

Solution: Housing Liaison

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PROBLEM

How can we overcome barriers to getting funding to Non-Profits, Faith-Based and Indigenous Organizations to increase low-income housing in Waterloo Region?

Picture this scenario: You are a leader in a non-profit, a faith-based or an Indigenous organization. You know there are large numbers of refugees and immigrants coming to Waterloo Region full of hope for a new life; hope for their children to have a better future in Waterloo Region. You know the current situation of low-income housing in our area. There just isn't enough. There isn't even enough housing for those already living in the Region. It's disheartening.

You believe funding is coming from the Federal Government but are not clear on what you need to do to get started with the various tiers of government – to get even a small project off the ground, so you can start to make a difference and increase low-income housing options in our area. You feel like you are not getting anywhere fast – you don't have enough funding to hire staff to navigate the system efficiently, and you just don't know what to do to move your low-income housing project forward. You have some great ideas for projects that you know will help. You just need help to navigate these complex waters...

Enter the Community Builders, a group of passionate individuals who joined the Leadership Waterloo Region class of 2022 for varying and diverse reasons. We are united around the desire to simplify and help non-profits, faith-based, and Indigenous organizations overcome barriers to access funding for low-income housing in Waterloo Region; in turn, helping to address the inadequate supply of low-income housing.

Barriers

There are several barriers that are leading to the inadequate supply of low-income housing including:

Waterloo Region has experienced explosive growth over the last five years: Kitchener-Cambridge-Waterloo CMA grew by 12% (to 593,882 people) from July 2015 to July 2020, the fastest growth rate of any of the 290 metropolitan areas across Canada and the United States with populations of at least 500,000 and almost twice as fast as Canada overall (6.4%), and almost four times faster than the United States (3.1%) from July 2014 to July 2019 [KWCF 2021 Waterloo Region Vital Signs Report – Affordable Housing.]

There are too many regulatory and planning barriers that prevent affordable home ownership and rental housing: In general, lengthy timelines and complicated processes for approval of rental developments increased both the risk and cost for developers. In Edmonton and the Region of Waterloo, developers found that minimum building code standards impacted financial feasibility. Rental licensing bylaws in Waterloo further added to development costs. The Federation of Ontario Rental Housing Providers (FRPO, 2015) suggested that rental licensing bylaws overlap with regulations provided by the Residential Tenancies Act, building codes, and fire codes. In the cities of Vancouver, Saskatoon, and Waterloo, minimum parking requirements

and offsite levies for municipal infrastructure deterred private rental development. chrome-
<https://cdn.dal.ca/content/dam/dalhousie/pdf/faculty/architecture-planning/school-of-planning/pdfs/studentwork/MPlanIndependentStudy/Lemphers-Barriers%20and%20Opportunity-A%20Meta-Analysis%20of%20Affordable%20Rental%20Housing%20in%20Canada-2017.pdf>

Developers do not have the correct incentives to build the required kinds of housing: The most fundamental barrier to building affordable rental housing is that, without government funding or tax incentives, it does not yield a satisfactory return on investment for real estate developers [Black, 2012; Pomeroy, 2012]. Municipalities often lacked the financial resources to encourage rental construction and maintenance on their own. Across Canada, loans were more difficult to secure for rental construction. Lending institutions charge high-interest rates to finance rental projects because they are viewed as risky. Rising construction and material costs led to even thinner margins of profitability
<https://cdn.dal.ca/content/dam/dalhousie/pdf/faculty/architecture-planning/school-of-planning/pdfs/studentwork/MPlanIndependentStudy/Lemphers-Barriers%20and%20Opportunity-A%20Meta-Analysis%20of%20Affordable%20Rental%20Housing%20in%20Canada-2017.pdf>

In addition to these barriers, those in not-for-profits, faith-based, and Indigenous organizations encounter additional barriers including:

Navigating the current system in municipal government. The system is slow – it is confusing since there are too many people in a two-tiered municipal government, and it’s hard to ensure funding gets to the right people at the right time.

One example of a recent experience from a faith-based organization:

- Father Toby Collins, the Priest of St. Mary’s Roman Catholic Church in downtown Kitchener experienced many challenges in the development of what eventually became the foundation for a Better Tent City.
- One of the struggles Fr. Toby experienced was the lack of coordination among various stakeholders in the social service sector with respect to accessing services on behalf of or for the homeless. In fact, Fr. Toby was asked to form a committee to try and address this very issue.
- Among the greatest barriers, he identified included the opaque processes that made it difficult to obtain a desired outcome, ongoing redirection from one social service agency to another, and a general lack of knowledge regarding available resources.

Tight timelines for funding applications and a lack of resources to complete these applications.

- Often very little notice is given when funding is available from the Federal Government, and applications are due within tight timelines.
- We learned from Karen Cooper, Manager of Business and Strategic Planning at the City of Kitchener in 2021 (principal author of Housing For All – the City’s housing strategy) that we often don’t know when the funding from the Federal Government will come. Most of the time very little notice is given and applications are due within a short timeframe. She mentioned how the City of Ottawa has created a “3rd sector liaison position” to assist the non-profit sector. This “Housing Developer” position at the City liaises with other departments, the non-profit sector and other levels of government, to help create opportunities to increase the supply of affordable housing units.
- Ryan Pettipiere, Director of Housing at the Region of Waterloo, also recognizes that there is currently a lack of resources for many of the non-profits, faith-based and Indigenous groups in the Region.

Many non-profits and faith-based organizations are not aware of when funding opportunities arise. They may not have the knowledge or expertise to be able to submit complete applications tailored to the specific funding opportunity.

Places to Intervene

There are several places to intervene to increase the supply of low-income housing in partnership with not-for-profits, faith-based or Indigenous organizations, including but not limited to:

- Provide tax breaks or incentives for developers to partner with not-for-profits, faith-based or Indigenous organizations to build low-income housing.
- Provide government support for not-for-profits, faith-based or Indigenous organizations.
- Require inclusionary zoning where a certain percentage of low-income homes are required. This would enable not-for-profits, faith-based or Indigenous organizations to have greater access to low-income housing options.
- Municipalities provide surplus land to not-for-profits, faith-based or Indigenous organizations to develop low-income housing.
- Subsidized government loans for not-for-profits, faith-based or Indigenous organizations to assist with builds
- Explore collaborative projects across agencies and funders to develop more low-income housing options.

PROPOSED SOLUTION

Based on our discussions and research, our solution is for Waterloo Region to create a Housing Liaison position like the 'Housing Developer' under the Affordable Housing branch at the City of Ottawa (Appendix A – job description) which has helped move forward affordable housing applications at a faster pace. This position would partner with community groups from the time funding is identified until construction is complete.

The Waterloo Region Housing Liaison position would enable not-for-profit, faith-based, or Indigenous groups that don't have the expertise by:

- Identifying needs and opportunities that exist in these community groups and partnering these needs with potential low-income housing solutions; and,
- Identifying affordable housing applications and/or funding to help move applications forward at a faster pace than other applications; and,
- Engaging with Ryan Mounsey, Manager, Affordable Housing Development at the Region of Waterloo, and the Local Area Municipalities to facilitate connections between the non-profits, faith-based and Indigenous groups to developers & builders in our community.

The Housing Liaison position would effectively be the point person to help find solutions to problems that arise, and help community groups navigate the complex government systems. This position would require someone who understands the various levels of government, has strong problem solving and communication skills, and is tenacious and caring about the outcomes for community groups.

The position in Ottawa provides an excellent foundation with which to model the position in Waterloo Region. It is recommended that the Region connect with the City of Ottawa to learn more about how they could create a similar position.

Intended Outcomes

Ultimately creating this Housing Liaison position in the Region would create more low-income housing options by:

- Helping affordable housing applications move forward at a faster pace.
- Building efficiencies into information sharing and application processes.
- Advocating for low income earners' human right to affordable housing.
- Developing stronger relationships between builders, developers, and various community groups.
- Connecting with community stakeholders to partner on low income housing projects.
- Streamlining complex housing and funding application processes.
- Bringing visibility and transparency to government funding for the community groups.
- Motivating developers/builders to choose high density, small size units in high volume by incentivizing them.

Potential Unintended Consequences

Some potential unintended consequences could be:

- Prioritizing one community group over another.
- The development of a culture of competition, as opposed to a culture of cooperation, with respect to the acquisition of government funding for affordable housing projects.
- Community groups with more resources/staffing reaping more benefits than their smaller counterparts.
- The bottlenecking of requests for service through a single Housing Liaison employee, resulting in potentially increased response wait times and a corresponding reduction in requests for service.
- An overreliance on the Housing Liaison position as the sole arbiter of information and resources around the issue of affordable housing.
- The development of communication barriers between a single Housing Liaison employee and various racialized and cultural stakeholders within the Region of Waterloo.
- Community members from a specific demographic (ex. specific language/religion/immigration status) may feel further marginalized.

Suggested Partners

Although this position would be funded by the Region, its success will hinge on its effectiveness in liaising between a two-tiered municipal government and the Region's various community stakeholders. Relationships will need to be built across all levels to help streamline and drive efficiencies in this process and to help identify opportunities for further growth. Some of these governmental and community stakeholders could include:

- The Region of Waterloo.
- The cities of Kitchener, Waterloo, Cambridge, and the townships of Wilmot, Wellesley, Woolwich, and North Dumfries.
- For-profit building and development corporations.
- Not-for-profit social service affordable housing organizations.
- Immigrant, Indigenous, and single parent social service agencies.
- Faith-based organizations.
- Local homeless shelters.
- Various marginalized and low-income populations with lived experience.

Financial Implications

Funding for a full-time equivalent position will need to be built into the Region's budget for approval by Council. An option could be to explore a 3-year contract position to test the feasibility of the position before committing to a full-time permanent position.

Who We Spoke To

- Ryan Pettipiere, Director of Housing Services, Region of Waterloo
- Ryan Mounsey, Manager of Affordable Housing Development, Region of Waterloo
- Karen Cooper, Manager of Business and Strategic Planning at the City of Kitchener
- Allan Mills, Executive Director, Extend-A-Family Waterloo Region
- Andrew Ramsaroop, Social Planning and Affordable Housing Program Lead
- Father Toby, Rector, St. Mary's Catholic Church
- Joe Mancini, The Working Centre
- Dan Vanderbelt, Community Engagement Coordinator with the Immigration Partnership at the Region of Waterloo
- Jenny Kluge, Housing Developer, Affordable Housing Branch, Community and Social Services, City of Ottawa

Lessons Learned

The issue of affordable housing is immediate, extensive, and complex, impacting a diverse group of people with various cultural backgrounds, abilities, socioeconomic statuses, ages, and genders. There is no one-size fits all solution. In addition, the current system is opaque, difficult to navigate, and inefficient, resulting in numerous instances of referral, redirection, and frustration for everyone involved. In order to overcome these challenges, a balance needs to be struck in developing immediate solutions tailored to the unique and diverse needs of individuals impacted while also trying to serve the vast majority of people impacted.

Other Resources

- KWCF 2021 Waterloo Region Vital Signs Report – Affordable Housing.
- <https://cdn.dal.ca/content/dam/Dalhousie/pdf/faculty/architecture-planning/school-of-planning/pdfs/studentwork/MPlanIndependentStudy/Lemphers-Barriers-and-Opportunity-A-Meta-Analysis-of-Affordable-Rental-Housing-in-Canada-2017.pdf>
- <https://cdn.dal.ca/content/dam/dalhousie/pdf/faculty/architecture-planning/school-of-planning/pdfs/studentwork/MPlanIndependentStudy/Lemphers-Barriers-and-Opportunity-A-Meta-Analysis-of-Affordable-Rental-Housing-in-Canada-2017.pdf>

Job Title: Housing Developer 2			
Department: Community & Social Services Dept.			
Service: Housing Services		Branch: Affordable Housing Development Branch	
Report to: Manager, Affordable Housing			
Affiliation: CIPP	PG: 05	HRS: 35 hrs/wk	JK: 10005437

Job Summary:

Responsible for facilitating the development of new affordable housing working with private and non-profit development groups. Assisting the housing development team with identifying innovative approaches, policies and programs to increase the supply of affordable housing.

Key Duties:

Facilitates the construction of new affordable housing by:

- identifying appropriate sites for residential development;
- managing Request for Proposal (RFP) processes to select development proponents;
- reviewing project capital and operating budgets, planning reports, environmental and other technical studies;
- coordinating technical project teams (architects, engineers, consultants) in evaluating the design of new construction or rehabilitation construction projects;
- negotiating agreements between the City of Ottawa and developers;
- coordinating meetings and consultations involving development proponents, community groups, City of Ottawa staff, members of City Council, financial institutions, and senior levels of government;
- drafting staff reports to City Council and committees; and
- creating and managing development schedules and assisting in the expediting of development projects.

Develops municipal policies and programs to assist in developing affordable housing by:

- writing reports and presentations to senior management, provincial committees, members of the housing industry, community groups, etc., and representing the city on external task forces that address the creation of more affordable housing;
- researching and identifying mechanisms/intervention strategies that will allow housing developers and the private market to reduce the cost of building and/or renovating in order to make housing more affordable for low or moderate income households;
- liaising with City Planning staff on issues and policies which may impact affordable housing development, and facilitating the delivery of new initiatives;
- negotiating, communicating and advocating with federal/provincial governments, other housing agencies, the private sector and other city departments to implement mechanisms for more affordable housing;

- recommending goals and targets for the preservation and development of affordable housing; and
- providing advice, interpreting policy and facilitating effective program delivery.

Works in accordance with applicable health and safety legislation, policies and procedures, and all other legislation, policies and procedures relevant to the work.

Performs other related duties consistent with the duties outlined above

Education:

Four (4) year under graduate in a related discipline (e.g. urban planning, urban studies, architecture, public or business administration)

Experience:

A minimum of two (2) years of housing experience

Knowledge:

- Residential building/construction industry
- Project management methodologies
- Project construction and operating budgets
- Principles of land use planning, development approvals processes and environmental considerations related to development
- Broader development issues including urban design and principles of smart growth
- Housing policy guidelines and relevant federal/provincial agreements and legislation, such as Housing Services Act, Planning Act.
- Municipal government policy, regulation and political processes
- Socio-economic theory and Land Economics (e.g. housing supply and demand factors and their impacts)
- Research and evaluation methodology and techniques
- Social housing programs
- Word processing and spreadsheet software
- Knowledge of applicable health and safety legislation, including the rights and duties of workers

Competencies/Skills & Abilities:

- Effective stakeholder consultation processes and facilitation skills
- Reasoning and problem-solving skills
- Superior verbal and written communication skills
- Negotiation and advocacy skills
- Establish and maintain positive working relationships
- Understand and resolve conflicting priorities
- Research, assess and recommend intervention strategies for housing development

Personal Suitability:

- Collaborative approach in working with others
- Demonstrated initiative and innovation/creativity
- Work under pressure in stressful situations
- Work within deadlines to meet goals and targets

Desirable Qualifications:

- Oral fluency, reading and writing ability in French
- Working towards one of the following designations: CIP/OPPI designation, Landscape Architecture, or Engineer