

Creating affordable housing... going beyond charity

*“My people will abide in a peaceful habitation,
in secure dwellings, and in quiet resting places.”*

Isaiah 32:18

A safe, secure, affordable home is a human right in Canada. Yet many families, seniors and individuals of all ages have no home, or they live in precarious and often unaffordable apartments. Excessively high rent is often the primary reason people rely on food banks. Too many Canadians run out of money before they run out of month.

Ontario has almost 200,000 applicants on housing wait lists, with close to 90,000 applicants in Toronto alone. Wait times can be 2 to 18 years depending on the type of accommodation required.

Canada’s National Housing Strategy provides incentives to create affordable housing. While many large projects are underway, the new housing they’ll create will still not be enough to ensure every Canadian has a place to call home.

If you own a home, you can be part of a solution that changes lives forever! By-laws in most municipalities allow for legal secondary suites, which provide a self-contained living area, kitchen and bathroom and can be built right in your home, as an addition to it or even as a detached unit in your backyard (coach house, laneway home, granny suite).

To build your new apartment legally, you must ensure proper fire separation, secondary egress (another way to get out of the unit in case of emergency) and, if needed, parking.

The investment to build the unit would be offset by the monthly rent you’d collect. In most cases, the net cash flow is almost \$1,000 a month! Your property also increases in value with a legal secondary suite. What’s more, some cities in Ontario and across Canada have introduced forgivable loans of up to \$30,000 to encourage homeowners to build legal secondary living quarters.

If you coordinate in advance with your local housing authority, your new apartment can then house an individual or a family from the housing wait list. The tenants pay 30% of their gross household income, and the local government pays the rest.

And as the owner, you get to meet and vet (including credit check) your prospective tenants to ensure they’re suited for your living environment. Tenants can also provide additional support by helping to maintain your property (gardening, shovelling, etc.) and keep watch over it for everyone’s safety. Experience shows that tenants from the wait list treat their new home and neighbours respectfully and pay their rent on time.

Some examples of how secondary suites can work:

- 1) An older couple wanted to continue to live in their home, close to their family, friends, doctors and church community. They realized, however, that their mobility would likely decline in the years to come. So they built a spacious ground-floor addition to their three-bedroom bungalow, with a beautiful view of their backyard, providing them with a lovely “condo” for years to come. Then they rented the bungalow to a family from the housing wait list. The family loves it there,

with the kids in a great school and the parents able to focus on further studies and move forward in their careers.

- 2) As first-time home buyers, Ben and Jenny decided to have a two-bedroom basement apartment built in their home. After it was completed, a woman and her ten-year-old daughter moved in to escape an abusive relationship. Ben and Jenny know they are making a real difference in the lives of their new tenants and get significant monthly income, some of which they donate to the local women's shelter.
- 3) Because of pandemic realities, Bill and Mary's adult son and his family lost their housing. After exploring their options, Bill and Mary saw that the most cost-effective solution was to create a modest but comfortable two-bedroom apartment in their home for the young couple and their four-year-old son. The family, under one roof, has been able to live comfortably in separate units. And because the young couple's combined household income was below the low-income cut off, the government contributed \$25,000 to the construction of their new apartment!
- 4) Moving to a retirement home initially made sense for Helen's mother. Then the pandemic came along. So, Helen assessed her own home and decided to build a new apartment there for her mother. Now they live close together and use PSWs and other resources to assist her mother as needed.

Every homeowner has different needs and opportunities. Every municipal and regional government has different by-laws and incentives. To help navigate the options available to you, please contact me, Garth Brown, at 416-459-2730 or 1-844-342-5489.

I've built legal secondary suites for years and helped to house families and individuals from the wait list.

*Garth Brown, member
National Housing Campaign*