

November 22, 2023

Housing Accelerator Fund

Dear Winnipeg City Council,

Thank you for the opportunity to provide a submission regarding Winnipeg's application to the Federal Government's Housing Accelerator Fund.

Social Planning Council of Winnipeg supports this project. We offer also some particular recommendations regarding affordable housing.

Canada is in an affordable housing crisis. Across Canada, housing prices have gone up dramatically putting housing out of reach for far too many families. The cost of an average house has climbed dramatically in recent years. In Winnipeg it has reached over \$370,000 according to the latest market survey.

For renters the housing is even more difficult to find. The average vacancy in Winnipeg was just 2.7 percent and the median rent for a two bedroom had reached \$1325 per month in last October's CMHC survey.¹

While these are averages, for households needing affordable housing, this is even more out of reach. The figure below shows that for households in Winnipeg's lowest income quintile, earning less than \$27,000 per year, only 4.2% of units in Winnipeg's housing universe are affordable.² Manitoba has lost hundreds of units of social housing and affordable housing in recent years as the existing stock has either deteriorated, been sold off or come to the end of operating agreements with the federal government that had kept it affordable. Given the state of housing in Winnipeg and across Canada, it is not surprising that it has become a salient issue for voters, especially youth who have not benefited from rising assets but now must face the higher costs. An Abacus survey this fall found 90% of young Canadians want

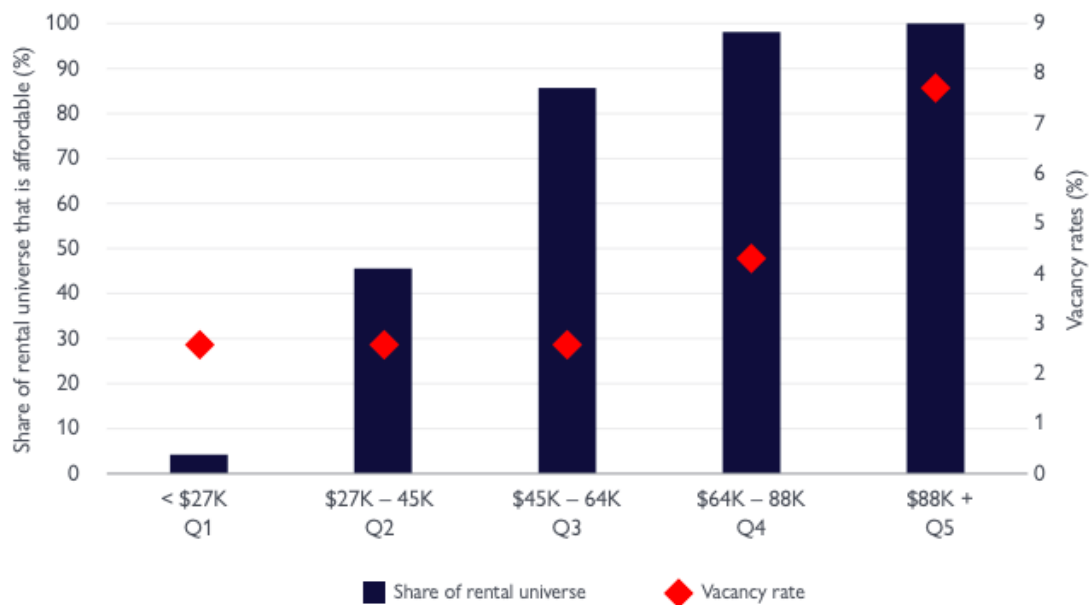
¹ CMHC Housing Market Information Portal: <https://www03.cmhc-schl.gc.ca/hmip-pimh/en#TableMapChart/2680/3/Winnipeg>

² CMHC. 2023. *Rental Market Report 2023*. Ottawa: CMHC. p. 52.
https://assets.cmhc-schl.gc.ca/sites/cmhc/professional/housing-markets-data-and-research/market-reports/rental-market-report/rental-market-report-2022-en.pdf?rev=ff8ebfd2-961f-4589-8ae2-fac01d1aedac&gl=1*1ilnkq7*ga*NDcwMDM3NjQ3LjE2OTQ0MzgZODQ.*ga%20CY7T7RT5C4*MTcwMDY3NTEwNC40LjAuMTcwMDY3NTEwNi41OC4wLjA.*gcl%20au*NTIwNDU0Mjk3LjE2OTQ0MzgZODQ

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governments to prioritize housing.³ This is a demographic Winnipeg must attract and retain if our city is to grow and prosper.

Figure 3 Households in lowest income quintile have limited rental options



Sources: CMHC, Statistics Canada

Housing is a problem that all levels of government have responsibility for, but the effects of which are seen most acutely at the municipal level. We all see every day the effects homelessness has had on our City both downtown and in neighbourhoods across the city. The 2022 Winnipeg Street Census found over 1200 people experiencing homelessness but we know this is just a slice of the total population in homelessness.⁴ None of your achievements as a council can be counted as fulfilled if you do not meet the task of providing the fundamental right to shelter for all your constituents.

The Housing Accelerator Fund will not solve all these significant challenges to our housing system, but it is nonetheless an important opportunity. The fund will

³ Abacus Data. 2023. "How the Housing Crisis Is Impacting the Goals and Well-Being of Younger Canadians". <https://abacusdata.ca/the-housing-crisis-impact-on-younger-canadians/>

⁴ Brandon. J. 2022. *Winnipeg Street Census 2022: Final Report*. Winnipeg, MB. End Homelessness Winnipeg and Social Planning Council of Winnipeg.

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provide Winnipeg with up to \$192 million dollars. The proposed targets include an increase of over 5000 units of housing including over 1000 units of affordable housing over the next three years. More will need to be done to meet the needs of affordable housing for all Winnipeggers but this would be an impressive start. The following chart from the City's report shows the expected targets for both total new housing and affordable housing in Winnipeg with and without the Housing accelerator fund. It is expected that the receiving the HAF will allow Winnipeg to build an additional 1081 affordable units over three years. Under the proposed agreement, affordable housing will make up 9.6% of new housing in Winnipeg over the next three years.

Affordable Housing

The HAF supports municipalities to increase the share of affordable housing units to be delivered.

	Without HAF (2023-26)	With HAF (2023-26)
Total units	8,824	14,101
Affordable units	261	1,342
Estimated share of affordable units	3%	9.6%

Source: Winnipeg Council Administrative Report on Housing Accelerator Fund, November 23, 2023. p. 18.

The proposed measures to create the excess housing will on the whole benefit our city. Many of the proposed measures will increase densification such as allowing up to four units per lot by right through most of the City. When thinking about densification measures like this it is important to consider that the alternatives to densification are to stagnate as a city or to accept further sprawl. When we look at the need to meeting housing needs through suburban expansion rather than densification, it would require adding an area of land greater than the size of Assiniboine Park every other year in Winnipeg just to meet existing growth needs.

Winnipeg as a city with an aging population also needs a greater number of units where people can age in place in their communities. Too many neighbourhoods in Winnipeg lack the middle ground of medium density housing that should be seen as an asset in our communities.

Other cities that have implemented multi unit zoning by right have not faced the crises that some detractors of this program have raised as concerns. Minneapolis since introducing city-wide multi unit zoning in 2018 has increased housing, stabilized rents, and eased overall inflation.

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While on the whole, the proposals in the HAF will benefit our community, I would like to take the opportunity to say that more should be done to promote truly affordable housing for low-income Winnipeggers. Little of the housing proposed here will be affordable to the households in the greatest need. Rather than aiming for merely affordable housing, we need to take the opportunity to use funding from the HAF to create social housing and rent geared to income housing that will be targeted to households in the lowest income groups and will have the greatest impact for reducing homelessness. There are also further measures we could take in Winnipeg around inclusionary zoning that would ensure that developers who will benefit from the changes proposed in this plan will pay some of the cost of new affordable housing.

We support Right to Housing Winnipeg's call for at least 7500 units of affordable housing built in Winnipeg over the next ten years. This is the minimum needed to address Winnipeg's crisis in affordable housing. We support their request that the HAF be amended to include:

1. Increase the target for affordable housing from 1,342 units to 2,250 units (750 units for each year of the HAF). This amended target will put us on track to achieve the 7,500 units required to meet the need in Winnipeg over the next 10 years.
2. All 2,250 units must be targeted to the lowest-income Winnipeggers by making them rent-geared-to-income.
3. All 2,250 units must be non-market housing owned by public, non-profit, co-op, or Indigenous-led housing providers⁵

I look forward to the work on this project I recognise there is a lot of work to do, including the development of a new housing needs assessment. I hope you will consider the Social Planning Council of Winnipeg as a partner in helping Winnipeg meet its housing needs and we will be happy to participate in any way possible to help achieve our housing goals for the city.

Josh Brandon, Community Animator, Social Planning Council of Winnipeg

⁵ Right to Housing Winnipeg: <https://righttohousing.ca/>