

Discussion on Affordable Housing / re CROZBY residential review, August 14th, 2019

A downfall of research on affordability and accessibility of housing - it establishes the need for affordable, accessible housing but there is still no housing created. A downfall of engagement - voices of persons with disabilities and their caregivers are not included.

Discrimination regarding housing is based on a multitude of factors (income source, ability, age, health conditions, addictions, etc.) and is still almost impossible to be proven:

- Discrimination in terms of disability or income source being Ontario Disability Support Program is seen as a prominent issue with private landlords
- Discrimination for those who have (mental) health problems or have previous experiences of homelessness

Even when individuals are ready and able to move into stable housing, or when workers with All in 2020 Campaign have resources to place individuals in the rental housing, there are no low rent or subsidized units to place them in. No low rent housing buildings are being built.

City of Kitchener offers incentives for below market rent units new buildings (profit or non-profit) but CROZBY currently addresses mostly secondary rental housing..

The enforcement of tenant protections is already weak for purpose built (more and more unaffordable) rental housing , and an influx of secondary rentals would make the situation worse for persons with a range of disabilities and chronic health problems.

Provincial cuts to the regional and municipal government raise the question how will they cover all supports needed with less staff, less money, etc. A push towards privatization in many service sectors will be devastating for many public and nonprofit service recipients.

In the whole zoning bylaw consultations and secondary planning in Kitchener, the least was heard from people with disabilities.

The questions surround the mundane/ technical problems such as - How much space between single homes and high-rises, size of driveways etc.?

Access in neighbourhoods is more important, if destinations are to be buss-able or walk-able, making buildings and units more accessible, as well as other amenities in general.

Accessible green public spaces are of concern for persons with disabilities. Many have dog companions and they need access to parks and greenspaces that are being diminished for new builds on Margaret St for example. Developers have to be responsible for making sure there are open green spaces included in the developments or private builds for secondary units.

The intensification is necessary, however, for persons with disabilities or anyone using a mobility device, development could cause higher traffic and access issues like a blind corner that could cause hazards, exits from building parking to the street to close to pedestrian crossings, and in general, more people and vehicles are an impediment for persons with disabilities.

What about the actual units being built that are in general inaccessible for persons with a range of disabilities. VISIBLE housing features, no step or accessible entrance ramps, wider doorways, units with lower kitchen elements, or townhouses with complete unit at the lower floor, all of this is not part of the conversations. Perhaps a by-law that requires accessibility features in the building plans to be granted approval.

This becomes even more problematic with the creation of secondary suits and laneway houses on one's property that the new zoning will be open to. What is it doing for people who need accessible housing?

- Apparently, there is a by-law that the door has to face the street
- Size of a driveway in itself shouldn't matter as long as it doesn't impede on access to laneways or backyard units
- When private homeowners build they do not have people with disabilities in mind as renters/tenants, especially as some features would cost them more. However, we have to think about making places more accessible as they are being built, both for the aging population, young families, persons with disabilities, everyone.
- If we are talking about secondary suits, there are a lot of landlord skills that have to be learned when renting to persons with disabilities.
- The city needs to ensure advisory services for those who will be adding new units on their property as they work to obtain their building permits.
- The protections for tenants have to be increased as more vulnerable tenants end up in less regulated and widely diffused types of housing. Discrimination and harassment are prevalent with tenants with disabilities.
- Displacing a tenant who lost a lot of functioning mobility and can no longer climb the stairs is a traumatic experience. If they cannot access the bedroom or the bathroom on the second floor, they have to move out of their dwelling and maybe their neighbourhood altogether.
- Accessible options are the first to be sacrificed in most cases when people are doing builds because properties are small and it does cost more
- Finding accessible options in buildings is difficult and the high-rise buildings pose risk to people with disabilities during emergency situations
- Accessible homes in the city are being moved to make space for high-rises.

True Affordability Now

Affordability has multiple interpretations.

80% below market rate is arbitrary as the market rate is unattainable for anyone on low income, fixed income or even young professionals or seniors on pension income.

Housing strategies and United Nations state 30% of persons/household income.

One bedroom apartments are well over \$1000 in the region and the rent has increased 16% in the last year only. No one can afford a 2 bedroom apartment without making \$22 an hour.

ODSP monthly shelter allowance is only \$497.

The fact is that some people have it harder than others.

Things also get harder over the years for people on low income or fixed income as there is no buffer no saving when health deteriorates, appliances need to be replaced, accidents happen.

When you start off you have all your clothes, and furniture, dishwasher, washing machine and dryer and then perhaps You lose your job and you end up on social assistance

People start off from different places, there is no easy answer.

We still have very strong not in my backyard push when we think about rooming housing, that is usually converted private houses with few or no accessibility features. Tenants are mostly in difficult situations and cannot access tenant protections either.

Cities are thinking about future needs, rather than current needs. It's interesting how we see current and future needs or how we understand urgency around true affordable and accessible housing. KW wants people with money to come to our community and are building for them as condos and high-end rentals are not in reach for the current residents of downtown. Many had to leave already. There is a push to send the poor people out of the city core. We have to prevent ghettoization of poverty and make sure well off city areas are welcoming to low rent and more truly affordable housing being created there.