

Creating Inclusive Communities

Industry Session - Inclusive Housing Design

Wednesday May 10, 9:00am – 12:00pm

The Livable Neighbourhood Initiative

Build Toronto Inc., in conjunction with Toronto Developmental Services Alliance, PooranLaw Professional Corporation and Kehilla Residential Programme, recently hosted an interactive session entitled “Inclusive Housing Design”. The purpose of the session was to discuss the opportunities and challenges of intentionally designing safe, affordable, barrier-free and inclusive housing to meet the needs of marginalized and vulnerable populations, such as those living with developmental disabilities.

The goal of this initiative is to determine opportunities for building new mixed income apartment or condo housing in mixed communities that include people with developmental and other disabilities, with amenities that encourage social interactions between all residents. This session was intended to be the first step in the setup a solid framework of design, policy and financial guidelines that will result in the successful implementation of concepts in all future mixed community opportunities. The implementation of these guidelines may be through the increase of affordable housing stock with an awareness of social health and well-being in communities built in partnership between the public and private sectors. New developments that welcome people of different abilities and encourage social engagement and community-building is the ideal outcome.

The Need

Over 100,000 Canadians with developmental disabilities are not able to access affordable housing that meets their support needs. These people have intellectual disabilities and perhaps physical disabilities; in some cases they are also living with mental health issues including the effects of trauma. There are currently over 13,000 such people on waiting lists for housing in Ontario; over 4,000 of them in Toronto alone. In addition, it is estimated that there are perhaps 100,000 vulnerable people of various types of disabilities waiting for affordable housing in the GTA.

Currently people with developmental disabilities primarily live with aging parents, in group homes, in homeless shelters, in long-term care residences or in hospital facilities. Many of them need support with everyday activities including meal preparation, getting to appointments, managing personal finances and with assistive aids and devices.

People living with developmental disabilities desire many of the basic needs as everyone else, including an affordable, inclusive and stable place to live where they have a sense of welcoming and safety. They want to be seen as unique and valuable individuals, not just as someone with a disability. They appreciate the opportunity to interact with all kinds of people.

Over the past 20 years, institutions have been in favour of group homes, but group homes are not always the best answer given the congregate nature of such arrangements. Many people with

developmental disabilities are eager to live in apartment buildings or condos, where they would enjoy greater independence, interact with people in their community and the ability to have family and other visitors, but they can only do that with ongoing support of various kinds.

Examples to Consider

As service providers, the Toronto Developmental Services Alliance¹ has developed an understanding of the needs of people living with developmental disabilities. Knowing that Toronto's housing stock is getting old and the increasing need to be prepared for an aging population of people with disabilities, we are actively seeking and working toward solutions.

Three distinct local institutional developments designed to serve populations with various needs were presented during the session to help highlight design elements that can be transferred to intentionally inclusive mixed use, market condominium and apartment buildings. The main elements of each project are outlined in Appendix A.

The Challenges

Prejudice remains against people with developmental disabilities and indeed against those with disabilities of all types. The challenge herein lies in the successful design and marketing of mixed-use buildings that everyone is positive about living with and including all their neighbours. It is still new and foreign concept to most, but success stories are beginning to emerge, Artscape is one of many examples.

How do we create inclusive communities within existing and new vertical housing developments? Ideally, we would create vibrant spaces with a range of activities that people with varying abilities can share. People with developmental disabilities can help establish an atmosphere of collegiality amongst their neighbours. Inclusive housing is pivotal to alleviating social alienation.

For such inclusive homes to work well, we must facilitate access to support services, including support workers and medical services.

Creating public spaces in high-rise buildings where people can gather in lounge-type and other settings for companionship and organized activities has a cost per square foot. How do we fund this? What is the role of lot levies, development charges and taxes versus incentives such as grants and tax rebates?

The break-out sessions

Four breakout sessions provided an opportunity to dive deeper into two main topics:

1. Brainstorming solutions to enable inclusive design

¹ The Toronto Developmental Services Alliance (tdsa.ca) is a network of 27 not-for-profit organizations that provide a wide range of residential and community-based programs and supports for people with developmental disabilities. TDSA formed a Housing Sub-committee in 2016 to increase opportunities and access to affordable, barrier-free, community-based, supportive housing options through collaboration and partnerships.

2. Identify viable opportunities to develop inclusive design prototypes

Plan for Inclusion Right at the Beginning:

Several of the experts in attendance made the point that it is much easier to design for inclusion when the needs are known up front (at the conceptual stage) and planned in, rather than retrofitted. There is a need for agencies to advise early on in the development process of the potential residents' needs (i.e. hearing impairment, visual impairment, etc.), before design has progressed too far. If architects/designers/builders know the needs early enough, it helps with design and gives greater flexibility, and reduces the risk for potential cost implications.

It was suggested that designs take into account the concept of aging in place and the growing incidence of dementia.

In the case of stand-alone, high-rise developments, it is crucial to get in early with the developer and communicate the importance of creating an inclusive space.

There is a lack of knowledge of the common minimal elements that makes everything more difficult. Most aging buildings are not suitable for retrofits or cost prohibitive

Create Easier Access to Design Specs

There is a need for an Affordable and Accessible Housing Guidebook or some kind of minimum specification book for the private sector that would help those designing for inclusion. A one-stop information source about both design commonalities and specs (the requirements for inclusive building and the universal design elements) and funding sources/possibilities, likely in the form of a website, was deemed valuable and necessary. Avoiding over-designing was mentioned in relation to cost control.

Facilitating Access to Support Services

The possibility of having a hub where support services could be located was mentioned. Inclusive housing for people with developmental disabilities may require space for agency support for individuals. Spaces being built must also be flexible enough to fit the needs of our aging population, so support workers can help them as well.

One of the biggest challenges is how to fund and deliver supports to people with disabilities in inclusive housing.

The Role of Legislation

The Convention of the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (of which Canada ratified in 2010), the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms and the Ontario Human Rights Code already emphasize the importance of protecting the human rights of people with disabilities. In addition, Ontario has the Accessibility for Ontarians with Disabilities Act which recognizes the need to remove barriers to accessibility within all aspects of life.

The definition of housing needs to be re-defined in zoning by-laws. One option could be an expansion of Section 37, adding an item for developing housing for people with disabilities. Can it be adapted to address inclusive housing and disability-related groups?

The issue was raised of how spaces will be classified in different municipalities. From a design perspective municipal classification of living spaces determine how the space can be used.

Affordability and Prejudice Issues

The usual definition of affordable housing, which is 80% market value cap, IS NOT affordable to most people in the GTA.

Most people that have developmental disabilities and indeed other disabilities are on monetary allowance using government funds. Some people suggest that there is not an incentive to work because there are claw backs on their incomes once they make more than a very low annual income.

Some organizations are having difficulty finding accommodations for the individuals they support and the social services to support them in their living spaces. There is a prejudice against housing those with developmental disabilities.

The hardest problem to solve is the funding. The challenge is accessing programs to write down the capital cost burden. We need to identify what is available for the population you want to service. For example, people with visual impairments or who can't read may need different features than those with a mobility disability or who are deaf and hard of hearing.

Funding of Inclusive Housing

The private sector is integral in the production of inclusive housing. Not only is a return on investment expected, there has to be a consciousness to the design as to not "over design" spaces that are not marketable to the entire community. Some felt the three example projects were too "institutional" to be private market projects. Private developers look for incentives to build these spaces meant for mixed communities that go above and beyond the market opportunities. As an example, the City of Toronto provides Development Charge credits to developments that exceed certain environmental targets.

A suggestion was made that cooperative groups can come together as a private entity to acquire land and create spaces that are inclusive. A local organization can pool money from persons supported to buy a building and add inclusive aspects. Using public land, as in the Regent Park redevelopment, was also mentioned. It was felt that by merging for profit and not-for-profits intentions together, it would help accelerate the creation of inclusive units. The movement away from head leases to referral agreements was mentioned to support a direct tenancy agreement so that tenants don't feel reliant on the supporting organization for their home.

As well as apartment buildings and condominiums, models such as 6-plex and 8-plex group homes were mentioned. The right choice for each individual depends on the individual's independence and ability to manage the living space themselves.

There was some talk of needing to ensure cleaning and organizing programming for common spaces, so they do not become dead space. Group or clustered housing may be better from a support point of view.

Another concept mentioned was creating a Legacy Home Foundation, where a family can put cash and assets into a fund for an individual, and then the home foundation buys a home and creates a life-long lease for the individual.

Marketing and Branding

We need to sell the notion that a lot of the targets of inclusive housing will benefit everyone in the community, especially given the aging population. We all benefit from having a sense of community and an inclusive atmosphere.

We all appreciate the ability to socialize and make connections, and gain from shared amenities that encourage positive interactions between residents. A tower without social space means NOBODY knows their neighbours, not only the people with disabilities.

Well-designed communal spaces are good design for everyone, not just people with disabilities. The conversation should be about having buildings with animation and programming that is meant for everyone, so everyone can fit in and meet others.

Where do we go from here?

The following committees have been formed to focus on three key areas of implementation.

- 1) **Planning, Policy and Legislation Working Group** (Bryan Keshen and Paul Bruce) – Relevant OP and Zoning Bylaw amendments, Building code, approval process and other studies review.
- 2) **Inclusive Design Working Group** (Susan Bisailon and Raphael Arens) – Develop a set of guiding principles. Document proven best practices and identify design ideas that will improve the entire community. Identify cost implications of the design and principles.
- 3) **Innovative Funding and Financial Frameworks Working Group** (Brendon Pooran and Nancy Singer) – Research of possible sources of capital and operating funds for inclusive design in purpose built rental buildings and affordable ownership condominiums. Develop a proposal for piloting inclusive communities.

Members are being sought for the committees, we invite you to contact Bayne Anderson (banderson@buildtoronto.ca) if you would like more information and get involved.

The information provided the session as well as a copy of the final presentation can be viewed at the following dropbox link

(<https://www.dropbox.com/sh/rh5lft9j9vxtit/AAC8rlBrzxL1njMrbzYEVNwja?dl=0>)

Appendix A

Development Examples

Ronald McDonald House

- This facility is a temporary home to over 81 sick kids and their families, made up primarily of studio apartments. The rooms are on the second floor.
- The House creates a sense of normalcy for families with very sick children.
- The dining and kitchen facility is a communal space.
- Families can cook meals by themselves or cook with other families (this encourages families to come together and meet with each other).
- A one-room school allow kids to continue to learn while staying in the building.
- Three courtyards give access to natural daylight and play areas so families can meet each other and socialize. In the hallways there are also lounging areas, providing opportunities to meet others that are coming and going. There is also a library.

CAMH

- This ongoing development takes up eight city blocks in Toronto.
- The goal was to turn CAMH from an enclosed mental asylum to an urban village, shifting the focus from being internalized and closed off to embracing and opening up to the surrounding community.
- The first phase was a housing project for individuals with anxiety, addiction and mood disorders.
- The concept was to extend city streets into the CAMH developments.
- There are three apartment units on each floor and a shared kitchen and dining area.
- Shared living rooms facilitate socialization (group activities and mingling with others)
- Thought went into the corridors, circulation space and the community gardening space
- Phase 2 (2012) buildings have a community kitchen and shared socializing space
- Phase 3 is currently underway.

George Street (Seaton House) Redevelopment

- The emphasis is on building an inclusive community with living spaces for older populations: seniors, homeless individuals and transitional groups
- Creating living spaces in a community-like environment including green walls and internal courtyards where people can meet others through activities like gardening, etc.
- There will be a communal dining room in the shelter so people can socialize
- The goal is to create a community where people come together in a calm, relaxed way.