), would prohibit the development of affordable housing opportunities.

Those involved in the real estate industry mentioned that they've noticed trends around co-op housing recently, with a notable example being the development of Oak Hill Co-Living ("Golden Girls") example in the Rockwood neighbourhood of Guelph.

## 4.2 Session #2: In-person Information Session for Development and Homebuilding Industry

Participants in this industry session were interested in the configurations of ADUs and multiplexes, and the impact on feasibility and parking requirements.

### ADU configuration

Participants felt that two ADUs in an accessory building should be permitted, even if the primary dwelling is one story. Additionally, one person suggested that the size of the ADU should not be constrained by the size of the primary dwelling.

Similar to the virtual session, participants questioned why basement ADUs were permitted to have three bedrooms, while above-ground ADUs were limited to 2-bedroom units. The rationale for this, from their perspective, is that 3-bedroom units are rare and missing in Guelph's current housing mix and should be enabled in the future.

In this session, participants also raised the issue of interior access to units, mentioning that this presents more challenges as the number of ADUs within a primary building increases.

### Multiplex configuration

The discussion around multiplexes spurred questions around parking and permeable paving. One participant suggested that parking in the rear yard does not need to be the default configuration and that other arrangements may be preferred by developers, homeowners or renters. A few participants were concerned that the rear yard parking eliminates opportunity for green space and amenity space on-site, and suggested that this trade-off may not be acceptable to all.

One participant wondered whether the multiplex model would be economically feasible to develop, given the current

regulations, and suggested that some cost analysis may need to be completed. The project team indicated that economic modelling will be available as part of the recommended Zoning Bylaw report coming to Council for decision in June 2024.

An additional comment was made around whether the consideration for permeable pavers was vetted by an engineer. The project team indicated that this would be further studied throughout the project.

### Parking requirements

Participants were not satisfied with the requirements for four parking stalls to be included in the four-unit housing type.

Participants demonstrated the necessity for on-street parking through an example of someone who develops a rear yard or basement ADU, but only has enough parking for the primary dwelling. As such, no parking stalls are provided as part of the rental agreement and street parking is not permitted on most residential streets. In this example, the homeowner may have difficulty renting the unit unless street parking were available to accommodate the incoming tenant.

As an additional solution, participants suggest reducing parking requirements to 3 stalls for four units would be preferred, especially in areas of reasonable transit availability. A few participants indicated that the parking requirements seemed to be at odds with the goal of maintaining or increasing permeability and affordability, and that incentives for purpose-built rentals may be warranted.

## 4.3 Session #3: In-person Information Session for Community and Resident Groups

While participants were eager to learn about the four-unit housing type, there was significant discussion around the impact of increased density on neighbourhoods that are currently considered to be low-density residential communities.

### Concern around the intensity of density

One participant described a scenario where a single parcel was subdivided into three parcels, each of which has three units. In this case, they envisioned 9 new residents arriving to the community, who may be students and each have their own personal vehicle. The scenario raised concerns for some participants around parking overflow into the community and the impact of having 9 new neighbours, rather than a single person, a couple or small family that they are accustomed to. The term “vicious density” was used to describe this scenario.

### Student housing

Conversations around student housing and the disruptions that this may cause, were an ongoing topic of conversation. This was framed in the context of the scenario above, as well as developers being incentivized to rent to students to increase their profit margins. The perception is that individual rooms in a 3-bedroom unit may be rented at a higher rate (say \$1,000 per room) than they may be able to achieve if the unit was rented to a single family (at below \$3,000 for the unit).

The suggestion was that, in a place like Guelph, the four-unit housing type is more conducive to students than it is to families. In addition, if economics are the primary

driver or incentive for development, then this approach may not result in affordability.

While, in general, there were concerns about the impact of students living in higher quantities in low-density residential neighbourhoods (whether based on personal experience or perceptions about what that might entail), one participant encouraged others to consider that mixing between ages, family structures, employment status and other characteristics is beneficial to a community. Participants seemed to agree about the benefits of social mixing, though the project team noted that this falls outside of the influence of this project.

### Parking + amenity space trade-offs

The stacked parking shown in some of the site demonstration plans were not considered practical, especially when units are rented to those who are not family members.

In some site demonstration plans, participants were concerned about the lack of rear yard amenity space available when accommodating four parking stalls.

A move towards mixed use development and more local commercial opportunities was mentioned as a way to reduce dependence on personal vehicles and make the reduced parking requirements more feasible.

Finally, participants would like to see tree regulations that protect existing trees when multiplexes and ADUs are implemented, especially if parking needs to be accommodated in the rear yard.

## **Opportunities**

Participants were excited about the opportunity to access affordable housing opportunities, as well as opportunities for aging-in-place. A few attendees who were not currently homeowners noted that they were excited about the prospect of being able to own a unit in a multiplex as a new homeownership opportunity that was more accessible to them than owning a detached or semi-detached dwelling.

## **Challenges**

One participant, who rents out multiple properties in Guelph, mentioned that as a landlord, they do not want to have to “donate” their money to implement Gentle Density. They wish to see that this opportunity is affordable and profitable for landowners and developers, suggesting that incentives may be required to enable affordability as a homeowner or renter. This prompted a discussion about energy efficiency as a way to increase affordability for developers or owners.



## 4.4 Session #4: In-person Public Open House

At the public open house, residents of Guelph were eager to provide their feedback on the four-unit housing type, with many echoing sentiments heard at the information sessions. It is worth noting that several attendees at the public open house had attended an information session for either the development industry or community and resident groups.

### Parking and transit

All of the comments related to parking suggested that the parking requirements for this housing type should be reduced (for example, two parking stalls instead of four parking stalls). In particular, some participants were concerned that the requirement for parking means that most or all of the rear yard would be occupied by paved surfaces.

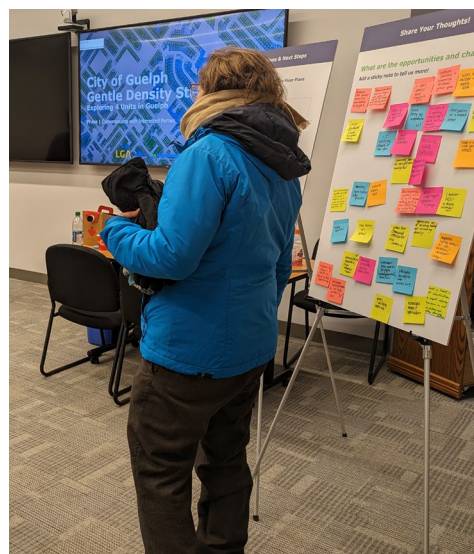
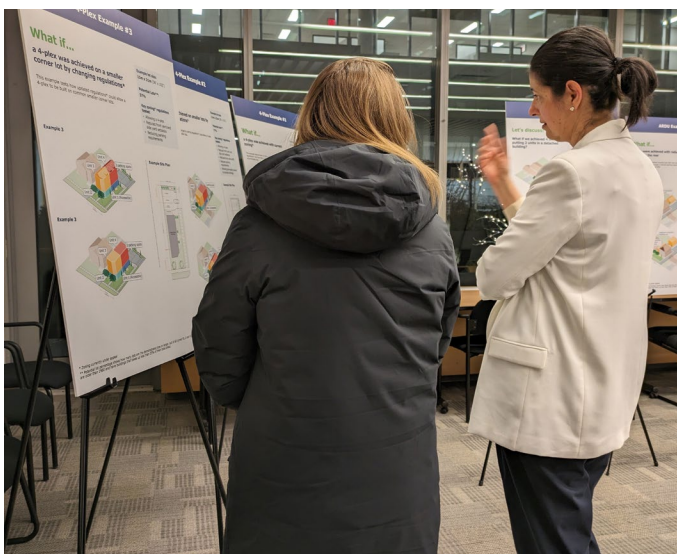
Suggestions to alleviate parking challenges included allowing for on-street parking and enabling car share locations nearby, as well as increasing public transit and active transportation networks to reduce reliance on personal vehicles.

### Green space and amenity space

Participants wish to see regulations that do not eliminate the opportunity for rear yard green space or amenity space (e.g., parking). One participant suggested that, should there be shared rear yard space between the four units, the City of Guelph should work to ensure parkland supply keeps up with density to compensate for shared use of backyards.

### ADU configuration

Comments were made about ADUs and their relationship to the primary dwelling, including allowing ADUs that are the same height regardless of whether there is a garage on the main floor, and allowing three-bedroom units to match the allowances for basement units. One participant felt that the regulations for the size of ADUs (compared to the primary dwelling) are too restrictive.



**Figure 1:** Public open house participants spoke with members of the project team about challenges and opportunities related to Gentle Density in Guelph.

## Opportunities

In general, most participants at the open house were excited about the opportunity to build a new form of housing that could alleviate the lack of affordable housing. Other opportunities participants were excited about include:

- Downsizing and aging-in-place
- Income generation through rentals
- Increased property value
- Allowing for more housing without sprawl
- Using existing housing stock to increase density

A few participants who attended the open house were representatives of organizations that support people with developmental disabilities, who indicated that the four-unit housing type would enable supportive housing opportunities that are accessible, affordable, and may allow for more independent living models for some of their clients.

## Challenges

There was a participant who was concerned about the potential for this housing opportunity to only be accessible to developers or those with access to capital. This concern was around the idea that developers could outbid people who are trying to buy a home (e.g., single-detached to house their families) in order to develop a four-units on a lot, making the homebuying process less accessible to them.

Similarly, several participants indicated that they would like to see support and incentives for individual homeowners to develop four units on their lots, with one person mentioning specific support for young adults or seniors.

## 5 Next Steps

In April 2024, the project team will refine the demonstration plans and draft zoning regulations, as well as conduct a market analysis, based on feedback received throughout engagement on the project. The graphic to the right includes more information on next steps for this project.

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