

AFFORDABLE HOUSING FRAMEWORK

September 2024



WOOLWICH
TOWNSHIP

Background

The Township of Woolwich has a rich history shaped by its agricultural heritage and by the growth of its urban centres. First settled by Mennonite and German immigrants, the Township's growth was centered around rural communities like Elmira and St. Jacobs. Over time, these areas have seen development, including communities like Breslau, which has seen and will continue to experience significant growth in population.

As the Township continues to grow, with its population expected to reach 51,000 by 2051, the local housing market faces increasing pressure, as demand outpaces supply. The Township recognizes the challenges many residents face in securing housing that meets their diverse needs, particularly when it comes to affordable options.

In response to these housing challenges, the Township applied for the Federal Housing Accelerator Fund (HAF) in 2023 and successfully secured funding in 2024. This funding enabled the Township to implement a proactive approach through its newly developed Affordable Housing Framework, designed to streamline and facilitate the development process for affordable housing projects. The framework focuses on assisting housing developers by providing clear guidance, removing barriers, and expediting approvals to accelerate the creation of affordable housing. Through this initiative, the Township aims to increase access to affordable housing options for current and future residents, meeting the evolving needs of its growing community.

Purpose

This framework is designed to offer a structured approach for the Township to actively support housing developers in creating affordable housing by providing a dedicated, streamlined service. This service will focus on guiding developers from the early planning stages through construction, addressing their needs, and facilitating efficient progress with the aim of creating an increasing supply of affordable housing in the Township. This support will be provided to developers seeking to include a minimum of 10% affordable units in a building, with affordability defined in accordance with the Township's zoning by-law.

Objectives

Through the framework, the Township is seeking to achieve the following:

- Facilitate and expedite the development process for affordable housing projects.
- Provide comprehensive support and guidance to housing developers.
- Leverage Township resources and services to shorten development timelines and increase efficiency.

Guiding Principles

1. To foster collaboration and partnership by building strong relationships with housing developers by maintaining open communication and encouraging active participation to ensure developers feel supported throughout the process. The Township will work closely with developers to align goals, share expertise, and find solutions that meet local needs while balancing environmental and heritage preservation.
2. To enhance efficiency and speed by being committed to reducing delays and accelerating the development of affordable housing through streamlined internal processes, fast-tracked approvals, and clear roadmaps for developers. This includes setting realistic timelines, simplifying permit processes, and fostering early collaboration with planners and regulators.
3. To ensure transparency and communication, consistent, open communication to keep all parties informed of progress and challenges through regular updates, clear documentation, and a single point of contact to build trust and reduce confusion.
4. To promote sustainability and community integration through a commitment to creating affordable housing developments that are environmentally responsible and seamlessly integrated into the existing community fabric. Sustainable building practices will be encouraged to ensure developments are compatible with the local character and infrastructure.

I. Dedicated Service

A. Dedicated Project Liaison

A designated Township staff member will serve as the primary point of contact for each affordable housing project, handling inquiries, coordinating resources, and providing timely updates to ensure a smooth and efficient development process.

B. Pre-Development Consultation

The Township will offer early-stage consultations to help developers understand local requirements and processes. This includes guidance on site selection, zoning, and regulatory compliance, helping developers navigate potential challenges from the outset.

C. Permit and Approval Assistance

Developers will receive assistance in preparing and submitting permits and applications required by the Township. Where possible, the Township will expedite reviews and approvals to reduce delays and keep the project moving efficiently.

D. Ongoing Project Monitoring and Follow-Up

Regular check-ins will be conducted to track project milestones and ensure timelines are being met. The Township will proactively address any issues within its control to keep projects on track.

E. Partnering and Problem-Solving

The Township will partner closely with developers and their consultants within each department, working to resolve challenges. This may involve facilitating solutions to regulatory or logistical obstacles, ensuring the development process remains as seamless as possible.

F. Communication

Projects that are deemed to have an affordable component ensures that staff will have regular communication with senior staff on its evolution. Staff will ensure that external agencies are aware of the importance of these projects and finally, Council will be aware of the development, what aspects are deemed affordable and able to communicate with staff and the developer any concerns prior to making any formal opinions on the project.

II. Township Support and Incentives

A. Financial Incentives

The Township presently offers a Rental Housing Incentive aimed at facilitating the development of rental housing, including affordable and sustainable housing. The Rental Housing Incentive Program, which provides funding allocations from 2024 to 2026, offers subsidies for building permit fees and development charges, specifically for rental housing units in Elmira, St. Jacobs, and Breslau. Eligibility criteria include compliance with construction timelines, building composition, and a minimum unit count. Interested developers can apply through the Township's application process, which ensures that funds are allocated to eligible projects aligned with the Township's housing goals. Further incentives will be developed as funding permits.

B. Streamlined Approval Processes

The Township is committed to simplifying and fast-tracking approval procedures for affordable housing projects. This includes simplifying and streamlining the process, and offering clear, step-by-step guidance throughout the approval process. The Township continuously reviews its internal processes to identify areas where efficiencies can be improved, aiming to make adjustments that will accelerate timelines for affordable housing development, and will continue to work towards a smoother pathway from project initiation to completion.

C. Technical and Planning Support

The Township provides technical and planning support to help housing developers meet the technical requirements needed for project success. This includes access to Township planning and engineering resources, offering advice on zoning, infrastructure, and site-specific conditions. The Township also provides recommendations for sustainable and efficient building practices that align with Woolwich's environmental policies. Developers can expect guidance on energy-efficient designs, waste management systems, and water conservation techniques to ensure projects are both economically viable and environmentally responsible. Additionally, the Township is available to offer early-stage consultation to identify potential technical concerns before they become obstacles in the development process.

III. Monitoring and Evaluation

A. Continuous Improvement

The Township recognizes the importance of flexibility and adaptability in its housing framework. To promote continuous improvement, the Township will regularly seek feedback from housing developers, as well as from internal departments and other stakeholders involved in the housing process. This feedback will help identify any holdups, challenges, or opportunities for further streamlining. Based on this input, the Township will enhance its policies, procedures, and support services. Regular reviews of the framework will be conducted to integrate best practices and ensure that the Township continues to meet its objectives.

B. Reporting

Transparency is a key principle of the Township's approach to affordable housing. Recurring updates will be available on its website on the progress of affordable housing projects. These will include key data, such as the number of projects underway, the amount of financial assistance provided, and progress toward meeting affordable housing goals. Publicly sharing this information ensures accountability and allows the community to remain informed about the Township's efforts to address housing needs. This reporting will take place annually or as needed to keep all stakeholders updated on key developments.

C. Performance Metrics

To ensure the effectiveness of the Affordable Housing Framework, the Township will establish clear and measurable performance metrics. These metrics will include the increase in residents living in affordable dwelling units, the number of days it takes projects to move through the planning process, and the total number of applications processed. Additionally, the Township will track the number of affordable dwelling units created, the number of buildings that include affordable housing, and the ratio of affordable housing within these buildings. The success rate of applications and the percentage of projects that reach completion will also be measured to help identify potential barriers that developers may face. The financial impact of subsidies and incentives provided to developers will be monitored to assess cost-effectiveness and ensure that resources are being used efficiently. By regularly tracking these indicators, the Township can ensure that its policies and support mechanisms are having the intended effect of accelerating and facilitating affordable housing developments.

Conclusion

Commitment to Affordable Housing

The Township of Woolwich recognizes that access to affordable housing is the foundation of a healthy and thriving community. As Woolwich continues to grow, our commitment to ensuring that all community members can access affordable housing remains constant. We understand that affordable housing is not just about providing shelter, it's about fostering stability, well-being, and opportunity for all residents. In alignment with our strategic plan, we will actively support the inclusion of affordable developments in our communities while enhancing our downtown cores to promote economic vibrance and strengthen community connections.

Through our financial incentives, streamlined approval processes, and technical planning support, we are fully committed to reducing barriers and creating a simpler and more efficient path for affordable housing developments and housing developers. Our strategic focus on downtown enhancement and community integration reinforces the Township's dedication to facilitating affordable housing projects that benefit both developers and residents alike, creating a more inclusive and connected Woolwich.

Call to Action

We encourage housing developers to engage with the Township early in their planning stages to fully benefit from the dedicated development service. By collaborating with us from the onset, developers can take advantage of thorough support, from financial incentives and fast-tracked approvals to technical advice and planning resources. This early partnership allows us to offer tailored guidance that aligns with our shared goals of creating affordable, sustainable, and well-connected communities.

Our team is here to help navigate the development process, answer questions, and work alongside developers to ensure that affordable housing projects are completed successfully. As we continue to expand and enhance Woolwich's infrastructure and public spaces, we invite developers to join us in building a future where affordable housing is accessible to all, contributing to the growth of vibrant, healthy, and interconnected communities. Together, we can create lasting positive impacts for the residents of Woolwich.