

Healthy Community – Attainable Housing

BACKGROUND:

- Despite the growth occurring in Huntsville, there is a growing shortage of attainable housing in our community. “Attainable housing” refers to a supply and type of housing that is readily available, affordable and meets peoples’ needs (adequate in condition, appropriate in size, accessible in that it is located in areas with common services and activities).

- This need in Huntsville is due in large part to the household incomes in Huntsville being significantly lower than the Provincial average. Muskoka and Huntsville have a high number of people employed in the retail, construction, accommodation and restaurant industries. These industries represent over 37% of the Muskoka workforce and 23% of the Ontario workforce. The seasonal nature of these industries and the lack of higher income industry in the region is a primary cause of this situation.

2010 Family Income			
Income	Ontario	Huntsville	Difference
Median	\$80,987	\$71,006	-14.06%
Average	\$100,152	\$84,628	-18.34%

- While this issue has been in the forefront in the Town and Muskoka for some time, it has also become acute in the Greater Golden Horseshoe Area, and [provincial initiatives](#) to address this matter have been recently announced. Other provincial initiatives targeted at promoting an increase to the supply of adequate affordable housing, include the [Long term Affordable Housing Strategy](#), which includes a new proposed Planning Act tool of inclusionary zoning. This tool is not yet available as the enabling Regulations have not yet been approved. Once this tool is available, municipalities will need to incorporate official plan policies that specify the types of development that may be subject to the tool, as well as details regarding the number, types and price thresholds of the dwellings to be required.
- A number of the initiatives announced by the Province are targeted at both “affordable” and “social” housing. These housing types are not the same. As outlined in the Provincial Policy Statement (PPS) and the Muskoka Official Plan, affordable pertains to market housing that is the least expensive of: housing that costs less than 30% of gross annual household income, or; housing that is priced at least 10% below the average permanent residential resale price, and below the average market rental price for non-ownership housing. Social housing is subsidized housing for households that would otherwise spend more than 30% of their income on housing.
- In Muskoka, the District of Muskoka is responsible for the provision of social housing and has adopted the [Muskoka Housing and Homelessness Plan 2014-2024 \(MHHP\)](#) to address this need. A primary goal of MHHP is to increase the supply of housing in all types of attainable tenures. To achieve this goal, the Muskoka Affordable Housing Initiative (MAHIP) was established to stimulate private sector development of attainable housing through funding grants to developers, builders and landlords.
- As municipalities struggle to fund the maintenance and improvement of capital assets for which they are currently responsible, public sector created social housing is rare. The challenge for municipalities is how to encourage a profit driven private sector development industry to include the construction of attainable housing into their business models and development plans for the growth areas of municipalities.

POLICY CONTEXT:

Provincial Policy Statement (2014):

- 1.2.1 h) A coordinated, integrated and comprehensive approach should be used when dealing with planning matters within municipalities, across lower, single and/or upper-tier municipal boundaries, and with orders of government, agencies and boards including addressing housing needs in accordance with provincial policy statements such as the Ontario Housing Policy Statement.
- 1.4.1 to 1.4.3 Requires planning for a range and appropriate mix of housing forms and densities to meet future needs, including establishing targets for housing which is affordable to low and moderate income households.
- 1.4.1a) & b) Requires municipalities to maintain at all times a 10-year supply of residential growth through intensification and redevelopment, and a 3-year supply of housing units through lands that are serviced and suitably zoned.
- 1.4.3 b) Permits all forms of housing, including second units, required to meet the social, health and well-being requirements of residents.
- 1.4.3 c) Directs development of new housing toward locations where appropriate levels of infrastructure and public service facilities are or will be available to meet current and projected needs.

Muskoka Official Plan (MOP):

- B.1 g) A range of housing options will be available and attainable for all demographic groups and income levels.
- B.9 To promote land use and development patterns that supports the health and well-being of the people of Muskoka and contribute to a higher quality of life.
- B.13 To encourage the provision of a wide array of housing opportunities, including housing that is attainable to a full range of income and demographic groups in Muskoka.
- C.38 & C.40 A full range of housing, in terms of form, tenure and affordability, to meet the projected demographic and market requirements for current and future residents will be encouraged. A full range of housing includes: ownership housing and rental housing, social housing, supportive housing, and housing for those with special needs. These policies are to be implemented through zoning by-laws at the Area Municipal level.
- C.41 & C.42 Secondary dwelling units, within a single detached, semi-detached or row dwelling or within an ancillary structure and are encouraged within Urban Centres where services are available as well as within the Community and Rural designations.

- C.43 The Muskoka OP contains policies that would not permit the conversion of rental housing with five or more rental units to condominium ownerships unless specific rental vacancy rates and existing market rent levels within the community are met.
- C.49 Opportunities to increase the supply of affordable housing through intensification and redevelopment are encouraged.

MOP Policy Directions Report:

- 28 MOP should include a minimum affordable housing target (for low to moderate income households).
- 29 MOP should establish a minimum density for designated growth areas in Urban Centres.
- 30 MOP should establish housing mix targets for new development in designated growth areas of each Urban Centre.

Towards Attainable Housing 2011 Report

Town Strategic Documents:

Strategic

Plan Collaborate with private sector and the broader community to create an economic development strategy that will diversify and strengthen the year round economy, and guide investment of time and resources.

Economic Development

Objectives:

- Goal 1
 - Partner in regional affordable housing strategies to address housing barriers

Unity Plan

Goal 12 Affordable Housing: The community of Huntsville will advocate for, provide and facilitate housing that is affordable to a range of incomes, and household sizes to meet the needs of all demographics at all stages of life.

Huntsville Official Plan:

2.4.7.2 Developing more affordable housing opportunities both on a rental and home ownership basis is an important component of the Town’s economic development strategy. The Town will explore a variety of means to increase the supply of affordable rental and ownership housing, including encouraging residential conversions, development of or disposal of appropriate Town owned or other public lands, intensification in the downtown core, and lower cost home ownership opportunities, and provide for an appropriate inventory of lots available for development.

4.1.6 The need to provide residential densities which are more cost and energy efficient will be balanced by a strong consumer desire for single detached dwellings on relatively larger lots. The Huntsville Urban Settlement Area will continue to develop a strong single detached dwelling base, while providing opportunities for multiple unit dwellings at medium and

higher densities, in order to assist in the provision of housing for an aging population, entry-level housing and affordable housing.

- 4.2.4.3 Where appropriate, alternative standards for residential development may be implemented to reduce housing costs and to achieve urban design objectives. Where such alternative standards are proposed, they shall be supported by appropriate studies that assess the impacts and benefits of such alternate standards...
- 4.4.1 Varied size, density and tenure of housing will be encouraged to provide reasonable housing costs.
- 4.4.2 The Town is committed to providing affordable housing options throughout the Urban Area and will encourage programs and policies that provide a range of affordable housing opportunities, including rental housing in order to meet identified housing needs.
- 4.4.3 The creation of dwellings in conjunction with retail and office commercial uses is promoted in commercial designations.
- 4.4.4 Residential intensification and infilling is encouraged within existing residential neighbourhoods as a means of increasing the amount of available housing stock. Intensification initiatives may include the provision of accessory units and the use of innovative lot configurations that would allow additional lots to be created in established areas.
- 4.4.5 The Town may utilize the provisions of the Development Charges Act, and other municipal approvals and mechanisms to encourage the production of affordable housing.
- 4.5.1.10 The density provisions may be exceeded for multiple unit residential development where bonuses are provided by the developer and are legally secured by appropriate agreements with the Town. Such bonuses may include, amongst other matters, underground parking; increased or specialized activity areas; recreational areas and facilities, public easements or conveyances of shoreline areas, or other public benefits.
- 4.5.1.13 “Where the Town permits accessory dwelling units in residential areas in the Urban Area...” a series of criteria must be followed.
- 4.10.2 The conversion of single family to multiple family residential uses is encouraged.
- 12.1.3 Community Improvement Areas are identified through deficiencies in the availability and/or condition of :
 - k) affordable housing.
- 13.7.4.2 The by-law (bonusing) may authorize such increases in height and density of development otherwise permitted in the zoning by-law that will be permitted in return for the provision of such facilities, services or matters as are set out in the by-law.

13.8.1 The Town may acquire, hold, develop or dispose of lands for any purpose that implements the Official Plan, in accordance with applicable Provincial statutes.

CONSIDERATIONS:

- 2.4.7.2 of the Official Plan currently identifies that developing more affordable housing development opportunities is an important component of the Town’s economic development strategy. However, the policies of Subsection 4.4 typically “encourage”, or “promote” its development. The policies also identify the use of municipal incentives to encourage this type of development.
- While intensification and infilling has occurred in the Urban Settlement Area, there is still a need for affordable housing in the community.
- The identification of this issue in the Economic Development Goal in the Town’s new Strategic Plan, the issuance of a request for Proposal in search of a private sector partner to build an attainable housing development on Town owned land, as well as the recent appointment of an Affordable Housing Advisory Group indicate Town Council’s commitment to resolving this issue.
- Secondary dwelling units are permitted within existing dwellings, and provide opportunity for more alternate housing/rental accommodation, while preserving the character and maximizing use of existing services, and represents intensification.
- Affordable housing concentrated in the urban settlement area close to employment services, amenities, transportation routes can reduce long term transit system and service costs.
- Our population is aging, and there is an increased need for seniors to age in place and in their community. The built form of low-rise medium to high density development close to amenities, employment opportunities, social services and transportation routes is an ideal form of attainable housing.
- Short term affordability of development of attainable housing in rural areas must also be weighed against additional costs for long term maintenance of private services, snow ploughing, transportation, condo fees etc. which may not lead to affordability over time.

SUMMARY:

A review of best practices from other municipalities across Muskoka has revealed that the following policy approaches may assist in addressing some of the considerations:

- A definition of attainable housing should be included in the Official Plan.
- The policies should permit development which uses or reuses the existing built form, including garden suites and second dwelling units as of right in the Urban Settlement Area, Communities and the Rural Area.

- Second dwelling units in accessory structures should be permitted in Urban Areas and Communities, with policies that reinforce the nature of the use as accessory, and integration within the urban context (specifying location, size and character).
- In appropriate areas within the built up area of the Urban Settlement Area (services and infrastructure are available), the policies should encourage and support infill and intensification that is in character with the neighbourhood. Also, where appropriate, infill lot creation or the development of vacant or underutilized parcels should also be encouraged/supported. The predominant built form for intensification and redevelopment within the existing developed residential areas will be single detached, semi-detached, townhouse and low rise apartment buildings.
- Respecting the designated growth area of the Urban Settlement Area, the policies should establish a minimum density for new development. A housing mix target should also be identified.
- A minimum target for attainable housing should be required for new development and when being provided as part of a subdivision or condominium development, it should be required in an earlier phase of the development build out.
- The policies should also enable Town Council to use of a range of planning and development tools, including community planning or other by-laws (inclusionary zoning), Bonusing by-laws & agreements, and Community Improvement Plans and financial incentives to encourage the construction of affordable housing.