

Minister of Housing,
Infrastructure
and Communities



Ministre du Logement,
de l'Infrastructure
et des Collectivités

Ottawa, Canada K1P 0B6

Mayor Mike Savage
Via electronic mail: mayor@halifax.ca

October 4, 2023

Dear Mayor Savage,

Last month, I wrote to you to ask that Halifax supplement its application to the federal government's Housing Accelerator Fund. I asked that you and Council do more to legalize housing so that more homes can be built, faster.

To do this, I made four suggestions: permitting four units as-of-right, creating a public facing affordable housing strategy, increasing density near universities, and allowing four storeys as-of-right.

Council has moved ahead with the suggested measures, except for permitting four storeys as-of-right. On this point, Council came back with a made-in-Halifax plan that they believe is not only better for the local context, but in fact bolder to deliver more "missing middle" units. If Council believes it can achieve the same ends, if not more, with this amended proposal, then I welcome the approach, especially if we are able to avoid any delay in implementation.

This is important work, because we need more homes for more families as soon as possible, and I trust your plan will offer just that. I appreciate your and Council's willingness to collaborate to ensure more affordable family-sized homes get built. Additionally, I look forward to working with Halifax to unlock more housing through the implementation of your rapid transit strategy, and through improvements to the city's infrastructure.

On the understanding that you will:

- Increase height in Established Residential 3 Zones;
- Increase height in Higher Order Residential and Corridor Zones;
- Increase height and Floor Area Ratio (FAR) increases in Centre Zones;
- Increase density near universities;
- Remove more minimum parking requirements;
- Increase as-of-right development approvals; and
- Work with the Province to enable unilateral discharge of DAs

I am pleased to inform you that Halifax's Housing Accelerator Fund application is approved.

I would like to thank you, Mayor Savage, as well as Council and staff for the work that you have put into this initiative. I would likewise like to thank my colleagues in who represent various parts of Halifax Regional Municipality: MP Lena Diab, MP Andy Fillmore, MP Darren Fisher, and MP Darrell Samson for their continued advocacy for housing in HRM.

Sincerely,

[Redacted signature]

The Honourable Sean Fraser, P.C., M.P.
Minister of Housing, Infrastructure and Communities



Mayor Mike Savage
mayor@halifax.ca

September 21, 2023

Dear Mayor Savage,

As a former resident of Halifax, and as a proud Nova Scotian, I was pleased to review Halifax's Housing Accelerator Fund (HAF) application. As one of the fastest growing cities in our country, I want to ensure the federal government plays an important role in supporting the City as it continues to grow and contribute to the well-being of the Atlantic region and the entire country.

From our many conversations, I know you want to see Halifax do everything that it can to ensure housing is available for all of its residents. You have been a tremendous advocate for Halifax, and an extraordinary partner in your engagement with the federal government.

While the City is embracing economic and population growth, it has withstood a series of challenging events. From hurricanes, to wildfires, to floods, the impacts of increasingly common severe weather events have threatened the City's progress. It is reassuring to have your leadership at such an important juncture. I commend you and Council for your service during these times, and for maintaining your focus on increasing the supply of housing in Halifax, and deliberately densifying the city core near existing municipal services, including transit, in the face of unprecedented challenges that have a serious impact on the City's residents.

Upon reviewing your application in detail, there were a number of initiatives which I was pleased to see. However, there are a few changes I request that you consider in order to strengthen it. These include:

- Legalizing 4 units as-of-right city wide;
- Legalizing dwellings up to 4-storeys high for all residential areas in the Centre Plan;
- Creating a non-market affordable housing strategy with staff dedicated to it; and
- Increasing density and student rentals within walking distance of the City's first rate post-secondary institutions.

I am eager to approve Halifax's application, but I will not be able to do so before you consider these improvements. I will remain a steadfast ally of the City and of any municipality ready to lead with the level of ambition required to solve Canada's housing crisis.

I appreciate you entertaining these requests and look forward to future conversations.

Sincerely,



The Honourable Sean Fraser, P.C., M.P.
Minister of Housing, Infrastructure and Communities

HALIFAX



MIKE SAVAGE

MAYOR
LE MAIRE
ME'R

1841 Argyle Street
PO Box 1749
Halifax, Nova Scotia
Canada B3J 3A5

902.490.4010
1.800.835.6428

mayor@halifax.ca
hall fax.ca
lif@MikeSavageHFX

September 29, 2023

The Honourable Sean Fraser, MP
Minister of Housing, Infrastructure and Communities
House of Commons
Ottawa, Ontario K1A 0A6
Sean.Fraser@parl.gc.ca

Dear Minister Fraser,

Thank you for consideration of Halifax Regional Municipality's (HRM) Housing Accelerator Fund (HAF) application. We were pleased to receive your letter dated September 21, 2023.

HRM Regional Council (Regional Council) discussed the contents of your letter in their meeting on September 26, 2023. Council is supportive of the requests outlined in your letter and would be pleased to address these requests in HRM's HAF application. To support this intent, Regional Council passed a motion which:

- Directs staff to prepare amendments to planning regulations to:
 - permit 4 units on all residential lots within the Urban Service Boundary, where water, wastewater and transit services are provided;
 - permit more missing middle housing options within the Regional Centre, with particular focus on smaller, faster building forms including wood frame construction, while ensuring capacity of water and wastewater services are considered, and exempting existing and proposed heritage conservation areas;
 - Confirms an affordable housing strategy that addresses non-market housing will be created and a HAF staff position will be dedicated to that work;
 - Commits the municipality to work with post-secondary institutions to increase density and create opportunities for student housing within walking distance of schools across the region; and,
 - Directs the Mayor to write to the Provincial government requesting the legislative ability for staff to discharge development agreements that may be more restrictive than the underlying zoning permissions.

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As part of the discussion, Regional Council carefully considered your request to permit dwellings up to four storeys high in all residential areas in the Regional Centre. Regional Council has requested a more nuanced approach, where staff would prepare amendments that would permit more 'missing middle' housing options. To do this, staff will prepare a comprehensive package of amendments to the Regional Plan, Regional Centre Secondary Municipal Planning Strategy and Land Use By-law.

We believe this set of amendments will be bolder than a uniform four-storey height permission, and most importantly, will result in delivering more units, quickly. This will create more opportunities for residential intensification while respecting the integrity of the Centre Plan. Examples of potential changes include:

- Increasing density and height near transit and corridors identified in the Centre Plan such as:
 - Height increases in Established Residential 3 Zones
 - Height increases in Higher Order Residential and Corridor Zones
 - Height and Floor Area Ratio (FAR) increases in Centre Zones
 - Further increasing density near universities including a review of height and number of units
- Beyond the Centre Plan we also can work on additional support for housing through the following actions:
 - Continuing our work on removing minimum parking requirements across the region through the Regional Plan Review
 - Continuing our work on reducing our reliance on development agreements by increasing as-of-right development approvals through the Regional Plan Review
 - Working with the Province to enable unilateral discharge of existing Development Agreements so that more density can be enabled in our Suburban Areas

We would like to avoid significant changes in existing and proposed heritage areas, which are important to Halifax's sense of place and character. We believe preserving these areas, at the same time as enabling significant growth in other areas, are at the heart of making our region a wonderful place to live and visit. This type of planning approach has created some of the most successful cities in the world. As such, Regional Council would like to exclude these areas from height increases.

We would also note the existing planning framework permits additional development on existing heritage properties through a discretionary development agreement process, which can allow for significant additional residential density while respecting heritage character.

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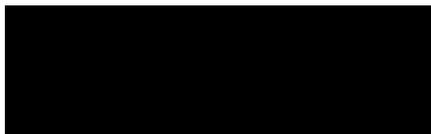
In fact, our HAF application included further investment in these heritage development agreements because of the opportunity for that process to generate additional residential development.

Per Regional Council's direction, staff will expedite amendments in support of the HAF application. Since July 2023, staff have been engaging with the public on the Draft Regional Plan, which includes many of the proposed regulatory changes to support additional housing density across the region. Initial feedback has shown significant public support for increased housing options. Once this engagement period has closed on October 27, 2023, a comprehensive amendment package in support of the HAF application will be brought forward for Regional Council's consideration. It is expected that Regional Council will be able to consider this package before the end of 2023. There will also be an opportunity for additional regulatory changes when the full amendment package in support of the Regional Plan is considered by Regional Council, expected to be presented in Spring 2024.

We are eager to discuss any other ideas that your office or the Canada Mortgage and Housing Corporation might have to permit rapid housing construction through regulatory changes. We would also welcome the opportunity to meet with your office to discuss any work underway with respect to National Building Code of Canada, Infrastructure Funding, and Surplus Federal Land, so we can share information, knowledge, and identify other opportunities.

We appreciate and look forward to your continued support of local government, housing, and infrastructure.

Kindest regards,



Mike Savage
Mayor

/bmj

Attachment 1: September 26, 2023 Motion of Regional Council

Attachment 1

On September 26, 2023, Regional Council passed the following motion:

1. Direct the Chief Administrative Officer:
 - a. To respond to the letter from the Minister of Housing, Infrastructure and Communities Canada, as included in Attachment A to the staff report dated September 25, 2023, to indicate HRM will include the initiatives as generally outlined, and further detailed in the staff report dated September 25, 2023, along with all additional required documentation to the Canada Mortgage and Housing Corporation as the Municipality's application under the Housing Accelerator Fund program to the extent the Municipality has the authority to do so;
 - b. Expedite amendments to the Regional Plan and supporting secondary planning strategies and land use by-laws (following the closure of the Regional Plan Review Phase 4 Public Participation Program on October 27, 2023) to enable:
 - i. a minimum of four units per lot in all residential zones within the urban service boundary.
 - ii. changes to the Regional Centre Secondary Planning Strategy and Land Use By-Law that would enable more missing middle housing, with a particular focus on smaller, faster building form and construction, and wood frame construction, while ensuring water supply and wastewater capacity is considered and existing and proposed heritage conservation areas are exempted.
 - c. To create a public-facing affordable housing strategy, including a non-market component, as outlined in the staff report dated September 25, 2023 and to dedicate a Housing Accelerator Fund position to this work;
 - d. To work with HRM post-secondary institutions to increase density and create opportunities for student housing within a walking distance from post-secondary institutions across HRM; and
2. Request the Chief Administrative Officer prepare a letter for the Mayor to the Province requesting a legislative amendment to grant the Chief Administrative Officer the authority to discharge existing development agreements where the development agreement is more restrictive than the as-of-right zoning.

Attachment A3 - Jurisdictional Scan

The following lists jurisdictions that have entered into an agreement with the federal government as part of the Housing Accelerator Fund. These jurisdictions have committed to making changes to planning documents to accelerate the supply of housing.

Housing targets and key Action Plan items are provided for each jurisdiction.

- **Edmonton (AB):** allows up to 8 units on a lot citywide and eliminated minimum parking requirements for residential uses.
- **Ottawa (ON):** allows up to 8 units in central neighbourhoods based on lot sizes, and including design controls.
- **Surrey (BC)** to fast track 2,800 housing units over the next three years. This work will help spur the construction of more than 16,500 homes over the next decade. Surrey's [Action Plan](#) will allow for:
 - Zoning changes to permit increased density and diversity of housing;
 - Incentive programs promoting high density development near rapid transit and affordable housing;
 - Policy changes to expedite development of below market housing;
 - Expanded use of professional reliance for faster approvals; and
 - Leveraging Artificial Intelligence to facilitate faster development and permit approvals.
- **Summerside (PEI)** to fast track 132 housing units over the next three years. This work will help spur the construction of more than 725 homes over the next decade. Summerside's [Action Plan](#) has an emphasis on:
 - Allowing four units on a residential lot as-of-right;
 - Broad zoning changes for increased density;
 - Reducing restrictions on accessory dwelling units; and
 - Incentives for multi-unit and missing middle housing.
- **Iqaluit (NU)** to fast track 160 housing units over the next three years. Iqaluit's [Action Plan](#) supports:
 - Reducing parking requirements;
 - Increasing building heights on targeted corridors;
 - Streamlining development application processes;
 - Creating a private land development framework; and
 - Expanding affordable housing delivery with non-profit providers.
- **Toronto (ON)** to fast-track nearly 12,000 new housing units over the next three years. This work will help spur the construction of more than 53,000 homes over the next decade. Toronto's [Action Plan](#) will allow for:
 - Zoning changes to enable up to six units on a residential lot citywide;
 - High-density development as-of-right near the city's transit corridors;
 - Expanded affordable rental programs; and
 - Streamlining development approvals process.
- **Winnipeg (MB)** to fast track 3,166 housing units over the next three years. This work will help spur the construction of more than 15,000 homes over the next decade. Winnipeg's [Action Plan](#) allows for:
 - Rapid zoning by-law amendments and amendments to local area plans;
 - Incentive programs promoting multi-family housing downtown and on transit corridors;
 - The establishment of a land enhancement office;
 - The creation of a city concierge for affordable housing;
 - Infrastructure support to increase residential development; and

- Digitizing and facilitating faster development and permit approvals.
- **Burnaby (BC)** to fast track 1,290 housing units over the next three years. This work will help spur the construction of more than 11,340 homes over the next decade. Burnaby's [Action Plan](#) will enable:
 - Zoning reforms to enable gentle density and missing-middle housing;
 - Streamlining the development process with the use of AI technology; and
 - Support for the Burnaby Housing Authority in the delivery of new non-market housing.
- **Vancouver (BC)** to fast-track over 3,200 new housing units over the next three years. This work will help spur the construction of more than 40,000 homes over the next decade. Vancouver's [Action Plan](#) will allow for:
 - Zoning changes to allow high-density development near transit stations with minimum densities;
 - Streamlining development approvals process;
 - Expanded affordable rental programs; and
 - New public housing near transit.
- **Mississauga (ON)** to fast track over 3,000 housing units over the next three years. This work will help spur the construction of more than 35,200 homes over the next decade. Mississauga's [Action Plan](#) will:
 - Support programs for affordable housing;
 - Expand permissions to streamline the creation of missing middle housing in existing residential neighbourhoods;
 - Accelerate approval turnaround times; and
 - Contribute to the comprehensive review of land in the city to unlock additional transformational density.
- **Richmond Hill (ON)** to fast track over 780 housing units over the next three years. This work will help spur the construction of more than 41,500 homes over the next decade. Richmond Hill's [Action Plan](#) will allow for:
 - Zoning changes to streamline development;
 - Up to four units on a residential lot where accessory dwelling units are permitted; and
 - Increased density around transit stations.
- **Moncton (NB)** to fast track over 490 housing units over the next three years. This work will help spur the construction of more than 5,500 homes over the next decade. Moncton's [Action Plan](#) will allow for:
 - Four units on a residential lot citywide;
 - Grant programs incentivizing more missing-middle development and accessory dwelling units;
 - Zoning changes to streamline development process; and
 - Building plan templates for energy-efficient multi-unit residential buildings.
- **Calgary (AB)** to fast track over 6,800 housing units over the next three years. This work will help spur the construction of more than 35,000 homes over the next decade. Calgary's [Action Plan](#) will support:
 - Office to residential conversions;
 - Creation 400 housing units on City-owned land in proximity to transit stations.
 - More missing middle rowhouses, townhouses and infill housing in established neighbourhoods;
 - Incentivizing secondary suites; and
 - Building inclusive and equitable affordable housing programs.

- **Province of Quebec** to add at least 100,000 residential units over and above historical averages across Canada, over four years. Quebec's [Action Plan](#) will support:
 - 8,000 new social and affordable housing units, 500 of which will be earmarked for clients who are homeless or at risk of homelessness;
 - New legislative amendments to improve urban densification and speed up building permit approvals; and
 - An interdepartmental project acceleration unit in co-operation with Quebec municipalities.

- **Kitchener (ON)** to fast track over 1,200 housing units over the next three years. This work will help spur the construction of more than 37,500 homes over the next decade. Kitchener's [Action Plan](#) will encourage:
 - Zoning changes to encourage high and medium density around Kitchener's Light Rail Transit stations;
 - Permitting four units on a residential lot citywide;
 - Offsetting affordable housing construction costs on city-owned lands;
 - Inclusionary zoning;
 - Incentives for non-profit rental and co-op housing providers;
 - Acquiring strategic parcels of lands for affordable housing; and
 - Planning for climate adaptation.

- **Kelowna (BC)** to fast track an additional 950 housing units over the next three years. This work will help create a potential for up to 20,000 additional homes over the next decade. Kelowna's [Action Plan](#) will allow for:
 - Higher density development as-of-right along rapid transit corridors;
 - Pre-zoning expanded area of city's core to permit to permit infill housing as-of-right;
 - Affordable housing development on city-owned lands;
 - Establishing new housing partnerships and affordable housing delivery;
 - Infrastructure planning to unlock housing; and
 - Leveraging new technology to improve processing and data management.

- **Brampton (ON)** to fast track over 3,150 new housing units over the next three years. This work will help spur the construction of more than 24,000 homes over the next decade. Brampton's [Action Plan](#) will allow for:
 - High-density development as-of-right near the city's transit corridors;
 - Four residential units and four storeys within 800 metres of transit;
 - Reducing barriers to the development of housing in key areas of the city – such as urban centres, boulevards, and major public transit stations; and
 - The creation of new incentive programs for affordable housing.

- **Hamilton (ON)** to fast track over 2,600 housing units over the next three years. This work will help spur the construction of over 9,000 homes over the next decade. Hamilton's [Action Plan](#) will allow for:
 - Four units on a residential lot citywide;
 - High-density development as-of-right near rapid transit;
 - A new land and property disposition and acquisition program for housing;
 - Incentive programs for housing development; and
 - Housing development on remediated brownfield sites.

- **Vaughan (ON)** to fast track over 1,700 new housing units and incentivize thousands of additional homes over the next three years. This work will help spur the construction of more than 40,000 homes over the next decade. Vaughan's [Action Plan](#) will allow for:
 - Four units on a residential lot citywide;
 - High-density development as-of-right near public transit; and
 - Updating permitting systems to speed up development.

- **London (ON)** to fast-track the creation of over 2,000 additional housing units over the next three years and build thousands more in the years to come. London's [Action Plan](#) will allow for:
 - Four units on a residential lot citywide;
 - High-density development as-of-right near public transit;
 - Disposal of city-owned land for more development; and
 - Partnerships with non-profit housing providers to build more affordable homes.

Across North America, many jurisdictions have already implemented some version of these changes, including:

- **Minneapolis, MN** – allows 4 units on a lot citywide and eliminated parking requirements for residential uses
- **Portland, OR** – allows 4 units on a lot citywide and eliminated parking requirements for residential uses
- **State of California** – Allows up to 4 units on all residential lots statewide.
- **Province of British Columbia** – recently passed legislation that requires all municipalities larger than 5,000 people to modify their zoning to allow up to four units on lots currently zoned for single-family or duplex use, and up to six units on larger lots currently zoned for single-family or duplex use and close to transit stops with frequent service.
- **Province of Ontario** – Allows up to 3 units on all residential lots provincially.

There are many other jurisdictions in Canada and the U.S. that have implemented similar changes. Experience from these jurisdictions shows that the pace of change in established neighbourhoods is quite slow, even with extra density being enabled. For instance, Minneapolis, MN made a change to 4 units on a lot in 2020. By 2023, permits associated with increased density in these residential neighbourhoods accounted for approximately 1% of new permits. Although change is incremental, zoning changes of this scale are still important to increase the housing stock over the long term.