



## WR YIMBY Delegation in support of Mayor Urbanovic's Four-plex motion

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### **Delegation presented by Kevin White, written by Martin Asling**

Thank you Mayor and Council for letting me speak on this important topic. We are excited to hear that the City of Kitchener is considering allowing four-plexes as-of-right throughout the City. While more will need to be done to address our housing shortage and more will need to be done (outside of supply) to ensure affordability, this is an unambiguous step in the right direction.

Allowing for more housing near the downtown but maintaining much lower density in other neighbourhoods prices people out of these lower density neighbourhoods.<sup>i</sup> This denies them the opportunities that those neighbourhoods can provide. It can also mean younger people are unable to afford to stay in the neighbourhood where they grew up and have friends, family and networks.

Currently, our growth in population and in housing in our downtown hides an opposite trend in other neighbourhoods. Last year, The Record noted that the "Forest Heights and Highview suburbs in west Kitchener lost one per cent of residents. Their housing stock grew by one per cent in a city where the population grew by 10 per cent and dwellings grew by eight per cent."<sup>ii</sup> Allowing for four-plexes in these neighbourhoods can address their decline in population, and allow these neighbourhoods to play a role in addressing our housing shortage.

Infill housing is also important for sustainability. Four-plexes and six-plexes can more easily be built using more environmentally friendly material for buildings, such as wood<sup>iii</sup>. Perhaps more importantly, allowing four-plexes throughout our neighbourhoods is an alternative to sprawl and makes public transit and active transportation more viable options.<sup>iv</sup> Denser housing is also less expensive to service than sprawling suburbs.<sup>v</sup>

Many on Council are also rightly concerned about displacement. We can't address displacement without also addressing the demand for housing that is at the root of it. When we don't build enough housing in some select neighbourhoods, all that demand is pushed into those neighbourhoods that do allow more housing. Allowing for more housing through the city takes some of this pressure off, and can possibly reduce displacement in the downtown.<sup>vi</sup> This makes four-plexes a good complement to other measures



the City of Kitchener or Region should consider, such as rental replacement rules for new developments and a renoviction bylaw like Hamilton is considering<sup>vii</sup>.

We look forward to hearing more details of this four-plex proposal in the coming year. We'll need to pay attention to the details. Requirements such as maximum heights, setbacks, Floor Space Ratio<sup>viii</sup> requirements and parking minimums<sup>ix</sup> can deter or increase the costs of such smaller-scale developments.<sup>x</sup> For example, in Vancouver, progressive economist Marc Lee recommended a 1.5 to 2.0 floor space ratio for missing middle housing to work, but the City only approved 1.0. Consequently, City staff only predicts 150 multiplex projects a year in a City as large as Vancouver<sup>xi</sup>. That's not enough. We need to prioritize more housing options over ensuring new housing looks the same as single detached homes.<sup>xii</sup>

Allowing for four-plexes throughout the City of Kitchener is an important step in the right direction. Ensuring that this missing-middle housing type is feasible by not tacking on onerous other requirements is key. In addition, we would be delighted if the City of Kitchener showed leadership in going further than the federal government is requesting, allowing for more than four units on a lot. We also note that the Housing For All strategy is looking at zoning for lodging homes, giving the City of Kitchener the opportunity to allow this more affordable housing type throughout the City of Kitchener as well. We are thankful to the City of Kitchener for this motion and to the Federal Government for helping spur this on.

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<sup>i</sup> Single detached homes and lower rise homes are consistently the most expensive housing types. For local data, see here: <https://kwar.ca/home-sales-june-2022/>

<sup>ii</sup> Outhitt, Jeff (March 22, 2022) Tall and sprawl: 'We have these very uneven patterns of growth' Waterloo Region Record. [https://www.therecord.com/news/waterloo-region/tall-and-sprawl-we-have-these-very-uneven-patterns-of-growth/article\\_aab9c8f7-86e9-5074-8ddd-1330ce750b75.html](https://www.therecord.com/news/waterloo-region/tall-and-sprawl-we-have-these-very-uneven-patterns-of-growth/article_aab9c8f7-86e9-5074-8ddd-1330ce750b75.html)

<sup>iii</sup> If a building is proposed using wood for more than 6 stories, "an Alternative Solution is required. This is a more involved process for approval." See Pg. 80 and the Outline for Wood Building requirements on pg. 6, in Ontario's Tall Wood Building Reference: A Technical Resource for Developing Alternative Solutions under Ontario's Building Code. October, 2017. [https://files.ontario.ca/ontarios\\_tall\\_wood\\_building\\_reference.pdf](https://files.ontario.ca/ontarios_tall_wood_building_reference.pdf)

<sup>iv</sup> Lower density housing is associated with higher greenhouse gas emissions due to size of homes and higher car reliance: <https://www.nytimes.com/interactive/2022/12/13/climate/climate-footprint-map-neighborhood.html> See also, Toronto Metropolitan University's (2020, pg. 6) *Density Done Right* [https://www.torontomu.ca/content/dam/city-building/reports/Ryerson\\_CBI\\_Density\\_Done\\_Right\\_April2020FINAL.pdf](https://www.torontomu.ca/content/dam/city-building/reports/Ryerson_CBI_Density_Done_Right_April2020FINAL.pdf)

<sup>v</sup> See *Density Done Right*, pg. 6, and Not Just Bikes, (March 7<sup>th</sup>, 2022), Suburbia is Subsidized: Here's the Math [ST07] <https://www.youtube.com/watch?app=desktop&v=7Nw6gyyrTel>



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<sup>vi</sup> On the link between funneling development into a select few neighbourhoods, instead of allowing multi-residential housing more broadly across the city, and gentrification in those relatively low-income neighbourhoods, see *Neighborhood Defenders*, by Einstein, Glick and Palmer (2019 pgs. 146-150)

<sup>vii</sup> ACORN Hamilton (October 14, 2023). Hamilton could pass first of its kind renovation bylaw. The Hamilton Spectator. [https://www.thespec.com/opinion/contributors/hamilton-could-pass-first-of-its-kind-renoviction-bylaw/article\\_807e03e0-4703-51be-ac83-2b83eb8bb10b.html?utm\\_medium=social&utm\\_source=twitter&utm\\_campaign=user-share](https://www.thespec.com/opinion/contributors/hamilton-could-pass-first-of-its-kind-renoviction-bylaw/article_807e03e0-4703-51be-ac83-2b83eb8bb10b.html?utm_medium=social&utm_source=twitter&utm_campaign=user-share)

<sup>viii</sup> Floor Space Ratios are defined by the City of Kitchener as “the figure obtained when the building floor area on a lot is divided by the lot area. In the case of a building or part thereof located above a street or lane, the calculation of the floor space ratio shall include that portion of the building floor area and that portion of the area of the street or lane between the lot line and the centre line of the street or lane”. See pg. 9, in the definitions for the 2019 bylaw, below: <https://app2.kitchener.ca/appdocs/Zonebylaw2019/PublishedCurrentText/SECTION%203%20-%20Definitions//Section%203.pdf>

<sup>ix</sup> Parking minimums also make housing more expensive, as parking encompasses “10-20% of the cost of housing”. Todd Litman (2019), Parking requirement impacts on housing affordability, Victoria Transport Policy Institute <https://apo.org.au/node/259126#:~:text=Parking%20typically%20represents%2010%2D20,requirements%20impose%20significant%20financial%20burdens>.

<sup>x</sup> Katie DeRosa (August 8, 2023). 'Poison pill' restrictions crushing hopes for more multi-unit housing in Victoria. Vancouver Sun. <https://vancouversun.com/business/real-estate/victoria-missing-middle-housing-restrictions>

<sup>xi</sup> See Marc Lee (2022, pg. 13) Upzoning Metro Vancouver’s Low-density Neighbourhoods for Housing Affordability [https://policyalternatives.ca/sites/default/files/uploads/publications/BC%20Office/2022/02/ccpa-bc\\_Upzoning\\_web.pdf](https://policyalternatives.ca/sites/default/files/uploads/publications/BC%20Office/2022/02/ccpa-bc_Upzoning_web.pdf) Lee’s colleague at the Canadian Centre for Policy Alternatives, economist Alex Hemingway makes a similar point here: <https://twitter.com/1alexhemingway/status/1683599504812167168>

<sup>xii</sup> Allowing for more flexible floor space ratios was recommended by Minneapolis’ planning commission as a way to make missing multi-family housing more feasible, but Council rejected this, arguably to preserve the aesthetics of single family homes:

“When the Minneapolis 2040 plan’s built form rules were being designed, the City Planning Commission and advocacy groups argued that duplexes and triplexes should be allowed to build at greater floor area ratios (FAR) than single family homes. This made a lot of sense as policy, because it would incentivize the construction of multi-family housing relative to single-family homes by increasing their potential leasable square feet. Furthermore, space is at a premium with smaller multi-family buildings, which need to provide certain types of rooms like kitchens and bathrooms in each unit, leaving less space for anything else.

But a greater FAR allowance didn’t make political sense, because the comprehensive plan had been pitched as allowing multi-family housing to be built only to the same size as existing single-family homes. As a result, the City Council walked back the FAR increases for duplexes and triplexes, leaving only a small bonus for buildings with an affordable unit.” Alex Schieferdecker, (August 24, 2022). How Minneapolis Could Become A Missing Middle Housing Factory, Streetsmn. <https://streets.mn/2022/08/24/how-minneapolis-could-become-a-missing-middle-housing-factory/>