

Scaling Innovation in Affordable Housing across Canada

Spotlight: Housing Innovation e-Booklet

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Introduction

Spotlight: Housing Innovation

Access to safe, stable and affordable housing underpins social and economic inclusivity and is essential to Canada's sustained economic growth and competitiveness.

Future Cities Canada developed [Spotlight: Housing Innovation](#), a series of events and research to support the scaling of innovation and impact within affordable housing as part of [Future Cities Canada: Unexpected Solutions](#).

Spotlight: Housing Innovation showcased exceptional contributions to affordable housing innovation across the country.

Selected applicants demonstrated their innovative solutions through a virtual Showcase of successfully scaled models, an immersive Scaling Workshop led by cross-sectoral experts from across the country and Scaling Innovation Webinars to broaden networks and potential partnerships.

This e-Booklet is a platform to showcase the innovations of the successful participants and contributors to the program. It is also a report that captures the insights, challenges and opportunities to further support and scale the impact of innovation in affordable housing moving forward.



The three sections of this report include:

Innovation Profiles

Spotlight profiles of all twelve participants and presenters. These profiles capture the unique innovation that the projects have achieved and how they have scaled their work.

Scaling Strategies for Innovation

An overview of the strategies that the participants employed in the process of scaling their work.

**Opportunities for Scaling
Innovations in Affordable Housing**

The emerging program ideas that can be leveraged to support scaling and deepen the impact of innovation in affordable housing work and beyond.

Scaling Innovation

The [Evergreen City Builder Glossary](#) defines Scalable as: "the ability of an organization, system, project or process to adapt, evolve or implement resources to expand its impact."

While the strategy through which an innovation is scaled differs based on its own unique context, successful scaling is determined by a shared scaling potential: an understanding of its market differentiation, a strong grasp of the impact it achieves and how it achieves it, and proof that the solution is not only transferrable, but also has deeper impact once scaled.¹

It is with this understanding of scaling innovation that a process was developed to support the participants of the Scaling Affordable Housing Solutions Workshop and was the foundation in all four Spotlight: Housing Innovation events from November 2020 – February 2021.

The process was informed by the barriers to scaling impact that were flagged in the applicant submissions, by desk research, and by the support of our advisory and expert contributors.

What We Found

What emerged from this series of events was the breadth of innovative work being done across the country, but a lack of dedicated attention and support on how to best scale those innovations.

Through group dialogue, one-on-one consultations, presentations and interviews, the root of this support lies in the long-term and cross-sectoral partnerships in scaling innovation. Leveraging the unique access and assets of those partnerships are critical to any of the scaling strategies.

¹ Dees, Gregory and Anderson, Beth Battle. "Scaling Social Impact: Strategies for spreading social innovations." (Spring 2004). Stanford Social Innovation Review. Available: https://ssir.org/articles/entry/scaling_social_impact

The participants and contributors to Spotlight: Housing Innovation demonstrated that good work can be scaled up, out and deep when dynamic partnerships can support opportunities such as diverse land-ownership or creative zoning.

Connecting the right people and the right resources with the right projects will continue to scale innovation in affordable housing moving forward.

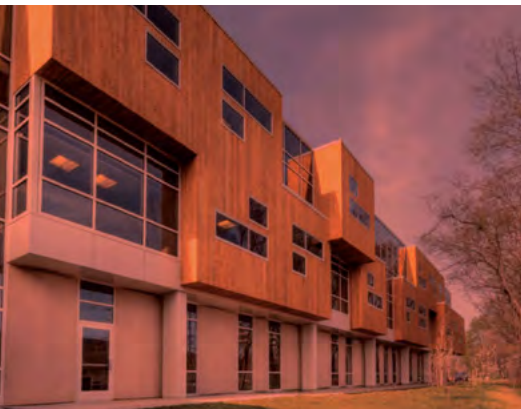
Recordings of the Spotlight: Housing Innovation events can be found on the [Community Solutions Portal](#) and CMHC website.

The Spotlight: Housing Innovation series and e-booklet received funding from the [National Housing Strategy](#) under the NHS Demonstrations Initiative, however the views expressed are the personal views of the author and CMHC accepts no responsibility for them.

Biindigen

Two Row Architects

Indigenous service-provider-driven affordable housing hub in north east Hamilton, Ontario built with connection to nature, health and community well-being.



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Healthy House Apartments

P&R Developments Inc.

East end Toronto multiple residential development on single unit lot made possible by the city's new laneway bylaws.



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HousingNOWTO.com

HousingNOWTO

Volunteer-run open-source web platform that shares and explains the details of the City of Toronto's affordable-housing development sites.



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Love the Laneways

The Laneway Project

An initiative to transform neglected urban laneways into vibrant community places that expand the shared space available for community life in neighbourhoods undergoing housing intensification.



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Modular Housing Initiative

City of Toronto

Innovative and cost-effective way to build small-scale infill housing while providing a rapid, dignified response to connect people experiencing homelessness with homes and appropriate supports to help them achieve housing stability.



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NEXII Whole Building Solution

NEXII Building Solutions, Inc.

Whole-building solution that improves the energy efficiency and therefore climate impacts of new and existing buildings - ultimately supporting Canada's commitment to reaching Net-Zero by 2050.

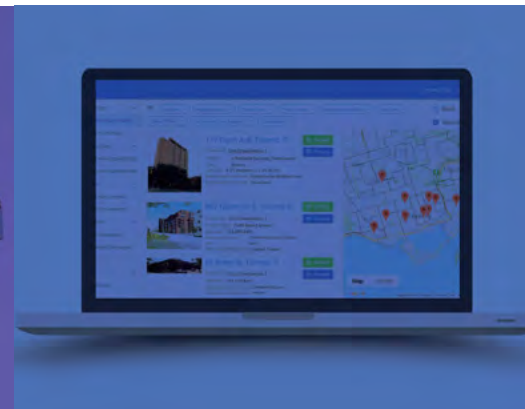


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Parcel

School of Cities, University of Toronto

Digital matchmaking platform to connect creative mixed-use initiatives and stakeholders in support of forming public-private-non-profit partnerships to deliver mixed-use affordable housing and elderly care facilities.



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The Rooming House Project

Dixon Hall

Restoration of four rooming houses in Cabbagetown, Toronto that showcases the transition of underutilized historical assets into an environmentally focused housing model with integrated social support.



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SAFERhome's Measurable Certification for Universal Home Design

The SAFERhome Standards Society

Certification standard to support accessible design and residential modifications to allow seniors to age in place or support residents with disabilities.



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SHINE

Seniors Services Society of BC

Province-wide, integrated model of housing and mental health/addictions information and support services for seniors.



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Tower Renewal Partnership

Centre for Urban Growth & Renewal

Nonprofit initiative which works through research, advocacy and demonstration to transform postwar towers and their surrounding neighbourhoods into more sustainable, resilient and healthy places and fully integrated into their growing cities.



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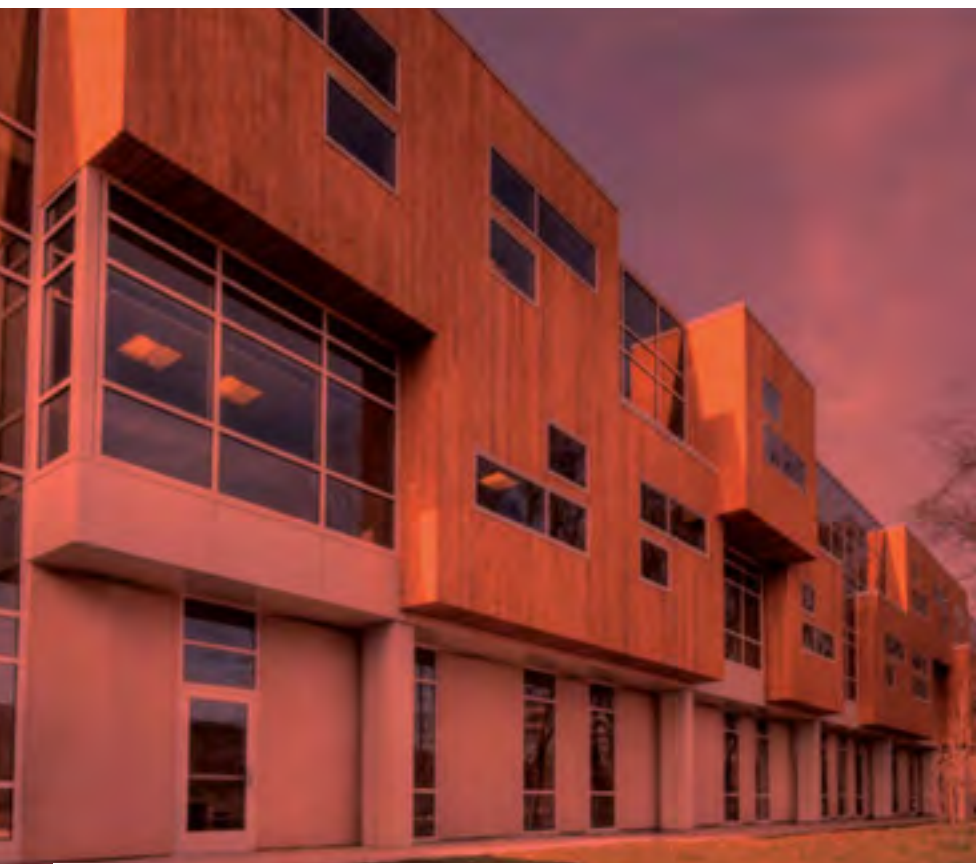
Usine de peinture Bétonel

Brique par Brique

An initiative to convert a paint factory into an affordable housing cooperative of 30 affordable and wheelchair accessible units in Montreal's Parc Extension east end neighbourhood.



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Biindigen

Two Row Architect & KPMB Architects

Biindigen is a housing “hub” development in north-east Hamilton, Ontario that is built in collaboration with local service-providers and grounded with the intention of developing a community through Indigenous ways of thinking, knowing and being.

Biindigen, the Ojibwe word for “Welcome!” pairs housing with other needs required for residents to thrive – connection to nature, health, and community well-being.

Affordable Housing Innovation

Biindigen takes a universal inclusive design approach to housing affordability. The residential units are priced relatively affordably in a municipal centre that has experienced a drastic increase in property values and rental pricing.

The innovation of Biindigen lies in the understanding that housing affordability can be better achieved when considered in tandem with the other costs associated with community well-being, such as affordable child care, health care, and proximity to nature.



[Learn more about Two Row Architect](#)



The project has three sections: residential, health, and a childcare/community centre, with a Gathering Circle in the middle.

[The Universal Inclusive Design approach is an act of decolonization](#) – Biindigen has been shaped to honour the land and other relations upon which we all depend, and re-centres the community around land, health and well-being.

Challenges and Opportunities to Scaling Innovation

Biindigen is a collaborative development project driven by service-providers,² rather than developers. This approach offers the opportunity for multiple community-led stakeholders to lead the process, supported by the leveraging of assets and support around them.

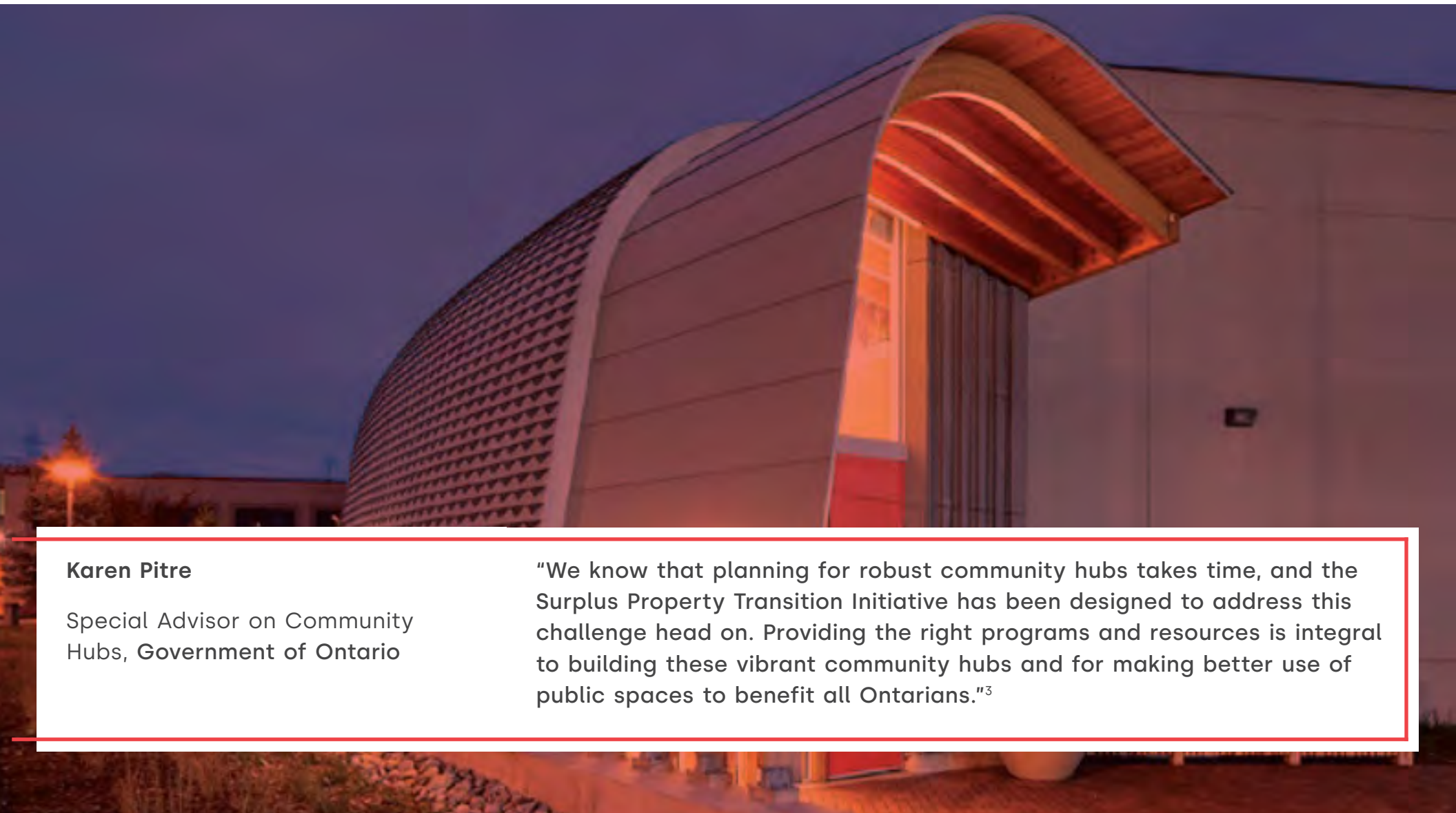
For example, the land upon which Biindigen is being built was owned by the City of Hamilton.

The land was the City's contribution to the development. It proved ideal given its proximity to trails, a river system and an existing urban farm. It was also an underserviced patch of the city, lacking options for food, health or service options within a 15-minute walk.

Biindigen was made possible by centering community wisdom and needs, and drawing upon a collaborative partnership model with unique assets and supports.

The opportunities of working with land-owners – municipal or otherwise – and connecting housing with other service providers is a model that can be replicated and scaled elsewhere.

² Biindigen collaborative service providers include Niwasa Kendaaswin Teg, De Dwa Da Dehs Nye>s Aboriginal Health Centre, and Ontario Aboriginal Housing Services, with support from McMaster University Health Sciences, City of Hamilton, Sacajawea Non-Profit Housing, McQuesten Urban Farm, and Nepaame



Karen Pitre

Special Advisor on Community
Hubs, Government of Ontario

“We know that planning for robust community hubs takes time, and the Surplus Property Transition Initiative has been designed to address this challenge head on. Providing the right programs and resources is integral to building these vibrant community hubs and for making better use of public spaces to benefit all Ontarians.”³

.....
³ Government of Ontario. (2018, January 30). Ontario Supporting Expansion of Community Hubs Across the Province. Ontario Newsroom. Available: <https://news.ontario.ca/en/release/48012/ontario-supporting-expansion-of-community-hubs-across-the-province>

Healthy House Apartments

P&R Developments Inc.

An east end Toronto multiple missing-middle development designed on a single unit lot, partially made possible by the City of Toronto's laneway suite bylaws.



Affordable Housing Innovation

Recent amendments to the Toronto Zoning Bylaw have created opportunities for re-imagining single-family housing.

Healthy House Apartments is a project planned for 2165 Gerrard Street East in the east end of Toronto, replacing a single detached house on a conventional 50-foot urban plot with two semi-detached fourplexes with laneway suites, certified to Passive House standard. The increased housing availability that would emerge in broader laneway housing investment could contribute to lowering average housing price points for buyers and renters.

Land ownership and land availability are two barriers addressed in this gentle-density neighbourhood development approach, without requiring any rezoning, site plan approval or official plan amendment processes.



[Learn more about P&R Developments](#)



Gentle intensification like the Healthy House Apartments can increase density in neighbourhoods with established public transit, bike infrastructure and amenities, thereby keeping carbon footprints low.

Challenges and Opportunities to Scaling Innovation

The unique opportunity of Healthy House Apartments combines creative densification with development expertise. While not all neighbourhoods or municipalities have robust laneway networks, the model has potential for place-based replication.

This includes gentle intensification of neighbourhoods with an intentional re-zoning of residential, commercial or industrial land.



"We believe in a series of innovations and practices that will develop housing that is both environmentally sustainable and incredibly comfortable."

Jacob Rothberg

Co-founder, P&R Developments Inc.



HousingNowTO.com

HousingNowTO

A volunteer-run and pro-bono open-source web platform that shares and explains the details of the City of Toronto's affordable-housing development sites.

Created in January 2019, this civic-tech initiative is made up of planning, architecture, technology and social-analytics volunteers who update and translate information valuable to both for residents affected by the development projects as well as municipal processes and operations.

Affordable Housing Innovation

The innovation behind HousingNowTO.com's approach is in the bridging of the communications and information gap that exists between housing professionals (civic, development, planners, etc.) and the average resident.

The project noticed that while polling indicated strong public support for affordable housing, there were also trends of complaints and questions from residents when affordable-housing projects were announced in their neighbourhoods.



[Learn more about HousingNOWTO](#)



Using common tools such as Google maps, photographs, videos and data-visualization, HousingNowTO.com removes industry jargon, thereby minimizing misinformation and enhancing transparency and opportunities for genuine civic engagement.

The impact of this increased engagement has a proven track record of supporting the development of affordable housing - the first four “fast-track” sites featured on the platform increased 30% in size and scale from the original City proposal, adding 588 units to the plan, 184 of which are affordable units.

Challenges and Opportunities to Scaling Innovation

HousingNowTO.com’s model has been built to be replicated and scaled. The civic-tech and open-government approach can be replicated by digital-government teams within the public sector, or by civic-tech and “data-for-good” voluntary teams.

Groups across Vancouver, Calgary and Ottawa have reached out to HousingNowTO to develop local methods and projects for themselves. This work has great potential in re-imagining land-ownership models across the country, including municipal assets, corporate and Crown lands.

It is also an opportunity to re-imagine how to share expertise. Secondments from government offices for part-time work with content expertise in planning, zoning processing and development engagement can support this work even when additional funding is not available.

Challenges around data upkeep and a sustainable business plan could be addressed with dedicated funding and partnerships to support full-time staff, strategic planning, and the most accessible user experience possible. The collaboration across the private sector, non-profits, government and residents in this model will strengthen two-way communication and impact to and from residents and their needs for innovative affordable housing development.



Mark Richardson

Technical Lead, HousingNOWTO

"There's lots of information out there about affordable housing right now, but all of it is currently stuck in silos and much of it is written in very arcane language... You have to simplify the information to make it consumable to the average person within sixty seconds."

Love the Laneways

The Laneway Project

An initiative to transform neglected urban laneways into vibrant community places that expand the shared space available for community life in neighbourhoods undergoing housing intensification.



Affordable Housing Innovation

By protecting, supporting and celebrating the place-based culture and landscape of neighbourhoods, Love the Laneways offers community-centered, low-cost and high-impact improvements that create a more vibrant public realm in our evolving neighbourhoods.

The initiative can increase the availability of green space in densely-populated areas, provide local economic opportunities like patios, pop-ups and micro-businesses, dedicate room for public events, art, festivals and more.

When neighbourhoods receive top-down external investment for parks, beautification projects, or creative neighbourhood initiatives, the subsequent ripple effects of that investment can drive up the market value of rental properties, commercial land and home ownership, and can push out its current residents.



[Learn more about
The Laneway Project](#)



A community-centered approach like Love the Laneways celebrates the unique culture of a neighbourhood as seen by its residents. It not only retains the vibrancy of the neighbourhood as it stands, but provides spaces and opportunities for new residents to become a part of it.

Some opportunities that could support the scaling of this work include collaborative engagements with communities, policy-makers and municipal urban planning departments, as well as new policy frameworks that support or require investment in the health and culture of neighbourhoods when new developments are being considered.

Challenges and Opportunities to Scaling Innovation

Building the capacity and supporting the innovative, community-centred improvement of public spaces in other neighbourhoods, cities and towns across the country is a goal that The Laneway Project is building to through the development of [adaptable resources, maps and toolkits](#).

In this dissemination approach to scaling, Love the Laneways becomes a framework of methods and measures that can support place-based leadership by local residents, organizations and policy-makers anywhere there is interest in creating and stewarding safe, vibrant, resilient spaces in alleyways, parkettes, courtyards and walkways.



Michelle Senayah

Executive Director,
The Laneway Project

"We've been able to draw broad lessons about laneways, but also about community-centered, community-focused spaces that access all of the different parts of our properties."



Modular Housing Initiative

City of Toronto

An innovative and cost-effective model to build small-scale infill housing while providing a rapid, dignified response to connect people experiencing homelessness with homes and appropriate supports to help them achieve housing stability.

Affordable Housing Innovation

With two pilot projects already open, the City of Toronto has advocated for the creation of over 3,000 new supportive housing units before the end of 2022, with 1,000 of these made possible through the Modular Housing Initiative.

The high-quality, pre-fabricated design greatly decreases construction time, speeding up the building of affordable housing to meet immediate needs of people experiencing or at risk of experiencing homelessness.

The model takes a "housing as health" approach and partners with non-profit service providers to support residents' needs, including access to food and health services.



[Learn more about the
Modular Housing Initiative](#)



Challenges and Opportunities to Scaling Innovation

Three critical components that could support the scaling of this model are catalyzing city-owned land, partnering with experienced non-profit service providers, and using a pre-fabricated design.

This secures more affordable housing units than the average development time. It also recognizes the role of housing as a key social determinant of

health, and supports residents transitioning out of housing precarity with services focused on their health and well-being.

The model also streamlines cost efficiency – it is estimated that the provincial and federal governments could save at least \$60-\$180 million following this approach rather than a traditional shelter system.

Opportunities for further development could include designing beyond the studio apartment to family-friendly units with the same service support and community integration.

Abi Bond

Executive Director, Housing
Secretariat, City of Toronto

"Housing really is health. You can't address any health issues without having housing as a foundation... housing saves lives."

NEXII Whole Building Solution

NEXII Building Solutions, Inc.

A whole-building solution that improves the energy efficiency and therefore climate impacts of new and existing buildings that supports Canada's commitment to reaching Net-Zero by 2050.



Affordable Housing Innovation

Meeting affordable housing goals requires that scaling be considered with a plan for resource-use and sustainability. NEXII combines existing resources, production and infrastructure to scale whole-building solutions quickly and at a lower cost than conventional construction.

NEXII's focus on energy retro-fits and green design improves existing housing and commercial building spaces and invests in a smaller footprint for new developments. This model reduces residential operating costs (heating, cooling) for renters and homeowners and reduces construction costs and waste production for developers and investors.

These improvements directly impact the investment and maintenance costs of municipalities, developers, construction companies, institutions, homeowners and renters alike.

NEXII

[Learn more about
NEXII Whole Building Solutions, Inc.](#)



Challenges & Opportunities to Scaling Innovation

NEXII has scaled rapidly in recent years. Its branching strategy requires local partnership, the establishment or adaptation of local manufacturing facilities, and local employment and skills-training practices, thus stimulating the local economy while broadening affordable housing opportunities.

NEXII has identified opportunities based on partnership potential, the local landscape, and the capacity for local manufacturing. As NEXII expands its operations globally, there is rich ground to assess both the positive and negative impacts of retaining local production and partnerships, and integrating global supply chains to keep housing costs affordable.

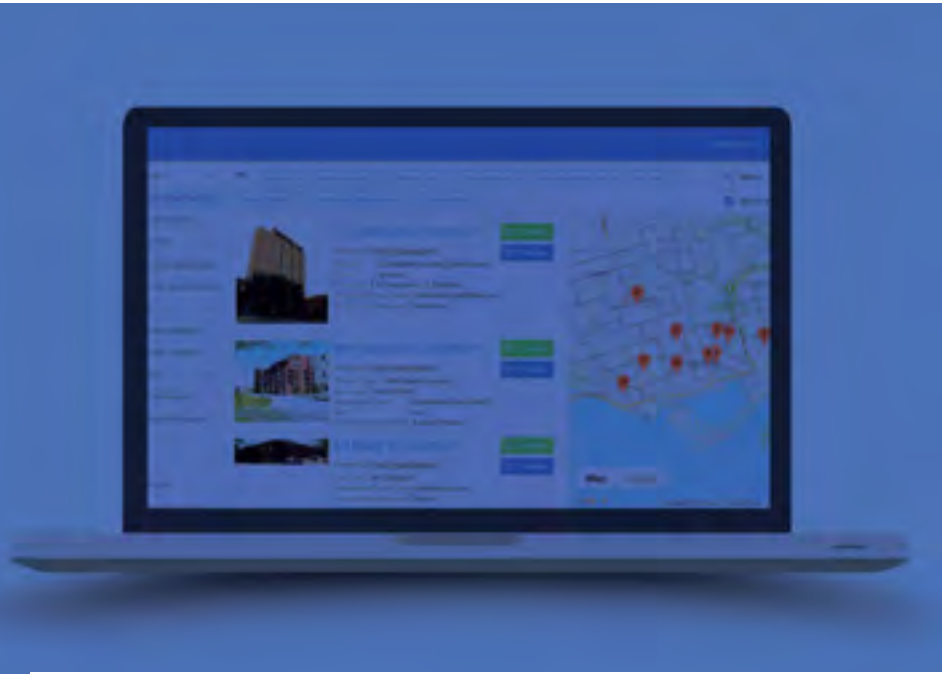


"A new building technology is an incredibly expensive venture, it's incredibly risky. Finding your right team, finding your right channel partners, growing together, is one of the most important aspects to taking a new technology to the next level."

Colin Doylend

Director, Partnerships, NEXII Building Solutions, Inc.





Parcel

School of Cities, University of Toronto

A digital matchmaking platform to connect creative mixed-use initiatives and stakeholders in support of forming public-private-non-profit partnerships to deliver mixed-use affordable housing and elderly care facilities.

Parcel case study listings. Image courtesy of Parcel.

Affordable Housing Innovation

The School of Cities at the University of Toronto launched Parcel to support partnership development across sectors for mixed-use affordable housing and elderly care facilities. This digital platform catalyzes innovative partnerships by connecting resources, assets and services across public, private and non-profit networks for an equitable and resilient pandemic recovery.

Research from the School of Cities has indicated that strong, dialogic partners with the right combination of resources and assets is critical to speed up affordable housing in mixed-use projects.

Parcel acts as the vehicle to facilitate and spark collaboration, matching networks based on needs, resources, and constraints. The first version of the matchmaking platform is complete and has been tested with over 40 key stakeholders.



School of Cities
UNIVERSITY OF TORONTO

[Learn more about Parcel](#)

Platform active Spring 2021



Challenges and Opportunities to Scaling Innovation

Lacking connections with the right resources is a consistent barrier to scaling innovation experienced across sectors. Some stakeholders face barriers to developing partnerships, not all interested parties make for suitable partnerships, and most stakeholders are not equipped to independently navigate the wide range of complexity across affordable housing development (from policy navigation to construction needs to power dynamics).

When framed with a grounding in social justice and resilience, a matchmaking platform can foster powerful multi-sectoral partnerships to share resources, risk and development in ways that might otherwise not have been possible.

Given its digital design, Parcel's methodology could continue to be scaled as more partners use the platform, could see improvements and increased offerings in its algorithms over time, and could be expanded to other municipalities for a place-based approach.

Early adoption by housing leaders, especially within the government and policy circles would improve impact in its beginning stages and lead to wider-spread and diverse adoption across silos.

Cecelia Pye

Project Lead, Creative Mixed-Use
Building Initiative, School of Cities

"The success in our approach has really built on the importance of relationships and developing partnerships."

Multiple community town halls, consultations and information sessions were hosted to inform the process, as well as a client working group to advise on how to best support those who have been unhoused.

Challenges and Opportunities to Scaling Innovation

Communities across the country are losing low-rise affordable housing assets. A model that enables community-centric non-profits to preserve neighbourhood assets through municipal and funder partnerships to retain the culture and heritage, ensures that low-income residents will not be forced out as neighbourhoods change.

The approach alleviates stress on the shelter system and provides a long-term housing option that supports the well-being and stability of its residents through social service provision, and strengthens communities through consultation and heritage preservation.

It might also increase tenancy sustainment and reduce overall micro and macro costs. Scaling this innovation will require a long-term commitment from partners with land, housing assets and funding for social services.

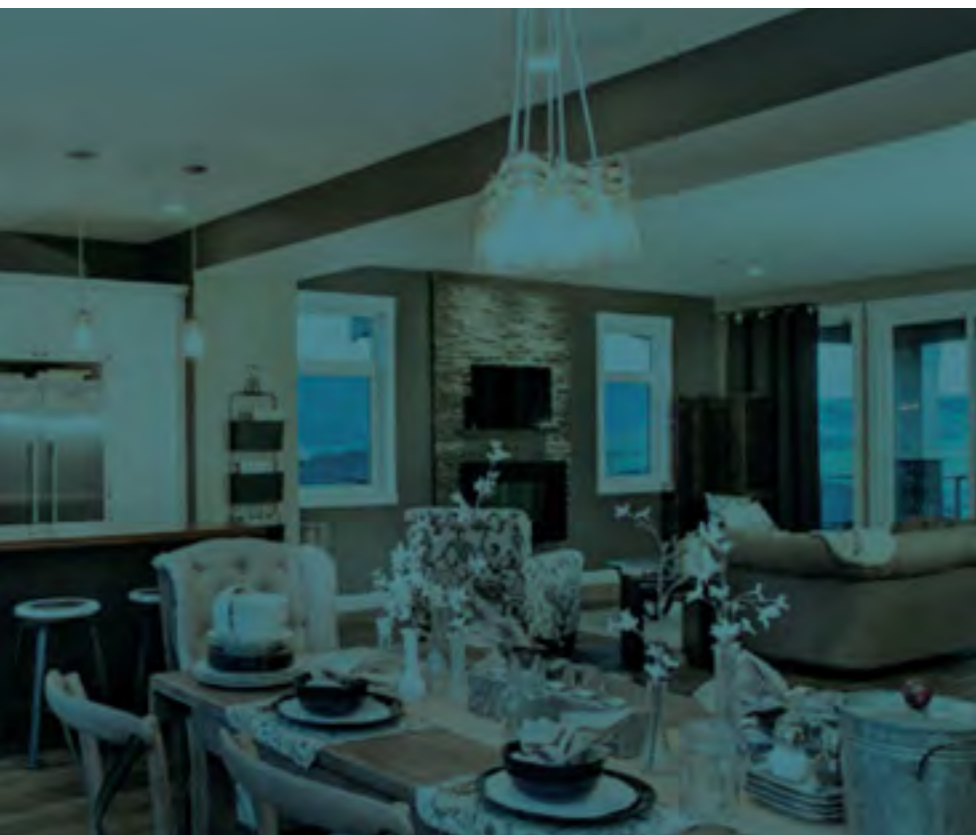
This approach could reduce risk and share responsibilities amongst stakeholders based on their resources or expertise, removing the burden of sustainable retrofitting, land upkeep, service provision and strategic planning from one single entity.



Eric Philip

Director of Real Estate, Dixon Hall
Services

"When you engage with [community stakeholders] really early on in the project, you're off to a good start in terms of building the community and creating a project that's more than just transitional housing - it becomes something that is building those bridges for the long-term in that community and between its populations.



SAFERhome's Measurable Certification for Universal Home Design

The SAFERhome Standards Society

A certification standard to support accessible design and residential modifications to allow seniors to age in place and support residents with disabilities.

Adoption of a standard enhances the sustainability of affordable housing for its residents and builds the accessibility of the broader community.

Affordable Housing Innovation

Developing a standard for safety is critical for innovation in affordable housing to address the holistic community needs and accessibility for our aging population, young children, and residents with disabilities.

SAFERhome honours the right to stay in place – that a home be both built or renovated so that it remains affordable, accessible and safe for the resident no matter how their circumstances change over time. It is a proactive approach and a nuanced understanding to housing sustainability and ultimately, affordability; by ensuring that housing is intentionally built or renovated to be adaptable, energy-efficient and safe for its residents.



[Learn more about SAFERhome](#)



Implementation of a standardized design process removes the burden of investment from the home and land owners.

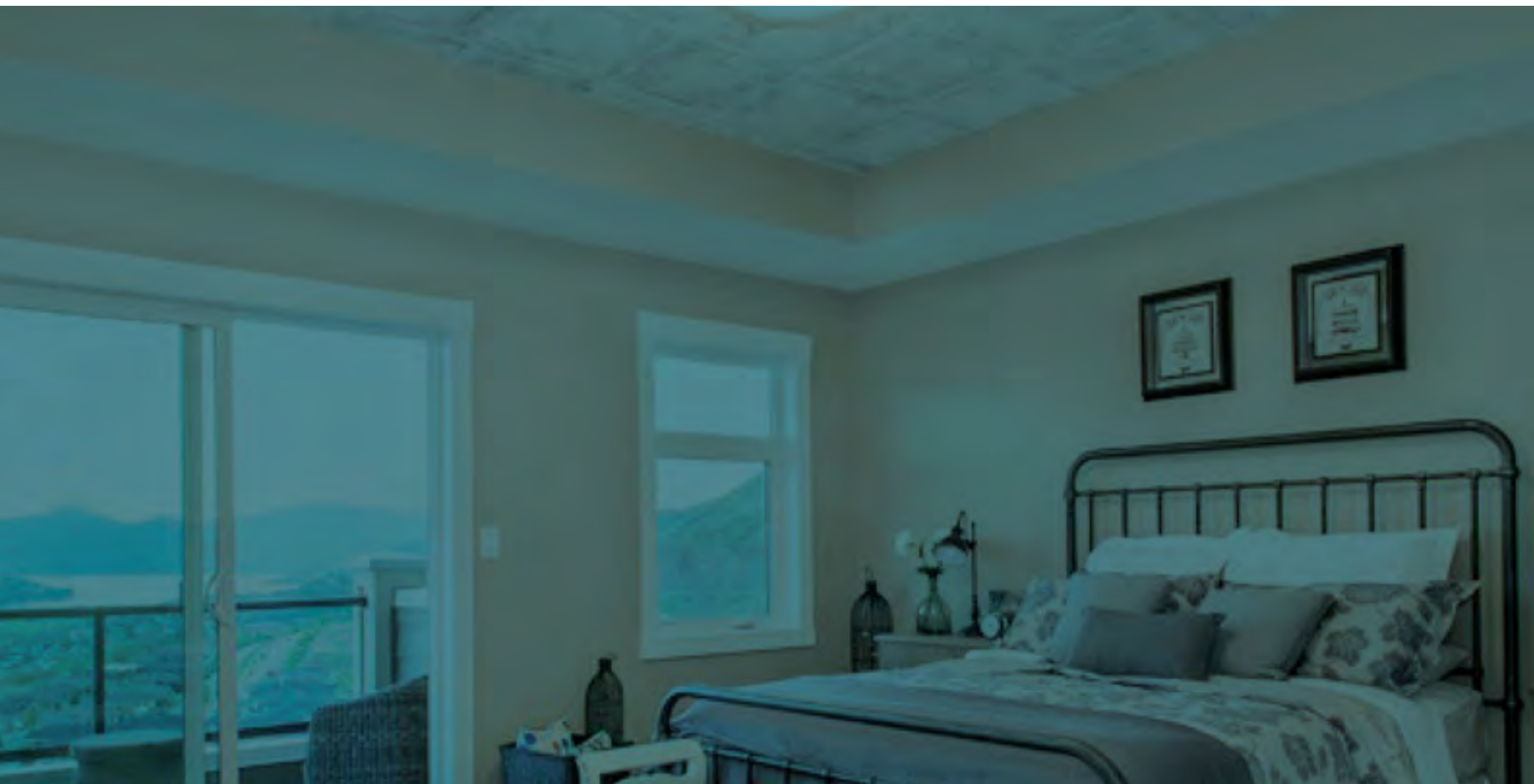
Given the aging population across the country, the increase in awareness around disability justice, and the limitations of appropriate care in assisted-living homes during Covid-19, innovations around staying in place will be critical to the future of affordable and accessible housing.

Challenges and Opportunities to Scaling Innovation

Setting up a standard through which housing professionals and homeowners can build long-term safety and accessibility ensures inclusive sustainability “in place”.

The challenge is the dissemination of this knowledge and know-how, the adoption and spread of standardization, and the funding required to support the initial building or renovations required.

Government funding dedicated to infrastructure upgrades in accessibility or green retrofits would benefit from the compliment of a standardized certification. So far, BC Housing's 2019 design and construction guidelines includes every aspect of the SaferHome standards.



Colin Doylend

Director of the Board, SAFERHomes
Standards Society

"The foundation of sustainability in any community begins with the homes within the community being sustainable for the people who live in them."

SHINE

Seniors Services Society of BC

The Seniors Housing Information & Navigation Ease program (SHINE) assists seniors and their caregivers to easily access senior-specific programs, supports and services across British Columbia (BC) related to housing, housing security, isolation and mental wellness.



Affordable Housing Innovation

Research in partnership with Simon Fraser University, the Ministry of Mental Health and Addictions and the Ministry of Health indicates that a growing barrier for aging populations is the challenging navigation of online platforms for housing and other social services (health services, mental health care, employment and insurance services, etc.).

SHINE's collaborative approach supports housing navigation, community service connections, resource/directory development and community collaboration.

This includes advising tenancy rights, communication support with rental organizations/applications, mediation, conflict resolution and self-advocacy training, and representing the needs of local seniors at community committees.

SHINE's innovation is in building a platform that supports aging in place by first developing a deep understanding of the root threats to ageing in place.



[Learn more about
Seniors Services Society of BC](#)



Challenges and Opportunities to Scaling Innovation

SHINE takes on a proactive approach in addressing some of the root causes of housing unaffordability before seniors and aging residents could become unhoused.

In following a network-based model, they are able to scale the impact of their platform with place-based and context-specific service provision across regions in BC, including New Westminster, Vancouver, Nanaimo, Prince George and Kelowna. The network approach disseminates the research and knowledge that has informed this platform while alleviating and

sharing some of the operational requirements to deliver services at scale.

A challenge may arise in the extension of this network, which could be alleviated through the use of interdisciplinary, national match-making platforms to extend the model with place-based leaders and networks.

With success in scaling across British Columbia already, SHINE has built a system that, with the appropriate place-based research partners and service providers, could help protect ageing in place across the country.

Alison Silgado

CEO, Senior Services Society

"[Seniors in transition] need a lot of supports during that time to stabilize them to transition into a more stable, permanent situation.

Those are pieces that COVID has really shone a light on."⁴

⁴ Theresa Mcmanus (2020, May 4) COVID-19 highlights need for homeless shelter for seniors. New Westminster Record. Available: <https://www.newwestrecord.ca/local-news/covid-19-highlights-need-for-homeless-shelter-for-seniors-3121945>



Tower Renewal Partnership (TRP)

Centre for Urban Growth and Renewal

A nonprofit initiative which works through research, advocacy and demonstration to transform post-war towers and their surrounding neighbourhoods into more sustainable, resilient and healthy places, fully integrated into their growing cities.

Image courtesy of Jesse Jackson.

Affordable Housing Innovation

The TRP was initiated by ERA Architects as the Centre of Urban Growth and Renewal (CUG+R) in 2009 to create a framework for tower neighbourhood investment.

Partners have included United Way, Maytree Foundation, Evergreen and DKGI, amongst dozens of contributors such as CMHC, municipalities, industry associations, tenant advocacy groups, technical innovation leaders, and residents with lived experience.

The TRP builds enabling frameworks to make tower neighbourhoods more livable, improving the access to and quality of affordable housing to priority communities. It focuses on deep energy retrofits that enhance the sustainability of both the housing supply itself as well as the community's environmental, economic and social sustainability.



[Learn more about the
Tower Renewal Partnership](#)

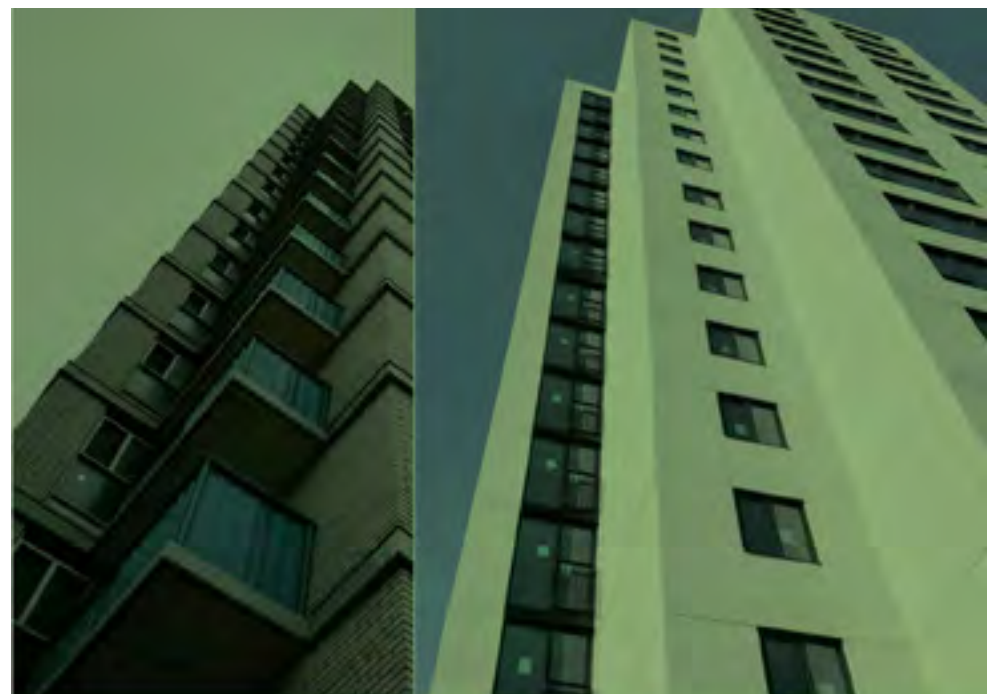


By renewing post-war towers, the TRP supports a balanced supply of housing, securing the future of our aging building infrastructure as a crucial part of the Canadian housing ecosystem.

Challenges and Opportunities to Scaling Innovation

The TRP estimates that there are at least 740,000 households across the country living in apartment units in need of renewal. The tower renewal concept is an opportunity to utilize existing infrastructure in a way that retains affordable housing within the community and invests in that community's future sustainability.

The TRP has seen a wave of early adopters, spurred by provincial and federal supports such as the National Housing Strategy and its Co-Investment Fund. Broader expansion and impact of the tower renewal model will depend on the clarity and support of regulation and guidelines, as well as the investment and advancements made in the industry.



"Covid-19 has brought housing inequities into sharp focus in neighbourhoods throughout our cities. Implementing Tower Renewal strategies, and investing in both the 'hardware' and 'software' needed, are more critical now than ever at a national scale."

Ya'el Santopinto

Director of Research & Partnerships, CUG +R

Image courtesy of ERA Architects.

Usine de peinture Bétonel

Brique par Brique

A paint factory (peinture Bétonel) converted into a social housing cooperative of thirty affordable and wheel-chair accessible units in Montreal's Parc Extension neighbourhood.



Brique par brique community engagement in Parc-Extension (Montreal).

Image courtesy of Brique par Brique®.

The Cooperative will be supported with community resources including childcare, translation services, and cooperative management training.

Affordable Housing Innovation

Peinture Bétonel came together through two distinct innovations. The first was its financing model. When other funding options were too limited or could not respond fast enough to the needs of the community, Brique par Brique tapped into the power of market forces and real estate.

The initial funding of the project was achieved through community bonds from a supportive network across Canada and the United States. The rest of the funding was earned from Brique par Brique's services in real estate, engineering, architecture and facilitation across collective housing initiatives such as cooperatives and tenant buy-backs.



[Learn more about Brique par Brique](#)



The second innovation was in the community-driven design of the project. By partnering with organizations embedded and trusted by the Parc Extension community, Peinture Bétonel was able to pull priorities flagged through these relationships and build essential social services into its design.

Challenges and Opportunities to Scaling Innovation

Community bonds and community-led change are acts of mutual aid. The community bond approach can be scaled, and ought to be complimented with community-driven objectives as demonstrated by Peinture Bétonel.

Scaling this model of funding democratizes land-ownership and housing assets, ensuring that those most impacted by affordable housing decisions are leading the decision-making process.

The impact deepens community-building, prevents evictions, and retains properties within the neighbourhood. Creative financing demonstrates that while broader systemic change is required,

there are disruption and intervention points within our current models of real estate and fundraising that can be used for social good.

There is much that can be explored in building out market forces and financial models for community-led projects, including international financing or international bonds.



Faiz Abhuani

Director, Brique par Brique

"[We] leveraged the power of the market to funnel resources towards social housing and the development of mutual aid in our neighbourhood."

Brique par Brique community engagement in Parc-Extension (Montreal). Image courtesy of Brique par Brique®.

Scaling Strategies for Innovation

Successful scaling of innovative solutions to housing affordability and other systemic challenges is necessary to fully meet innovation ambitions and impacts.

Before a tested and proven innovation can develop its scaling strategy, it needs to explore its scaling potential through:⁵

- Strong understanding of unique offering, market differentiation
- Deep concept of impact and how it is achieved
- Proof that the model is transferrable and evidence indicating that it has a deeper impact when scaled

The first step to scaling is sharing the solution and its real and potential impact with targeted key stakeholders, exploring ways to leverage existing networks, resources and collective ambitions.

⁵ Dees, Gregory and Anderson, Beth Battle. "Scaling Social Impact: Strategies for spreading social innovations." (Spring 2004). Stanford Social Innovation Review. Available: https://ssir.org/articles/entry/scaling_social_impact

Scaling Out, Scaling Up, Scaling Deep: Advancing Systemic Social Innovation and the Learning Processes to Support it Prepared for the J.W. McConnell Family Foundation and Tamarack Institute by Darcy Riddell and Michele-Lee Moore (October 2015). Available: https://mcconnellfoundation.ca/wp-content/uploads/2017/08/ScalingOut_Nov27A_AV_BrandedBleed.pdf

Sharing can happen in several ways. The four approaches identified below have proven particularly effective from a scaling perspective:



Dissemination

Spreading a solution by sharing knowledge that others can bring into their own communities or work. This could include resources, toolkits, processes and lessons learned, and is a decentralized approach to broaden impact within the challenge area. This is sometimes the least costly and the least resource-intensive way to spread impact.

HousingNowTO, for example, prioritizes an open-source, volunteer-led digital platform, a model which can be disseminated and adopted by groups started in other municipalities.

Love The Laneways has started exploring the building of toolkits that can be used by communities across the country looking to transform their own laneways or shared spaces, thereby sharing the integral operations, processes and mechanisms of their work in a way that can be adapted by

community leaders across the country to their own specific place-based affordability needs and priorities.

SAFERhome's Measurable Certification for Universal Home Design also scales its work through dissemination of resources and guidelines for accessible design to professionals and homeowners alike. The impact of disseminating knowledge is stronger when the target audience and key decision-makers are known and are embedded in the dissemination process.



Affiliation

Spreading impact through affiliation and cooperation with others can take many forms. For example, it can be a loose network of aligned affiliates centred around shared best practices and know-how.

It could also be a formalized group of aligned work that comes together across different districts to achieve the same objective.

A large part of **SHINE's** successful expansion across British Columbia is due to the support it gives to the organizations within its network. It boosts the capacity and development of the organizations, strengthening the services provided to clients across the province.

Parcel is also a model invested in affiliation. In connecting the right stakeholders together with the right resources, Parcel is deepening the collective impact of the network while supporting each individual stakeholder's impact.

The **Tower Renewal Partnership** scaled through an affiliation of cross-sectoral partners across Toronto who were able to leverage their respective contributions and were able to improve more residential towers as a result.

Similarly, the **Modular Housing Initiative** was a collaboration of municipal land-ownership and social service provision that has not only scaled across the city of Toronto but that scaled from Vancouver's experience and is shaping the model of municipalities across the country.

Branching

If cohesion in governance, branding or delivery are of high importance to maintain impact, quality or legitimacy, branching could be a strong scaling strategy.

This could take a centralized or de-centralized approach, either ensuring a similar experience or impact is achieved regardless of location, or encouraging local autonomy and place-based adaptation. Branching can be resource intensive and costly.

For example, **NEXII Whole Building Solutions** builds the resource, manufacturing and local employment infrastructure required to branch out to different regions and locations.

While **Healthy House Apartments** is currently developing its first site, its future work may scale through branching, applying its model for gentle intensification under the same centralized branding and operations.



Dialogue

A dialogic approach requires reciprocal conversations, and an openness to change opinions, plans and strategies based on the feedback received from communities, users, or those outside of the target audience.

It embraces a non-linear approach to scaling, holding community impact and positive outcomes for the community (as demanded by the community) as the objective, rather than “scaling” as the objective in and of itself. A dialogic approach is both a style of scaling, as well as a strategy that should be applied to all of the styles outlined above.

The Rooming House demonstrates a high degree of managing diverse perspectives, needs and changes in their communities and with their partners and funders – indeed, consultation across community lines has been essential to its success.

Usine de peinture is another example of the power of scaling dialogically. The project succeeds in holding the Parc Extension neighbourhood needs at the forefront through deep relationship-building,

while tapping into resources held within and outside of the community to secure the space.

Lastly, **Biinidigen** integrates a universal design to the dialogic approach, ensuring that community needs to housing and well-being are directly embedded into the planning, as well as honouring and protecting culture and the land. Place-based work and deep long-term relationships are critical to a dialogic approach to scaling.

Outcomes

Outcomes of these, and other forms of sharing, support scaling by:

Building Collective Capacity

Alignment with broader networks; emergence of new partnerships within and across sectors; identification of shared priorities and development of shared roadmaps or action plans.

Establishing Clear Areas of Opportunity

Identification of investment requirements and opportunities; policy change requirements; regulatory change requirements and action plans.

Identifying Strategic Alignment

Identification of leverage points vis-a-vis alignment with existing federal, provincial and/or municipal plans and strategies.

Influencing Paradigm Shifts

Opportunities to question existing regimes and approaches and create windows of opportunity to shift perspectives, influence ways of thinking, and shape new trends.

Supporting a Systems-Based Approach

Moving beyond industry silos to ground innovation across sectors and systems and thus contribute to greater social value.

Opportunities for Scaling Innovation in Affordable Housing

Several opportunities to scale affordable housing innovation emerged throughout Spotlight: Housing Innovation.

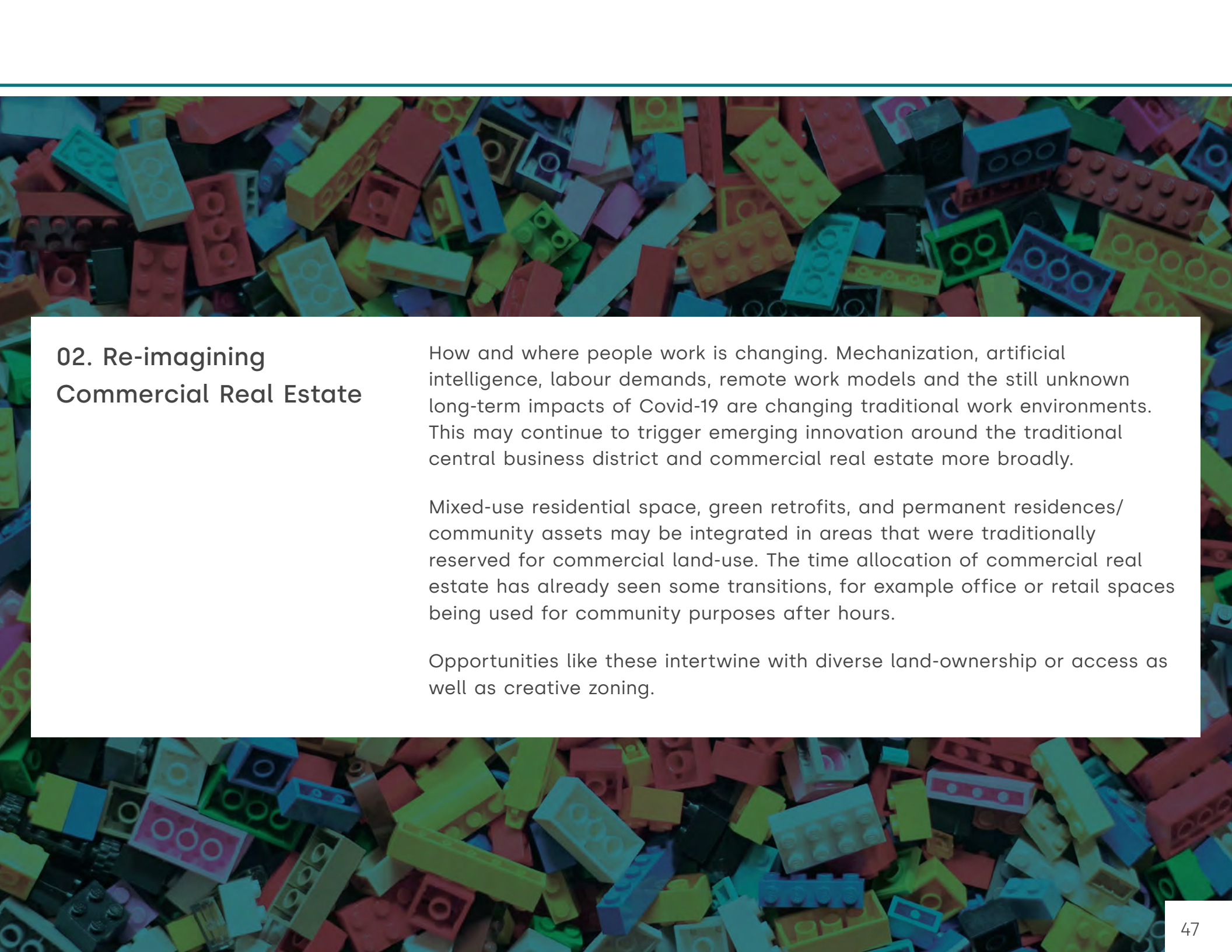
Drawn from diverse perspectives from across the housing ecosystems and associated industries, these opportunities include:

01. Diverse Land Ownership and Access

Conventional land ownership and single-use land development can limit the potential for community-driven gentle intensification and creative, local, multi-use solutions.

Land owned by churches, school boards, the Crown and other institutions could be explored through asset-mapping and community needs assessments to encourage efforts for affordable, community-owned rental properties/buildings, creating more mixed-use commercial/residential units through ownership or leasing models.

National commitments, including federal powers to expropriate land and dedicated regional plans to re-distribute city or privately held assets, could support long-term affiliative or branched scaling impact on affordable housing with opportunities for integrated support and cross-sectoral partnerships.

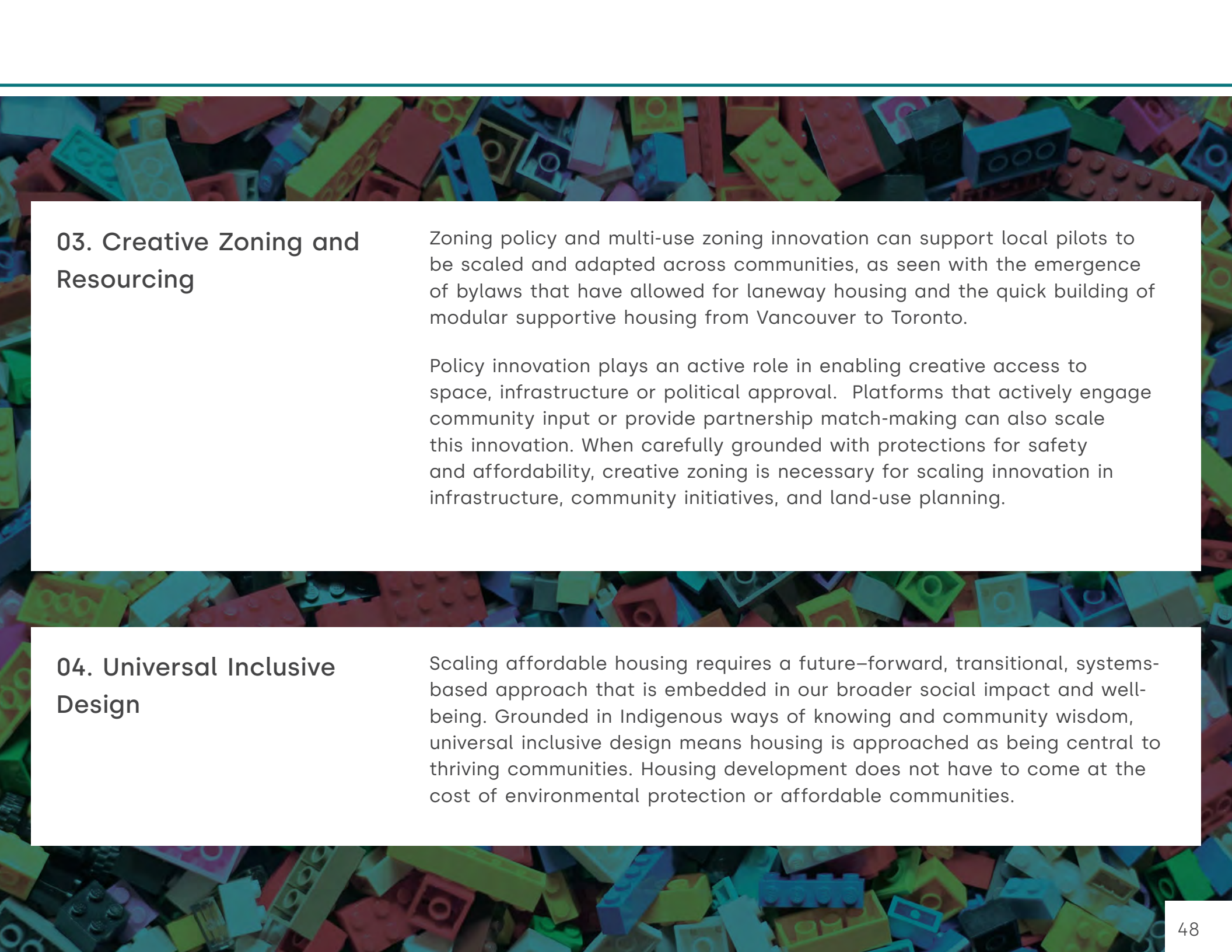


02. Re-imagining Commercial Real Estate

How and where people work is changing. Mechanization, artificial intelligence, labour demands, remote work models and the still unknown long-term impacts of Covid-19 are changing traditional work environments. This may continue to trigger emerging innovation around the traditional central business district and commercial real estate more broadly.

Mixed-use residential space, green retrofits, and permanent residences/ community assets may be integrated in areas that were traditionally reserved for commercial land-use. The time allocation of commercial real estate has already seen some transitions, for example office or retail spaces being used for community purposes after hours.

Opportunities like these intertwine with diverse land-ownership or access as well as creative zoning.

A background image of a large pile of colorful LEGO bricks in various shapes and sizes, including red, blue, green, yellow, and purple. The bricks are scattered and overlapping, creating a textured, playful background.

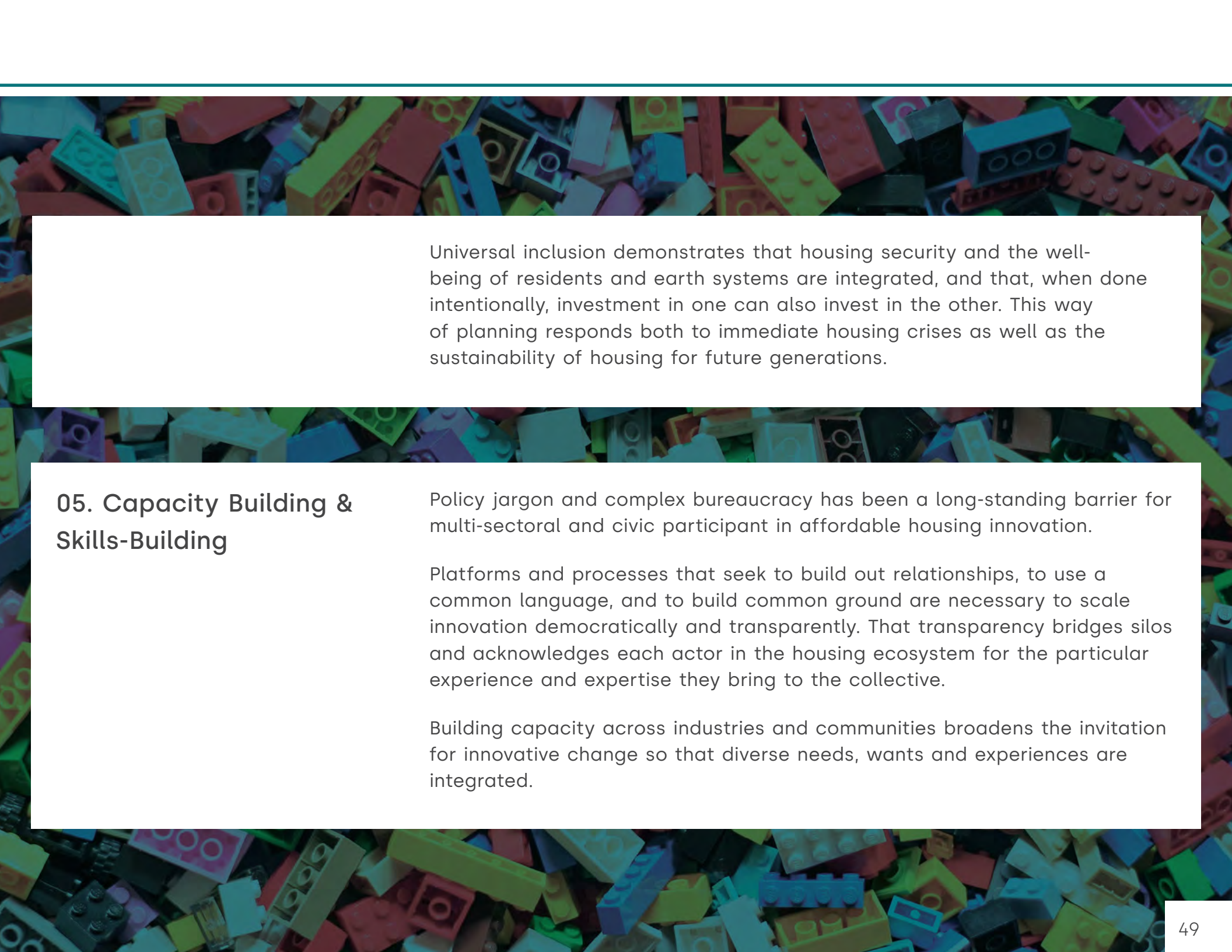
03. Creative Zoning and Resourcing

Zoning policy and multi-use zoning innovation can support local pilots to be scaled and adapted across communities, as seen with the emergence of bylaws that have allowed for laneway housing and the quick building of modular supportive housing from Vancouver to Toronto.

Policy innovation plays an active role in enabling creative access to space, infrastructure or political approval. Platforms that actively engage community input or provide partnership match-making can also scale this innovation. When carefully grounded with protections for safety and affordability, creative zoning is necessary for scaling innovation in infrastructure, community initiatives, and land-use planning.

04. Universal Inclusive Design

Scaling affordable housing requires a future-forward, transitional, systems-based approach that is embedded in our broader social impact and well-being. Grounded in Indigenous ways of knowing and community wisdom, universal inclusive design means housing is approached as being central to thriving communities. Housing development does not have to come at the cost of environmental protection or affordable communities.



Universal inclusion demonstrates that housing security and the well-being of residents and earth systems are integrated, and that, when done intentionally, investment in one can also invest in the other. This way of planning responds both to immediate housing crises as well as the sustainability of housing for future generations.

05. Capacity Building & Skills-Building

Policy jargon and complex bureaucracy has been a long-standing barrier for multi-sectoral and civic participant in affordable housing innovation.

Platforms and processes that seek to build out relationships, to use a common language, and to build common ground are necessary to scale innovation democratically and transparently. That transparency bridges silos and acknowledges each actor in the housing ecosystem for the particular experience and expertise they bring to the collective.

Building capacity across industries and communities broadens the invitation for innovative change so that diverse needs, wants and experiences are integrated.

Conclusion

The value of a platform to showcase leadership, to exchange ideas and to share opportunities is the knowledge, process and relationships that emerge from it. Innovation in affordable housing is widespread across the country, yet support in scaling that innovation is not.

That opportunity is clearly rooted in the collaborative leveraging of resources and expertise, combined with creativity and operational excellence.

It is clear from the Spotlight: Housing Innovation Demonstration Initiative that the collaborative leveraging of resources and expertise towards the common goal of affordable housing for all, is the pathway forward to scale those innovative initiatives that are championing this work.

While each showcased initiative demonstrated its unique approach to scaling innovation, the consistent through-line across participants' experience was the necessity for cross-sectoral, long-term partnerships that build solutions out of their respective strengths, skillsets, expertise or access.

Rachel Watson

Designer, Housing Action Lab
& Director, Watson & Associates

"Collectively we got to the problem, and collectively we're going to get out."

Graeme Stewart

Principal, ERA

"People on the ground and the expertise on the ground that is usually held by profit-driven enterprise is now being more distributed for purpose-driven enterprise."

Matti Siemiatycki

Interim Director, School of Cities,
University of Toronto

"There's been a lot of interest and enthusiasm for innovation in the provision of affordable housing... the key is twofold:

To think big and address this urgent challenge, and to do it in collaboration through deep partnerships and listening to those who are out there doing the work and building our cities."

Indeed, the power of innovation relies on collaborative, kinetic energy that breaks down silos and creates generative discussion, transparency and mutual accountability.

Supported by the right partner with the right resources and operational excellence, this combination of space, timing and common language will be integral to support the scaling of innovation and impact in affordable housing and the mission of the National Housing Strategy.

Appendix

Participants and Contributors – Spotlight: Housing Innovation

Innovative Housing Showcase

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Scaling Innovation Housing Workshop Participants

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University of Toronto

Mark Richardson, HousingNowTO.com, HousingNowTO

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Parkdale Neighbourhood Land Trust

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Design by Rosemary Costelloe

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