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10 updated Housing Accelerator Fund best practices

Explore the 10 best practices from successful Housing Accelerator Fund applications.

Updated July 2024

We've updated the 10 best practices from successful Housing Accelerator Fund applications!

Only applicants who weren't approved in the 2023 application window can apply for funding from this round of the Housing Accelerator Fund. If you are eligible and reapplying, use this information to guide your application.

We encourage all municipalities to explore these proven strategies and integrate them into their plans to help boost housing supply and affordability.

10 Housing Accelerator Fund best practices

1. **End exclusionary zoning**
2. **Make municipally owned lands available for housing**
3. **Increase process efficiency**
4. **Prioritized/enhanced development approval process**
5. **Comprehensive review of development charges and fee schedules**
6. **Reduce or eliminate parking standards**
7. **Eliminate restrictions**
8. **Develop affordable housing community improvement plans**
9. **Design and implement guidelines**

10. **Develop grant programs**

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1. **End exclusionary zoning**

   - Stop low-density zoning and regulation that excludes housing types, such as affordable and social housing and which limits the variety of housing typologies in residential areas.
   - Encourage mixed-use and high-density residential development by allowing as-of-right zoning within proximity to urban centres and rapid transit.
   - A proactive approach includes adopting by-laws with as-of-right zoning measures to increase height and density.

   Additional guidance for applications to the second round of the Housing Accelerator Fund – successful implementation strategies from the initial application window.

   - Allow 4 units per residential lot as-of-right* to support infill development in low-density neighbourhoods municipality-wide **(minimum program requirement for Large/Urban stream).**
   - Increase as-of-right building height and density near transit to a minimum of 4 storeys within 800 metres of main transit routes, increasing to high-density development near high-frequency rapid transit **(strongly recommended for Large/Urban stream).**
   - Increase as-of-right height and density near post-secondary institutions to a minimum of 4 storeys **(strongly recommended where applicable).**
   - Expand as-of-right permissions for corner lots and large lots by allowing 6 to 8 units per lot, for example.
   - Expand as-of-right permissions in urban cores and along key corridors to promote mid-rise development.
   - Expand mixed-use zoning to increase housing options in commercial areas and near services and amenities.
   - Assess infrastructure capacity and review policies such as fire flow requirements and on-site stormwater management to promote infill and higher-density development.

   As-of-right zoning (also known as pre-zoning) improves predictability and shortens approvals timelines by removing the need for rezoning applications

2. **Make municipally owned lands available for housing** through strategies such as disposition, acquisition and/or pre-development.

- Complete an inventory and assessment of surplus and underused municipal land.
- Develop policies and guidelines to allow the municipality to acquire strategic land parcels for redevelopment, including affordable housing.
- Pre-zone and/or pre-service priority sites to facilitate as-of-right redevelopment.
- Engage the private sector and non-profit housing providers on acquisition and partnership opportunities.
- Consider long-term lease strategies to non-market housing providers as an alternative to disposition.
- Develop a framework for co-locating community facilities and housing.

3. **Increase process efficiency** by implementing new technologies or software to speed up development approvals, such as e-permitting.

- Expand e-permitting to all development and building permit types **(strongly recommended).**
- Develop systems to monitor and publicly report on application processing times, with emphasis on continuous assessment and improvement **(strongly recommended).**
- Digitize case management and automate workflows to speed up reviews.
- Expand delegation of authority to staff for development permits and minor variances based on established thresholds or parameters.
- Leverage digital tools like artificial intelligence (AI) and automated compliance checks to focus internal resources on more complex development applications.
- Digitize regulations and bylaws to support future iterations of e-permitting.
- Consider building information modeling (BIM) and 3D digital twins to support long-term land use and infrastructure planning.

4. **Prioritized/enhanced development approval process** for rental and affordable housing.

- Fast-track development and building permit reviews for non-market housing and purpose-built rental developments.
- Eliminate rezoning, public hearing and urban design review panel requirements for affordable housing municipality-wide.
- Increase as-of-right density permissions for affordable housing.
- Implement inclusionary zoning to require a minimum number of affordable units in new developments near transit.
- Consider rental-only zoning.

- Create a concierge service to help non-profit providers navigate the development and building permit process.

5. **Comprehensive review of development charges and fee schedules** including waivers for affordable housing.
   - Ensure that development and amenity charges are clear, transparent and pre-determined (not subject to negotiation).
   - Waive application and/or permit fees for priority housing types including non-market housing and/or purpose-built rentals.
   - Reduce or eliminate development cost charges for non-market affordable housing.
   - Implement disincentives or other strategies to encourage development of vacant, underdeveloped or idle land.

6. **Reduce or eliminate parking standards** to increase project viability, density and reduce carbon footprint.
   - Eliminate minimum parking requirements near rapid transit and in downtown centres.
   - Reduce or eliminate parking requirements for accessory dwelling units and multiplexes.
   - Implement policies to reduce car dependency and promote active transportation, such as bike parking and storage and car sharing.

7. **Eliminate restrictions and add flexibility** related to height, setbacks, building floor area and other regulations to allow greater variety in housing types and density, including accessory dwellings.
   - Reduce and streamline urban design guidelines such as height restrictions, visual character requirements, view cones, setbacks and angular planes to support higher density and improve project viability.
   - Increase allowable floor area (FAR/FSR) for new developments.
   - Update policies to facilitate the conversion of vacant and underused commercial properties to residential and mixed-use.
   - Explore form-based zoning as an alternative approach, that focuses on the form and scale of residential buildings in relation to the lot. This approach focuses on the physical characteristics of the building instead of the number of dwellings inside the building.

8. **Develop affordable housing community improvement plans** or strategies/plans for the rapid deployment of affordable housing.

- Develop an affordable housing strategy or Community Improvement Plan (for Ontario municipalities).
- Introduce or enhance density bonusing policies to allow increased density in exchange for affordable housing and/or community amenities.
- Ensure the affordable housing strategy links together all available tools. These include zoning reform, municipal lands, regulatory and process improvements, fee reductions and financial incentives (see other Best Practices). This comprehensive approach makes it easier and faster to develop affordable housing.

9. **Design and implement guidelines** or pre-approved building plans for missing middle housing or specific accessory dwelling such as laneway housing or garden suites.

- Develop design guidelines for low-rise infill developments including accessory dwelling units and multiplexes to support as-of-right zoning permissions.
- Develop and/or promote standardized designs and pre-reviewed building plans, including the adoption of the federal design catalogue.
- Introduce a fast-tracked review process for standardized designs to allow projects to proceed directly to building permits.
- Expand certified model programs to include additional low-rise building types such as multiplexes, row houses and townhomes.

10. **Develop grant programs** encouraging the development of housing types that align with the Housing Accelerator Fund such as missing middle, row homes, purpose-built rental and/or that promote innovative construction techniques.

- Develop incentive programs to promote construction of accessory dwelling units, suites and other missing middle housing types.
- Offer incentives to enable the conversion of vacant or underused non-residential buildings to housing.
- Promote innovation through incentives for pre-fabricated, modular housing and mass timber construction.
- Introduce targeted financial incentives for affordable housing and purpose-built rentals.

Note: Provincial enabling legislation may be required to fully implement certain measures such as eliminating rezoning requirements for affordable housing, inclusionary zoning, rental-only zoning and development charge waivers. In these cases, we encourage municipalities to ease planning and approval processes to the greatest extent possible. This includes eliminating public hearings and urban design review panels for affordable housing.

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