

City of Guelph

Housing Affordability Strategy

Engagement summary

July 2024



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Appendices

- A *TO BE ADDED IN FINAL VERSION*
- B *TO BE ADDED IN FINAL VERSION*
- C *TO BE ADDED IN FINAL VERSION*



Executive summary

The City of Guelph is updating its Housing Affordability Strategy (HAS) so that it can address the housing crisis that Guelph is facing. The updated HAS will provide a toolbox of actions for the City to use to address housing needs.

A critical component of this work is to hear directly from public and private sector representatives, as well as Guelph residents who can share their lived experience. This report summarizes the feedback gathered from engagement that has taken place in Phases 2, 3, and 4, which includes:

- Interviews and a workshop with key public and private sector representatives;
- three meetings with the Housing Affordability Strategy Focus Group (HASFG);
- public engagement on the Draft Strategic Actions for the Strategy; and
- two public surveys.

The key themes that emerged through engagement that the City should focus on for the Housing Strategy included:

- Promoting incentives for affordable housing development;
- addressing barriers and hidden costs in affordable housing;
- enhancing education and capacity-building for housing-focused non-profits; and
- encouraging a wider diversity of housing options.

This report includes an overview of the HAS project, details about the engagement activities that were undertaken, themes we heard from the community, and directions for the HAS.

The next phase of engagement will include sharing a draft Housing Affordability Strategy with the Guelph community.



1.0 Introduction and purpose

1.1 Project background

Like many other communities across the province, Guelph is experiencing a housing crisis, which has intensified in recent years. The City of Guelph and the broader community believe that housing is a fundamental need and should be accessible to all. Everyone deserves a place to call home that is safe, affordable, accessible, and suitable regardless of income, age, or situation. Having a place to call home is also at the core of mental and physical wellbeing and participation in society. No matter who we are, what we do, or which ward we live in, the Guelph community looks out and supports each other.

The City of Guelph has recognized the importance of housing-related issues residents face and is working on a 2024 Housing Affordability Strategy (HAS)



to identify actions within its control to help address affordability in the short, medium, and long term.

Engagement is a critical piece of the HAS and necessary for its success. The primary purpose of engagement has been to seek direct, on-the-ground feedback from private sector representatives, public sector representatives, and residents, including those whose lived experience is critical to understanding local challenges. Engagement included a variety of in-person, online and hybrid activities designed to reach as many different people as possible. Community engagement occurred across three phases that are aligned with core decision-making points in the HAS work plan (recognizing Phase 1, which involved presenting a high-level workplan and timeline to Council, was completed by staff):

- Research and information gathering (Phase 2)
- Identify goals and targets (Phase 3)
- Identify actions (Phase 4)
- Finalize strategy (Phase 5)

1.2 Engagement objectives

1.2.1 Phase 2

Engagement and communications for Phase 2 focused on the following objectives:

- Inform the community and focus group participants about the project, and share why engagement is important;
- generate interest from the community in the project; and
- involve the Housing Affordability Strategy Focus Group (HASFG) and key parties early on to gain mutual understanding about local opportunities, gaps, and housing needs along the housing continuum.



1.2.2 Phase 3

Engagement and communications for Phase 3 focused on the following objectives:

- Inform the community about Phase 3 engagement opportunities and their purpose;
- promote online surveys; and
- involve the community and HASFG members in developing the goals and confirming targets for the HAS.

1.2.3 Phase 4

The purpose of engagement in Phase 4 was to hear public input on the draft Strategic Actions and focused on the following objectives:

- Inform the community about project updates and engagement opportunities; and
- involve the community and the HASFG to review and validate Strategic Actions and to provide feedback on the prioritization and implementation of proposed actions.

2.0 Engagement and communication activities

2.1 Communication activities

To inform the community about the project and create a touchpoint for information and engagement, a project page was created on the City of Guelph's online engagement platform, Have Your Say. The project page includes project information and background, key engagement dates, staff contact information, FAQs, the project timeline, important project milestones, announcements and updates, and tools for the community to participate in activities such as the surveys. The community was also informed through a public notice, media interviews and local news coverage, e-newsletters, social media posts, and paid advertising on digital platforms. From its launch in September 2023 through June 2024, there have been over 4,000 visits to the engagement page.



2.2 Engagement activities

The engagement activities involved in-depth conversations with key interested and affected parties to understand the housing needs, gaps, and issues in Guelph, as well as to hear from interested members of the public. This input built on the data and research completed in Phase 1 and helped to inform goals and target development. The following sections outline the key engagement activities that were completed during Phases 2, 3 and 4, and the outcomes are summarized in **Section 3.0: What We Heard**.

2.2.1 Interviews

Ten interviews were held in February 2024 with different groups of key interest holders, including:

- Indigenous organizations;
- Developers;
- Wellington County staff;
- Student housing services;
- Co-operative housing representatives;
- The Guelph Wellington Seniors Association; and
- Advocacy and not-for-profit groups.

Questions were tailored for each interview group to hear their thoughts about housing affordability and how their organization(s) might best play a role in addressing housing needs in Guelph. In addition to suggestions for engagement approaches, key themes were identified from each interview, resulting in a list of 10 key themes. This list was refined as further engagement took place.

2.2.2 Housing Affordability Focus Group (HASFG)

A Housing Affordability Focus Group was formed to collaborate with professionals in the housing sector and community members throughout the project. There were six community spots on the Focus Group available, and 96 applications were received to fill those spots.



The first Focus Group meeting was held virtually on March 25, 2024, with 16 attendees and was facilitated by four project team members (two from the City of Guelph and two from Dillon).

The second Focus Group meeting was held in-person on April 22, 2024, 14 attendees and four project team members (two from the City of Guelph and two from Dillon).

2.2.3 Public and private sector workshops

On April 4, 2024, a workshop was held for public and private sector representatives at Guelph City Hall from 1 to 4 PM. There were 28 attendees at the workshop. The workshop began by introducing the project, going over some key housing affordability concepts, and presenting feedback received so far. This included reviewing and refining the top 10 themes. For the second half of the workshop, attendees spent time addressing some key questions that emerged through interview discussions and the first HASFG session. Both groups developed a list of actions they believe should be the focus of the HAS.

2.2.4 Surveys

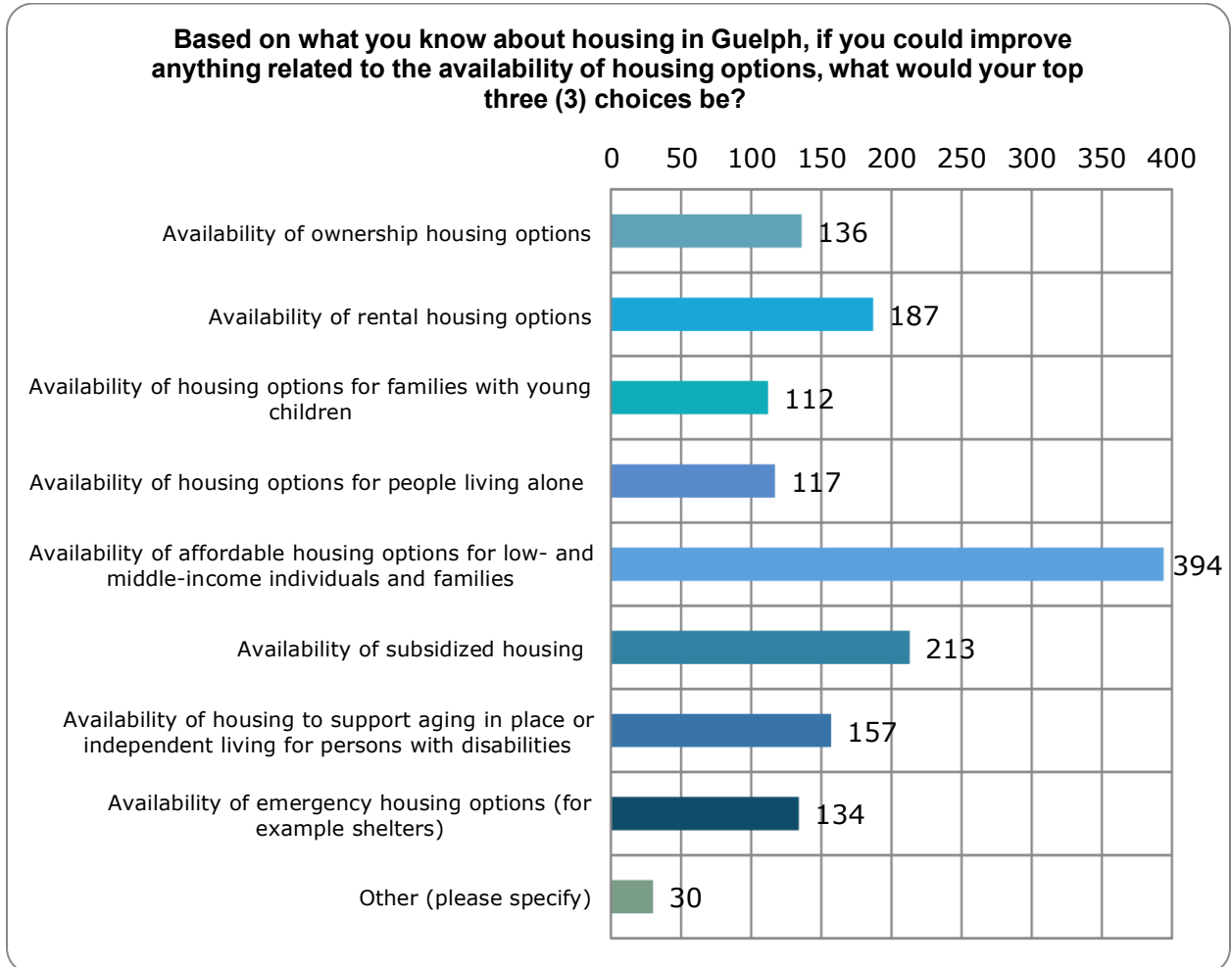
The City launched two surveys during Phase 3 of the project:

- **Survey #1:** Guelph Housing Affordability Strategy Survey 2024
 - A survey designed to be completed by any interested members of the public to share what actions they think would help address housing gaps in Guelph.
- **Survey #2:** Additional Residential Dwelling Unit (ARDU) Survey 2024
 - A survey designed to be completed by people who have an interest in ARDUs, whether that be through building, owning, or renting and ARDU, or just a general interest.

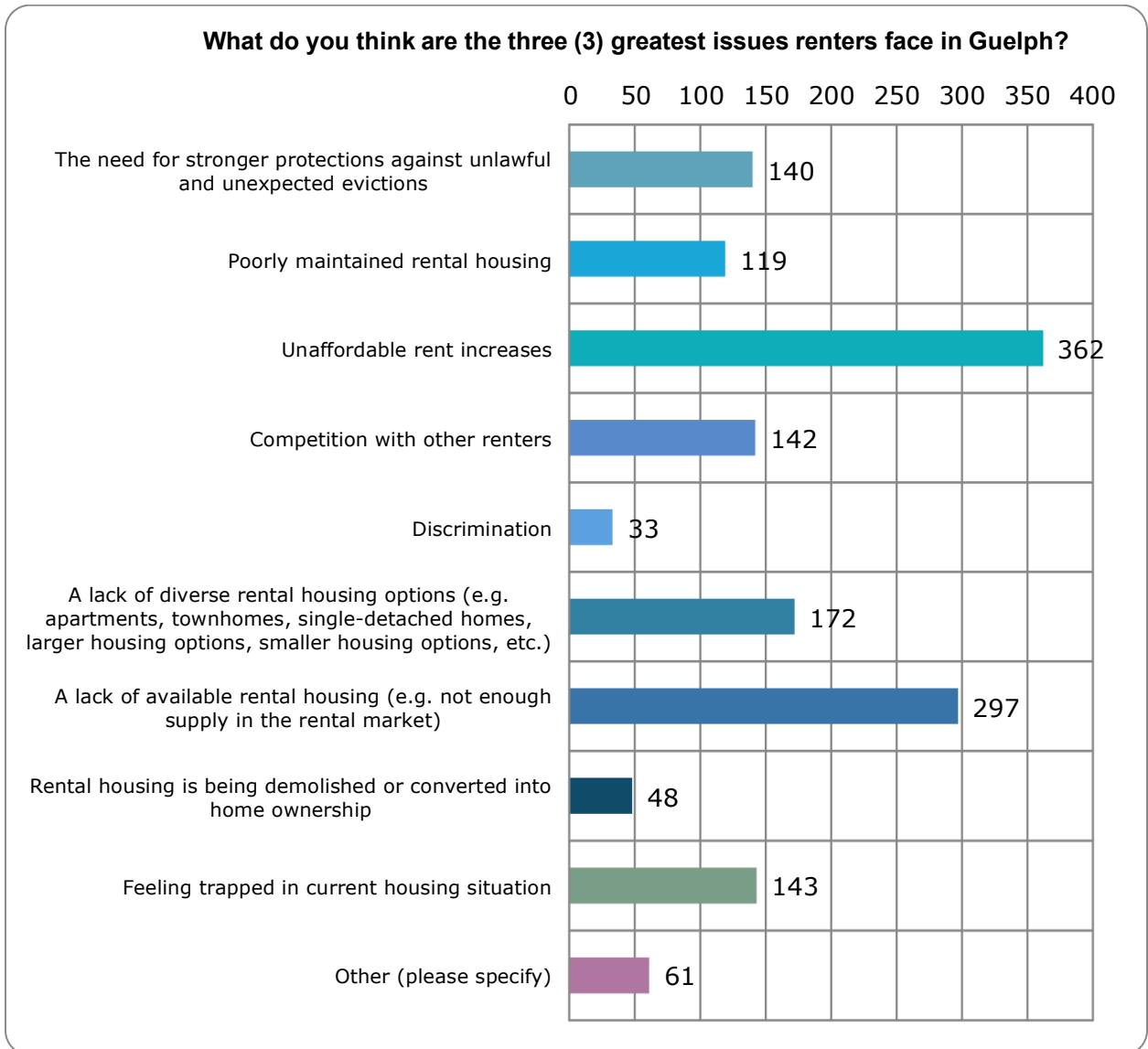
The surveys ran from April 22, 2024, to June 23, 2024. A total of 535 responses were recorded for Survey #1, and there were 318 total responses for Survey #2.



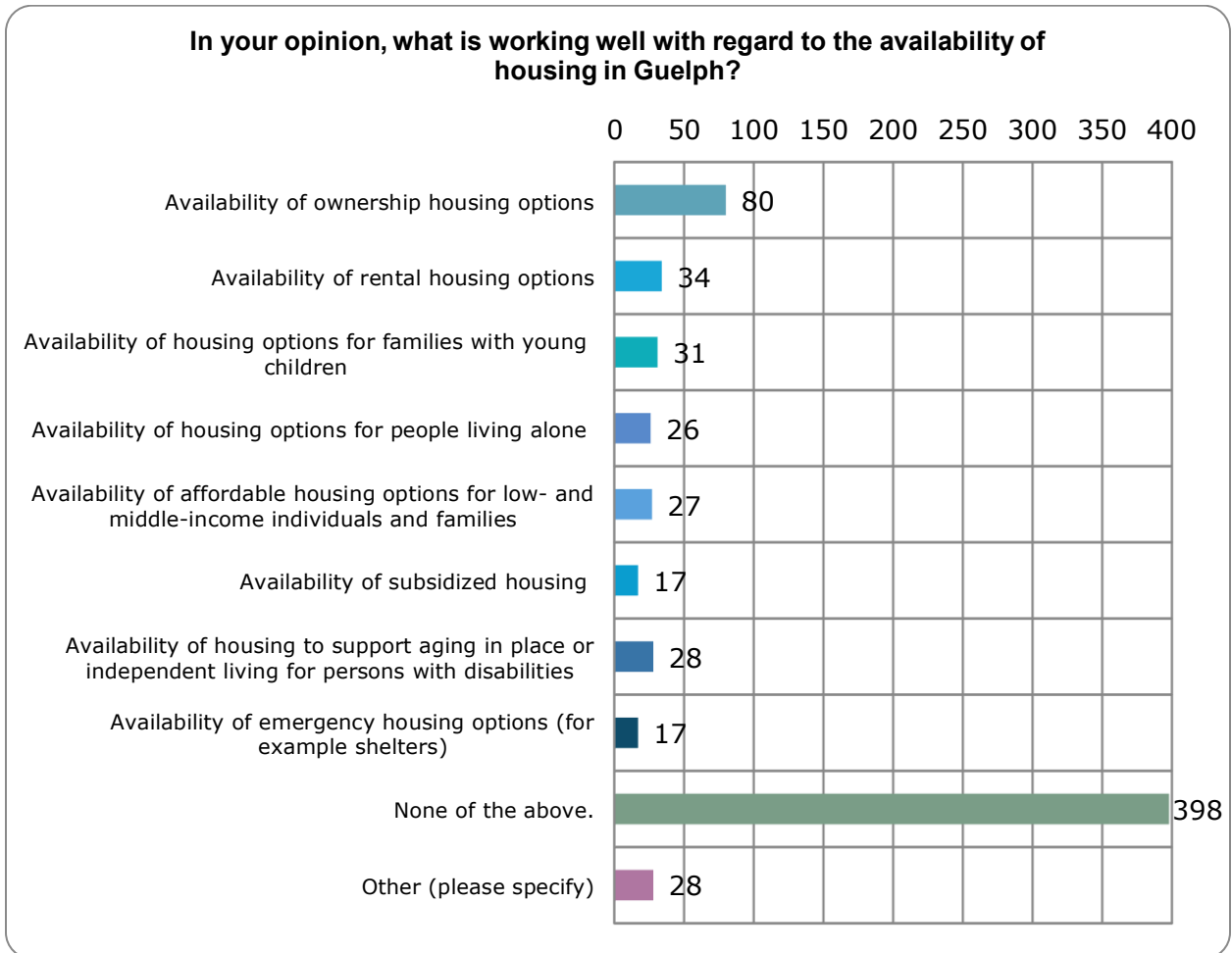
When asked what they would improve about housing options in Guelph, seventy-four per cent (74 per cent) of Survey #1 respondents selected said the availability of housing options for low- and middle-income individuals and families.



Sixty-eight per cent (68 per cent) of survey respondents identified unaffordable rent increases as the greatest issue renters in Guelph face.



When provided with a list of options, seventy-four per cent (74 per cent) of respondents indicated that nothing is working well regarding the availability of housing in Guelph.



The majority of respondents to this survey (56 per cent) own the home they live in, and 47 per cent of respondents said they live in housing they can afford. Notably, the most-represented household income range amongst survey respondents was a range of \$100,000 or more.

For Survey #2, 85 per cent of respondents do not currently own a property with an ARDU, while just under half of all respondents (49 per cent) are interested in creating an ARDU on their property. Of the 48 respondents who do have an ARDU, 42 (87 per cent) are located within a single detached dwelling.



2.2.5 Public engagement on Draft Strategic Actions

On June 13, 2024, City of Guelph and Dillon Staff held two drop-in public engagement sessions at the Royal City Mission, one from 2 pm to 4 pm, and one from 6 pm to 8 pm.

The location for the session, and the outreach tactics, which included staff outside of the venue encouraging people to participate in conversations, resulted in individuals from across the housing spectrum feeling welcomed and comfortable providing feedback. Over the course of the afternoon and evening sessions, approximately 90 people attended, and several informal conversations also took place outside of the venue. Attendees were noted to have positive and solution-oriented feedback.

The event was held drop-in style, and there were five interactive stations for attendees to visit:

- The Education Station, where participants could learn about housing affordability in Guelph and provide feedback on the definition of housing affordability;
- The Vision and Goals Station, which shared the draft vision and goals for housing in Guelph and collected feedback on the draft vision and goals;
- The Draft Actions Station, where participants could review the draft actions to improve housing affordability and provide feedback on the actions and prioritize the actions;
- The Reimagination Station, which provided an opportunity to reimagine the housing continuum; and
- The Surveys and Stories Station, where participants could share their stories about housing-related experiences or visit the project website to participate in the surveys.

Feedback shared by participants at all five stations will help to further refine the strategy .



3.0 What we heard in Phases 2 and 3

Feedback that was gathered through Phase 2 and Phase 3 engagement was grouped into the key themes listed below. The subsequent section summarizes the feedback in more detail.

Theme	Description
Incentivize affordable housing development	Types of incentives might include financial, such as Community Improvement Plans, and non-financial, such as density bonusing.
Barriers to housing development	Barriers that the City can work to reduce might include construction costs, infrastructure costs, time-related costs, shovel-ready land availability, and more.
Flexibility and diversity in housing	Offer a range of housing to accommodate varied needs.
Hidden costs	Numerous hidden costs are impacting housing affordability, such as bidding wars, non-rent-controlled units, and the cost of construction.
Capacity-building and skills-sharing	There is an opportunity to increase knowledge and share skills related to the development process.
Streamlined and transparent development process	Look into ways that the development approvals process could be streamlined.
Increased accountability	Need for increased accountability for housing providers.
Community through housing	Need to promote connections and a sense of community through housing.

3.1 Input by theme

This section summarizes the input and feedback heard within each of the key themes outlined above with more detail.



3.1.1 Incentivize affordable housing development

- To increase the development of affordable housing, it needs to be incentivized
 - Financial incentives could include community improvement plans, development charge reductions/exemptions, tax relief, and affordable housing reserves
 - Non-financial incentives could include density bonusing
- Survey #1 participants identified this as the most important action the City of Guelph could undertake to address affordability

3.1.2 Barriers to housing development

- There are too many barriers to developing housing in Guelph
- Financial barriers include construction costs, infrastructure costs, and tree-cutting costs
- Non-financial barriers include a lack of adequate infrastructure, delays in the development process, and competition with other municipalities

3.1.3 Flexibility and diversity in housing

- The current range of housing options is limited – there should be a variety of options that are diverse in size, type, and cost
- Housing options need to be able to provide for people at different stages of life
 - Encourage the development of units that accommodate multi-generational households
- Should explore ways of supporting smaller housing units, such as modular housing and tiny homes
 - Nearly half (49 per cent) of respondents to Survey #2 expressed interest in creating an ARDU on their property, but only 15 per cent currently own a property with one

3.1.4 Hidden costs

- Renters face too many hidden costs that make housing less affordable
 - Bidding wars on rentals
 - Students needing to pay rent over the summer months to ensure they have housing in September, even if they leave Guelph



- Utilities and Wi-Fi typically not included in rent
- The amount of time spent in the development approvals process can negatively impact the cost of housing development as costs of land, construction, and labour increase as well as the risk of project timelines for development

3.1.5 Capacity building and skills sharing

- Capacity building and knowledge sharing could take place amongst City staff, housing providers, and non-profits to share information about the development process
- Opportunities for private sector developers to partner with non-profit housing providers to share their know-how of developing housing

3.1.6 Streamlined and transparent development process

- Development approvals process could be streamlined to increase how quickly housing can be built
- Could be policy, administrative, or educational streamlining (or all three)
 - Options could include a Community Planning Permit System (CPPS), how-to guides, or a concierge service
 - A concierge service might involve supporting non-profit organizations through the affordable housing funding process in addition to development approvals
- Process should also be transparent, so organizations know exactly what they need to provide from the beginning

3.1.7 Increased accountability

- Engagement participants want to see increased accountability for housing providers
- This might take the shape of a landlord registry or licensing process, which could increase protections for renters
- A vacancy tax could be used to address concerns related to vacant properties
- Desire for increased accountability for different levels of government to better address affordability



- City of Guelph should collaborate more with the County of Wellington

3.1.8 Community through housing

- Develop housing that promotes social connectedness by being close to daily amenities
 - A mix of housing types needs to be in proximity to amenities
 - Just over half (52 per cent) of Survey #1 participants identified promoting a mix of housing as one of the most important actions the City could take
- Co-housing models should be explored as a means of promoting affordability and a sense of community

4.0 What we heard in Phase 4

This section summarizes the input and feedback heard at the Open House by activity station, which are described in **Section 2.2.5 Public engagement on Draft Strategic Actions**.

4.1 Education station

Overall, participants identified that affordability should be income-based, and there should be different housing options for all levels of income.

4.2 Vision and goals station

4.2.1 Draft vision

Overall, participants supported the draft vision but suggested that it was missing accessibility and a human-rights approach.

4.2.2 Draft goals

Overall, participants expressed support for the goals. Some participants included additional points to consider for the goals, including the following:

- Protect existing housing stock.
- Support aging in place.



- Work with and support non-profits to build affordable housing.
- Prioritize municipal land for building affordable housing.
- Focus on those needing deeply affordable and supportive housing.
- Reimagine the housing continuum for Guelph.
- Work with all levels of government on affordable housing.
- Make it easier for small-scale and local developers to build housing.
- Support diverse housing types and housing tenures¹ such as co-ops and co-living.

These comments have been considered as part of the actions that will be included in the Strategy.

4.3 Draft actions station

Participants identified the following actions for the City to prioritize in the HAS:

- Theme #1: Tools to directly supply affordable housing and increase the availability of housing that meets community needs
 - Purchase lands to build affordable housing that would be managed by housing service providers.
 - Identify underutilized City-owned properties that could be converted for affordable housing purposes.
 - Consider the purchase of multi-unit buildings on the market that could be used for affordable housing.
- Theme #2: Programs and policies to support affordable housing development or maintenance
 - Explore tools and other opportunities to prevent the (further) erosion of the rental housing supply (e.g., implementing a Rental Housing Protection Bylaw, implementing a vacant home tax).
 - Explore the opportunity to create and implement a Concierge Program and supporting how-to guide to assist non-profit

¹ Housing tenure refers to the way that people live in and pay for their homes, and it describes the nature of one's occupancy and the rights and responsibilities associated with it. Housing tenure typically includes categories such as homeownership, renting, or living in government-assisted/subsidized housing.



- organizations in: moving through the affordable housing development process; identifying and applying for funding/grant opportunities to support affordable housing development; and sourcing lands to be developed for affordable housing purposes.
- Encourage the development of ARDUs (e.g., through an awareness program), and find ways to streamline the process.
 - Theme #3: Financial tools and policies to support affordable housing development or maintenance
 - In collaboration with key actors in the housing community, create a City-wide Community Improvement Plan with financial incentives on affordable housing development, housing accessibility, and sustainable housing design.
 - Identify and allocate adequate resources to help advance affordable housing initiatives.
 - Theme #4: Educational tools and policies to improve community awareness of local housing needs
 - Conduct a mapping review of residential property parcels to identify those that would be suitable for an ARDU. Contact the homeowners to let them know that their property has potential to support an ARDU and provide information to help them do this if they are interested.
 - Theme #5: Advocacy and partnerships
 - Explore opportunities to help create partnerships between private sector developers (who have the insight and knowledge about building housing) and non-profit housing providers (who have the interest in building affordable housing but not necessarily the knowledge and skill to move through the development approvals process).
 - Collaborate with the County and housing providers to help develop non-market housing.
 - Theme #6: Monitoring and implementation
 - Establish a monitoring and reporting program for the HAS to track progress on housing-related initiatives.



- Every year, check to see how local housing needs are being met; how the City is doing in meeting the short-, medium- and long-term benchmarks for housing; and, how the City is doing in meeting any provincial and federal government directions.

4.4 Reimagination station

Participants preferred a non-linear continuum that centered on an end-goal where people have access to housing that is adequate and affordable and meets their needs. This differs from the current housing continuum, which is linear and ends with home ownership as the end-goal.

4.5 Surveys and stories station

Participants were encouraged to take the survey at this station. Feedback is summarized in **Section 3.0**.

At this station, participants were invited to share their housing-related stories. This station provided a safe space for participants to be vulnerable and share their lived experiences or struggles with housing. The main sentiments that came out of these stories are that:

- Affordable housing is a deeply personal issue; and
- safe, accessible, and affordable housing is vital to quality of life and overall health, well-being, and success of individuals in a community.



Stories also mentioned:

- Issues of hidden homelessness (people who live temporarily with friends, family or strangers or in temporary accommodations with no long-term housing security);
- struggles with mental and physical health issues that impact housing security;
- desires for pets and families to be included in emergency shelters;
- that housing situations can change drastically when issues arise, and there needs to be responsiveness and flexibility in housing options; and
- that people with disabilities are often overlooked and struggle with finding affordable housing options.

5.0 Key directions and recommendations

Based on the feedback and input received so far, the following directions and recommendations should be considered in the next phase of the project to help shape the final goals, actions, and targets of the HAS:

- Collaborate with different levels of government to develop non-market housing.
- Allow alternative and diverse forms of housing, such as co-housing models or tiny homes.
- Work to improve the affordable housing development process by providing resources to non-profit organizations and other affordable housing developers.
- Identify properties in Guelph that could be used for future affordable housing developments.
- Use enhanced policies and efficient processes to create more housing and affordable housing.
- Ensure monitoring is done to track progress and communicate progress broadly.
- Find ways to financially incentivize the creation of affordable housing.



6.0 Preliminary vision

Using feedback gathered during engagement, some draft ideas for the Housing Affordability Strategy Vision were developed. Based on feedback from the public, these ideas will be further refined and eventually developed into one vision statement:

- Range of housing types and living arrangements to meet the needs of our diverse community.
- Human rights come first: a holistic, empathetic, and equitable approach.
- Special consideration for the underserved and marginalized.
- Accountable, action-oriented leaders in housing affordability through strong collaborations and partnerships.
- Willingness to explore experimental strategies to tackle housing affordability.

7.0 What we are doing

The City of Guelph is the regulatory authority over land use in the municipality. This means that there are a number of possible ways to address housing affordability that are within the City's control, such as introducing financial incentives to promote the development of rental and non-profit housing and developing policies to promote the availability of a full range of housing types. The final HAS will be a toolbox of actions for the City to use to address housing needs. This will include benchmarks for housing affordability in Guelph, along with a roadmap for implementing the actions that are developed – actions will be divided into short, medium, and long term.

As guided by what we heard during engagement activities to date, some directions for the HAS include but are not limited to:

- Reimagining the housing continuum;
- providing incentives (e.g., through an Affordable Housing CIP) for affordable housing development;



- exploring alternative housing types and models (co-housing, tiny homes, etc.);
- tracking and monitoring affordable housing initiatives;
- assisting people in moving through the development process (knowledge-sharing and capacity-building, Concierge Program); and
- identifying lands or properties that are either City-owned or could be purchased for affordable housing.

8.0 What we are not doing

Some suggestions have emerged during engagement for ways to tackle housing affordability that are not within the City's control and are, therefore, not feasible for this strategy. The City has the responsibility to create the conditions needed for housing development (e.g., by implementing tools to help accelerate the development approvals process), but has a limited ability in regulating some aspects of the process. For example, some of the suggestions heard during engagement activities that are out of the City's control included forcing house construction to occur within a certain timeframe, influencing the list price of homes on the private market, requiring that a development be rental only, or ensuring that affordable housing is built. Similarly, while the City can and does advocate for changes at different levels of government, it cannot change provincial or federal legislation.

9.0 Next steps

In our next phase of engagement, City staff and Dillon Consulting will use the feedback and input gathered to develop a Housing Affordability Strategy, with specific goals, objectives, approaches, and actions to be implemented to address housing needs. Engagement activities for Phase 5 (Finalize Housing Affordable Strategy) include:

- HAS Focus Group meetings,
- Pop-up events at community centres, and
- Public engagement on the Draft Housing Affordability Strategy, by posting it to the project website for review by the public and other interested parties



The City of Guelph and Dillon Consulting staff will present the Draft Housing Affordability Strategy for public input during the final phase of engagement, Phase 5: Finalize Housing Affordability Strategy.

It is anticipated that the draft Housing Affordability Strategy will be presented to Council in Q3 2024 on October 8th, and the final Housing Affordability Strategy will be presented to Council for approval in Q4 2024.

For more information on the project, or for engagement updates please visit: www.haveyoursay.guelph.ca/housing-affordability