



# Housing Pledge

December 15, 2023

## Housing Pledge

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### Our Pledge

There is no question that the availability and affordability of safe, appropriate housing is a significant concern for communities across Ontario, including ours. The City of Woodstock is committed to working together with the provincial and federal governments, as well as private sector partners, to address this housing crisis. Our Housing Pledge outlines our vision for the future of Woodstock as it relates to ensuring residents have safe, affordable housing that meets their family's needs and outlines the strategies and actions we will undertake to achieve our housing target of 5,500 new residential units by 2031.

The City of Woodstock has done much to establish a development-supportive environment over the past decades and has a reputation amongst the development industry of being a good place to invest in. However, more can be done to enhance a supportive environment to specifically encourage the development of new housing. This can be accomplished through policy and bylaw amendments, through streamlined and accelerated approval processes, through development-supportive programs and by ensuring the availability of an adequate supply of residentially designated land.

The cost and availability of financing for housing development and home ownership plays a primary role in housing market conditions. Ultimately, the decision to advance a project from concept to reality is the decision of the landowner or land developer which is strongly influenced by housing market conditions. The City has limited (to no) ability to counteract these broader housing market factors. As such, the City of Woodstock commits to enhancing a supportive environment, over which the City has control, to facilitate the development of 5,500 additional dwelling units by 2031.

### Vision and Goals

Woodstock City Council held a Special Council Meeting on Nov. 9, 2023 to explore gentle density strategies and brainstorm initiatives and barriers to creating more homes in Woodstock. It was clear that while there are a few areas where our Council has a difference of opinion, they are aligned on the following:

- We want Woodstock to be a place where everyone has a place to call home.
- We must have adequate funding and capacity for supportive infrastructure like roads, sewers and transit while not placing undue burden to fund this required infrastructure on the shoulders of our residents.
- We take a broader view of housing supportive infrastructure that includes adequate health and childcare services, educational institutions and recreational facilities.
- We must approach this challenge holistically and ensure we're building a complete community, not just more housing units so we can deliver services that contribute to the quality of life our residents want.
- We will look to increase density appropriately to effectively use available lands while protecting quality of place and our environment.

# City of Woodstock Housing Target

Overall Provincial  
Target for Ontario  
(2021-2031)



Target for the 50  
Municipalities  
Assigned Targets



1,327,300 homes

Target for the  
Remainder of  
Ontario



172,700 homes

Woodstock’s target is 5,500 new housing starts, which is our share of the province’s overall target of 1.5 million. The targets we’ll be measured against for the three years of the Building Faster Fund, are:

Year	Target
2023	403
2024	458
2025	550

This means, to achieve the total provincial target of 5,500 by 2031, the City would need to be exceeding 550 units per year post 2025 to make up for the lower targets in 2023-2025.

For context, in 2022, the actual number of housing starts in Woodstock (based on the MMAH tracker using CMHC housing start data) is 257. By comparison however, the City of Woodstock issued permits for 322 housing units in 2022.

## Capacity to Achieve the Housing Target

As of year-end 2022, the City’s remaining residential land supply was estimated to be approximately 5,700 units. Further information on approval status and unit types in Woodstock is as follows:

	Approved (Registered / DA, SPA)	Estimated (Submitted / Circulated etc.)	Estimated (Unit potential on remaining vacant lands)	Unit Type Totals
Low (SFD/Semis)	1,485	57	144-155	1,686-1,697
Med (THs)	1,017	225	8-20	1,250-1,262
High (Apts.)	1,606	773	16-34	2,395-2,413
Unknown Unit Type	342			342
<b>Total</b>	<b>4,450</b>	<b>1,055</b>	<b>168-209</b>	<b>5,673-5,714</b>

The above supply estimates do not currently include any additional lots or units that could potentially be accommodated through infilling and intensification (e.g., ARUs, re-development of sites at higher density, more mixed use etc.). For decades, the County of Oxford Official Plan and the City of Woodstock Zoning Bylaw has included permissive intensification policies and regulations. Accordingly, much of the opportunity for residential infill has been used.

City Council amended the City of Woodstock Zoning Bylaw to implement permissions for Additional Residential Units in November of 2023. These amendments create the potential for thousands of “as of right” intensification opportunities in the context of zoning restrictions. We anticipate that uptake on intensification through Additional Residential Units will initially be modest with approximately 20-50 units per year. A communications and marketing plan outlining how to implement an Additional Residential Unit will be developed to increase owner interest and reduce the number of conversions that occur without required permits and inspections.

## **How We Will Achieve our Target**

At its special meeting of Nov. 9, City Council affirmed the following initiatives / directions to achieve our housing target of 5,500 new residential units by 2031. The City of Woodstock will work collaboratively with partners as appropriate to implement the following actions and initiatives.

### **Municipal Initiatives – Planning**

There are a number of specific initiatives staff will take in conjunction with Oxford County who delivers planning services on behalf of the City of Woodstock and is accountable for the County of Oxford Official Plan. Council will consider and adopt as appropriate initiatives that support and reduce barriers to increasing density in key areas of the city and provide direction and clarity around built form and permitted uses to support gentle density and minimize conflict with existing residential.

Some examples Council will explore include:

1. Continue to work with Oxford County to identify and implement interim Official Plan Policy revisions to facilitate more ‘gentle density’ and other appropriate forms of residential intensification in advance of a new Official Plan.
2. Review the City’s Zoning Bylaw provisions to ensure they effectively facilitate appropriate forms of residential intensification, including review of permitted unit types, built form (e.g., height, setbacks, lot coverage etc.) and other provisions (e.g., parking requirements).
3. Continue to explore opportunities for boundary expansions with our neighbouring municipalities with the goal of ensuring that there is an adequate supply of designated residential land supply.

### **Municipal Initiatives – Service Levels**

The City of Woodstock will also explore changes to service levels to support the increased population and housing density, including:

1. Exploring new initiatives or changes to parking that support increased density in residential neighbourhoods (i.e., year-round parking permits, alternate-side on-street parking, increasing bylaw staff).

2. Increasing staff resources to support development approvals (planning / building).
3. Investigating enhanced / expanded transit service.

### **Municipal Initiatives – Streamline and Simplify**

To remove barriers to development and facilitate more homes built faster, Woodstock City Council will:

1. Review current planning and development approval processes to identify opportunities for further streamlining (e.g., updated pre-consultation process, further delegation of approvals to staff, potential benefits of Community Planning Permit System, etc.).
2. Review options to eliminate or reduce the need for approval by two step planning approval process (County Council and City Council) for applications that include an Official Plan Amendment and / or a Plan of Subdivision. Options could include a delegation of approval authority by County Council for certain types of planning applications.
3. Increase capacity within specialized technical skill sets to improve housing supply tracking / monitoring and simplifying / updating of the Zoning Bylaw to ensure timely development approvals.
4. Consider the creation of an Intensification Facilitator position as a single point of contact within the building department to focus on supporting smaller-scale intensification applications (e.g., ARUs, conversion of existing buildings / properties to multi-unit residential, etc.).

### **Municipal Initiatives – Financial**

The City of Woodstock and County of Oxford have exempted affordable housing projects from development charges since 2009. Similarly, the City and County have exempted all residential development from development charges within the central business district for decades. The City of Woodstock and County of Oxford Community Improvement Plan includes a program for a tax increment grant back of new residential unit development within the central business district.

To further support private investment in the development of new housing units in Woodstock, the City will:

1. Explore new Community Improvement Plan grant / incentive programs to increase affordable housing, rental housing and other desirable forms of housing to areas of the City outside of the Central Business district.
2. Consider exemptions for parkland dedication (and cash-in-lieu) for affordable housing developments.
3. Consider boulevard parking and/or cash-in lieu of parking options for development within a broader area in proximity to the downtown.
4. Consider the development of a Brownfields Community Improvement Program to encourage the re-purposing of former commercial or industrial buildings to residential where appropriate. Programs could include grants for feasibility studies and environmental site assessment studies.
5. Research the authorities to introduce fees and/or penalties for property owners of long-term vacant buildings.

## **Municipal Initiatives – Municipal Surplus Lands**

The City actively reviews its land inventory and pursues opportunities to realize the highest and best use. Evidence of this is the recent sale of a half-acre of unused road allowance to an adjacent property to facilitate the construction of a 10 storey, 125 dwelling unit apartment building.

The City of Woodstock has declared two significant parcels of land surplus. The first is the former Woodstock Hydro Building which has been conditionally sold through a recent public Expression of Interest process. This property sale will include performance covenants requiring a minimum of 100 new dwelling units to be constructed in this downtown location. The second is a portion of land previously rented for the purpose of a golf course which has since closed. The City is completing the necessary planning studies to re-zone the land to high density residential and is proposing two towers with approximately 340 dwelling units. This land will be offered for sale through a similar Expression of Interest process.

The City will continue to explore other opportunities to yield additional housing with surplus municipal properties.

## **Municipal Initiatives – Infrastructure**

New housing cannot be built without putting in place both the hard infrastructure and community infrastructure that provides the critical foundation for complete and safe communities. It is crucial that Council, together with support from provincial and federal partners:

1. Identifies potential areas of concern around infrastructure in existing residential areas (roads, water, wastewater etc.)
2. Considers requirements to ensure sufficient City services (police, fire, transit, recreation etc.) as well as the needs for increased services for childcare, health care, education.

## **Considerations and Dependencies**

While there are a number of actions and initiatives the City of Woodstock can and will undertake to support the development of new housing units, the reality is that there are some factors we have no control over. In order to be successful in achieving our housing target, it will be important that:

1. The province recognizes that addressing the housing crisis is a shared responsibility and should therefore identify annual targets for developers, homebuilders and other community partners as well as accountability measures and metrics to ensure the building of homes in a timely manner once development approvals are in place.
2. The province looks at and overcomes delays related to reviewing and issuing permits within provincial ministries (e.g., Ministry of Transportation, Ministry of Environment, Conservation and Parks) and mandate maximum response times.
3. The province recognizes that servicing land for development without any guarantee of the timing or extent of the development and associated collection of development charges is risky for municipalities and should therefore help municipalities by providing funding for infrastructure upfront to mitigate this risk. Municipalities also face the need to front end finance significant costs for certain infrastructure (i.e., sewer / water), which is recoverable from development at a future date. Municipalities do not wish to finance these costs with 10- or 20-year debentures in this interest rate environment when there is a financial

recovery by development proponents before the end of the debenture term. The province should consider a short-term loan program for municipalities for these circumstances.

4. The province commits to building supporting institutions including schools, hospitals, daycares and long-term care facilities to support the provincially anticipated surge in population.
5. The province considers introducing a new intake under the “streamline Development Approval Fund” for municipalities in the second tranche of the housing pledges as this funding program was only offered to 39 of the largest municipalities.

## **Reporting and Monitoring Measures**

The provincial housing tracker compares yearly new home construction starts against municipal housing targets. Currently, this tracker relies on monthly housing data provided by Canada Mortgage and Housing Corporation (CMHC). CMHC will only undertake a Completions and Absorptions Survey in a Census Metropolitan Areas (CMA). Census Canada establishes a CMA only when there is a total population of at least 100,000, of which 50,000 or more must live in a core (municipality). A Census Agglomeration (CA) must have a core population of 10,000. Woodstock is not a CMA, but rather a CA as established by Census Canada given its population of approximately 50,000. This in turn means that Woodstock will not be subject to a CMHC Completions Survey.

The housing tracker indicates that Woodstock has 120 housing starts in 2023. The source of this data is unclear. The City of Woodstock has issued building permits for 354 dwelling units between January and October of 2023. Similarly, CMHC data for 2022 inaccurately reported on the total number of housing starts as referenced to the number of units created by issued building permits.

All the initiatives in this housing pledge are directed towards the outcome of increasing the number of building permits that will create new housing. We will monitor progress towards our housing target using building permits issued and we recommend that the province also follow this methodology.

## **In Conclusion**

The City of Woodstock is pleased to submit our Housing Pledge as requested by the Ministry of Municipal Affairs and Housing and do our part in collaboration with the province and other stakeholders to increase opportunities for safe, affordable and appropriate housing for Woodstock residents. As we grow, we cannot lose sight of the burden this growth will place on our taxpayers. It will be important to maintain a clear vision of the Woodstock we aspire to be so we can preserve what people value about our community as we capitalize on the benefits growing our community offers to those living in Woodstock and across Oxford County.