

Prioritizing Deeply Affordable Housing for People with Developmental Disabilities in Housing Plans

Dear Members of City Council,

Thank you for the opportunity to provide input as you work to shape the future of housing in our city. I am writing to highlight the urgent need to include deeply affordable housing for individuals with developmental disabilities in your upcoming housing strategies. This population faces unique challenges that require thoughtful collaboration between the city, social housing managers, and developmental services agencies.

It has been noted that the current focus is on below-average market rentals and home ownership which is again not attainable for people with Intellectual and Developmental Disabilities and they need to be part of the planning for supportive housing with support on-site or close by to assist them in maintaining their tenancy and become active members in their community

The Challenge

People with developmental disabilities often live on fixed incomes, such as Ontario Disability Support Program (ODSP) benefits, which provide a limited monthly amount. This leaves many unable to afford even the lowest-cost rental options in our city. Without access to appropriate housing, individuals with developmental disabilities may experience instability, homelessness, or be forced to live in institutional care settings that limit their independence and quality of life. Others remain living with family until the family unit is no longer able to support them where they then find themselves in crisis.

The Solution: Collaboration for Inclusive Housing

To address this critical gap, I urge the city to include the following measures in its housing plans:

Set Aside Dedicated Units

Mandate that a percentage of units in all new affordable housing developments be reserved for individuals with developmental disabilities. Work with social housing providers to ensure these units are affordable, ideally costing no more than 30% of a tenant's income.

Partner with Developmental Services Organizations

Collaborate with agencies and families that support individuals with developmental disabilities to design housing tailored to their needs. This includes accessibility features, proximity to public transit and services, and access to onsite or nearby support programs such as life skills training, employment assistance, and mental health care.

Explore Funding Opportunities

Maximize the impact of provincial and federal housing programs by aligning municipal plans with these resources. Incentives for nonprofit and private developers to build deeply affordable housing, combined with funding from developmental services, can help address affordability challenges.

Foster Community Integration

Focus on housing projects that integrate people with developmental disabilities into the broader community, promoting inclusion and reducing stigma. Mixed-use developments and scattered site models can help achieve this goal.

The Benefits

Investing in housing for individuals with developmental disabilities is a win-win for our community. It promotes equity, independence, and dignity while reducing reliance on costly emergency and institutional services. Studies consistently show that stable housing improves health outcomes and enhances participation in the workforce and community life.

Call to Action

I respectfully ask City Council to:

Establish a working group with representation from housing providers, developmental services organizations, and individuals with lived experience to identify actionable priorities.

Include specific targets and funding allocations for deeply affordable housing for people with developmental disabilities in all upcoming housing plans.

Advocate at the provincial and federal levels for enhanced funding and support to meet the housing needs of this vulnerable population.

Together, we can build a more inclusive city where everyone, regardless of ability, has the opportunity to thrive. Thank you for your attention to this critical issue, and I look forward to seeing the positive changes this council will champion in the months and years ahead.

Sincerely,

Cora Pacheco

Guelph Wellington Family Network