CONNY GLENN FOR MAYOR OF KINGSTON — POLICY PAPER

Kingston's Housing Blueprint

A Practical Plan for Housing Stability

Introduction

Kingston has always been a city of opportunity — home to world-class institutions, a regional health-care system, one of Canada's most significant military communities, and neighbourhoods people are proud to call home.

But for too many people, finding a stable home in Kingston has become one of life's greatest challenges. Young adults who grew up here wonder whether they'll ever be able to stay. Families struggle to find housing that fits their needs. Seniors who want to downsize have few options in their own neighbourhoods. Students compete in an already tight rental market. And too many residents experience homelessness — not for lack of potential, but for lack of stability.

Housing is the foundation everything else is built on: economic growth, healthcare, education, community safety, and the strength of our neighbourhoods. This Blueprint sets out how Kingston will lead the creation of non-market housing, use its land and resources as tools for long-term stability rather than short-term revenue, and build permanent institutional capacity to deliver, not just another plan.

This is not a strategy document. Kingston already has strategies and plans. This is a commitment to delivery, built on one governing idea: stewardship. It is our responsibility to use public land, public dollars, and public trust in ways that serve Kingstonians for generations, not just the next term of Council.

1. The Case for Change — Restoring Stability

Kingston's housing challenges did not emerge overnight. They are the result of a multi-decade shift in the policy of senior levels of government, which backed away from directly building housing at scale and shifted responsibility toward the private market, while housing and homelessness responsibilities were increasingly downloaded to municipalities.

The private sector has played, and will continue to play, a critical role in building housing. However, the market alone cannot solve every housing challenge or meet every need. There is a growing gap between housing the market can provide and housing many residents can afford.

Kingston, like other municipalities, has become increasingly responsible for responding to the consequences of that gap — managing homelessness, operating shelters, supporting encampment responses and administering affordable housing programs without the financial tools to solve the problem on their own. And we've been managing. But managing a crisis is not solving it.

Despite investments and expanded supports, encampment numbers and waitlists remain persistently high. Emergency shelters remain under pressure, and first responders and service agencies spend increasing amounts of time responding to housing instability rather than preventing it. Despite all our good efforts, demand continues to grow faster than the system can respond.

Kingston is also growing, which is typically a positive sign for a city, but when lack of affordability is growing at the same time, we need to reset our focus. The inability to keep pace is not a failure of the people working within the system. It is an

indication of a system that needs restructuring.

By most conventional measures, Kingston is doing what it's been asked to do. The City committed to 8,000 new homes by 2031 as part of the province's housing push, and it has repeatedly exceeded its annual targets — enough to earn provincial infrastructure funding several years running.

Rents, despite falling somewhat, remain among the highest in the province relative to local incomes. Residents are feeling the squeeze. Young people still wonder if they can afford to stay. That gap between “meeting our targets” and “residents feeling stable” is the whole problem. Hitting overall housing-start numbers is not the same as solving affordability. Market-rate construction alone was never going to close that gap — it was never designed to, and we blame developers and the market for their supposed failing. The reality is that only a deliberate, City-led supply of non-market housing can stabilize housing.

Kingston does not need another collection of individual housing projects. It needs a housing delivery system — one that continuously identifies opportunities, coordinates public investment, brings partners together, aligns housing with infrastructure, secures funding from every level of government and community sources, and measures results in a meaningful way.

We need a system that views housing as critical infrastructure, where success is measured by stability, and where the ultimate measure is whether Kingston becomes a community where homelessness is rare, brief and non-recurring.

Kingston is unusually well positioned to lead on this. Few cities our size have such a high concentration of institutions and capacity, alongside an active development industry and experienced non-profit housing providers. What has been missing is a permanent organization committed to non-market housing. We need a city-led Housing Office.

2. Confronting High Rents

It's important to recognize that the affordability gap isn't spread evenly. It falls hardest on renters. Kingston's rents remain among the highest in the province relative to local incomes, and homeownership is out of reach for many who would once have expected to get there. Renters are disproportionately young people, students, seniors on fixed incomes, shift workers, and people already living paycheque to paycheque. A general cooling in the rental market is welcome, but it is not the same as rent stability, and it is not a plan.

Kingston will treat rental affordability as its own priority, not an assumed side effect of overall supply growth:

- Directing a meaningful share of the Housing Office's non-market portfolio specifically toward rental units, including rent-geared-to-income homes, so renters see the benefit directly rather than waiting for it to trickle down from ownership-focused construction.
- Protecting existing purpose-built rental stock through adaptive reuse and non-market acquisition, rather than only chasing new construction while older affordable rentals disappear.
- Advocating to the province for stronger tenant protections where the City's own tools fall short, since municipalities cannot set rent policy alone.

3. Housing and Health Care

Housing and health care are not separate systems. Unstable housing drives poor health outcomes, and poor access to housing drives pressure onto Kingston Health Sciences Centre and our broader health system. A serious housing plan has to treat that connection directly, not as an afterthought.

- **Reduce pressure on hospital beds.** Champion supportive and transitional housing options, developed with health system partners, so patients ready for discharge but without stable housing aren't held in hospital beds they no longer need medically — a real cost to the health system today, and one that increases wait times for you and your family.
- **Support housing-first approaches to homelessness.** Stable housing is health care. It reduces emergency department visits and improves outcomes for people experiencing chronic homelessness. The Housing Office should prioritize supportive housing units for this population as part of its portfolio.
- **Let seniors age in place.** Housing options that allow seniors to downsize within their own neighbourhoods or consider co-housing, rather than being displaced into long-term care earlier than necessary, ease pressure on both the housing system and the health system at once, while also decreasing social isolation — one of the leading causes of health decline in seniors.

4. Our Commitment: Kingston Must Lead

The market alone, as we've identified, will not deliver the housing stability Kingston needs. Private development has a critical role to play, but it will not solve homelessness, and it will not build the supply of deeply affordable homes our seniors, students, workers, and families need.

Kingston must lead the creation of non-market housing. That means:

- **Sustainably growing** the City's own social housing portfolio, not just supporting others who build it.
- **Contributing** municipal land and municipal money to non-market housing projects when economically feasible.
- **Treating** public land as a long-term asset for housing stability, not a one-time sale for short-term budget relief.
- **Building** the in-house capacity to move projects from concept to construction, supporting external partners who often have limited resources to carry all the work. Projects should not languish or fall through the cracks where we can assist.

Kingston will work as a facilitator and partner with the province, the federal government, non-profits, builders, and institutions. And, where Kingston can, it will contribute land, money, or direct delivery. This is what it means to be a system builder rather than a caretaker of the status quo — building the permanent institution that outlasts any single project or funding cycle.

5. How It Gets Delivered: The Housing Office

Every commitment in this Blueprint will run through one body: a dedicated Kingston Housing Office.

This is not a new committee layered on top of existing structures, and it is not a program that can be cut in a future budget cycle. It is a permanent change to how the City is organized to deliver housing — a standing institution with its own mandate, land holdings, and budget line, built to outlast any one Council term or election cycle. Just as the City permanently organized itself around roads, water, and transit generations ago, this Blueprint permanently organizes it around housing delivery.

The Housing Office will:

- **Hold and manage** the City's pipeline of housing-ready land, including sites contributed to non-market housing.
- **Administer** the City's direct contributions of land and money to affordable and social housing projects.
- **Lead** expansion of Kingston's social housing portfolio, including through direct development where appropriate.
- **Coordinate** across planning, engineering, finance, and community services so applicants and partners deal with one door, not five.

- **Prepare** projects in advance so Kingston is ready when provincial and federal funding opportunities open.
- **Report** publicly, every year, against Kingston's non-market housing targets.

Where past efforts have measured success in strategies written, meetings held, and new units of housing, the Housing Office will measure success in homes delivered — and it will still be measuring that a decade from now, regardless of who sits on Council.

Governance and Structure

Institutional design matters as much as the mandate itself. To avoid becoming another layer of process, the Housing Office will be built as follows:

- **A standing office, not a committee,** led by the city, with a budget approved annually by Council but structured, where possible, through multi-year funding agreements so individual projects aren't exposed to single-year budget swings.
- **Staffed by consolidating existing capacity.** Initial staffing draws from planning, housing, finance, and community services staff already doing pieces of this work today, consolidated under one roof rather than built from a blank slate, to help keep early costs down and institutional knowledge intact.
- **Supported by a Partnership.** Integral to the model is the Kingston Housing Partnership, which will advise on priorities and shared opportunities. The Housing Office holds its own delivery authority, but works with the partnership on resources and gaps to ensure a steady pipeline of housing is created.
- **Subject to independent review.** Annual reporting to Council and the public, plus an independent mid-term review at the midpoint of each Council term assessing progress against published targets, conducted by a third party.

6. Setting Targets We're Accountable To

Kingston already tracks its overall housing-start numbers closely, and has beaten its provincial targets in most recent years. That tells us the market-rate side of the system is working reasonably well. It tells us nothing about non-market housing, because no comparable target exists for it today.

That has to change. As part of its first-year mandate, the Housing Office will establish and publish a target broken down by the type of need it addresses, not just a single aggregate number:

- **Deeply affordable units** — homes at rent-geared-to-income levels for households who cannot be served by the private market at any price point.
- **Supportive housing units** — for people transitioning out of homelessness or requiring on-site supports, developed in partnership with health and social service agencies.
- **Workforce and attainable housing** — attainable ownership and workforce rental homes for health professionals, tradespeople, and other workers Kingston's economy depends on but who are being priced out.
- **Units delivered through direct City development and non-profit partnership** — tracked separately so residents can see which results come from City action directly and which depend on partners.

Each category gets its own annual sub-target, tracked on a public dashboard alongside the City's existing overall housing-start numbers, so residents can see both halves of the picture: total supply and non-market supply, broken down by who it actually serves.

Setting the target this way is itself a commitment: Kingston will no longer be able to point to strong overall housing-start numbers as evidence that affordability is being addressed, and it will no longer be able to hide behind an aggregate non-market number that could be met entirely with the easiest projects while harder ones, such as supportive housing and deeply affordable units, go under-developed.

7. Implementation Timeline

A permanent institution still needs a starting sequence. This Blueprint will be delivered in three phases:

- **Phase One** — Establish the Housing Office and transfer existing staff and functions under it; complete a full inventory of municipal land suitable for housing; publish the first non-market housing targets and public dashboard; sign the initial Housing Accord with founding partners.
- **Phase Two** — Begin construction on the first wave of non-market projects on identified municipal and other sites; lean into other financing and fundraising opportunities such as community bonds; adopt standardized design templates for non-profit and small-builder use; launch the first jointly developed supportive housing project with our health care partners.
- **Phase Three** — Annual public reporting against every target category; a rolling, continuously updated inventory of shovel-ready sites and partnerships; a standing practice of applying lessons from each completed project to the next one.

8. Working With Partners

Kingston cannot do this alone, and it shouldn't try to. A Kingston Housing Partnership will bring together the organizations already doing this work: the Kingston Frontenac Housing Corporation, Frontenac County, local health and housing agencies, educational institutions, Indigenous housing organizations, builders, and co-operative housing and non-profit housing providers.

The Partnership's job is coordination and shared priorities, not paperwork. Its members will help identify where municipal land, money, or capacity can do the most good, and hold each other accountable to a shared public commitment to work together rather than in silos.

9. Building Smarter

Delivering housing faster and more affordably means changing how Kingston builds, and changing how Kingston thinks.

Innovation — Standard Operating Procedure

Innovation isn't about chasing the newest idea because it's new. It's a discipline of constantly asking whether there's a better way to build, approve, finance, and support housing, and then actually changing course when the answer is yes. Under this Blueprint, that discipline shows up in concrete ways:

- **Modernize approvals with data and digital tools.** Move permitting and plan review onto modern digital systems, with clear public timelines, so that process delay stops functioning as a hidden tax on affordability.
- **Use data to plan ahead of demand,** rather than reacting to it, by tracking vacancy rates, demographic shifts, and construction pipeline data so the Housing Office can act before a shortage becomes a crisis rather than after.
- **Partner with our institutions on demonstration projects.** Queen's, St. Lawrence College, and RMC bring research and technical capacity Kingston should be using directly, piloting modular and mass-timber construction,

healthy building design, and district energy approaches on real municipal sites, not just studying them.

- **Treat every project as a chance to improve the next one.** The Housing Office should capture what worked and what didn't on each project it touches, so Kingston's fifth non-market housing project is measurably faster and cheaper to deliver than its first.

Innovation should always strengthen stewardship, never substitute for it. A clever financing tool or a faster approval process is only worth adopting if it produces more homes and better outcomes for residents, not fewer public protections.

Building Methods

- **Use what already exists.** Prioritize adaptive reuse of underused municipal buildings, surplus institutional properties, and commercial space before defaulting to new construction.
- **Standardize where it makes sense.** Adopt standardized, pre-approved housing designs, including through the federal Housing Design Catalogue, adapted to Kingston's neighbourhoods, to cut costs and speed up approvals for non-profits and small builders.
- **Build with modern methods.** Support modular, panelized, and mass-timber construction where it lowers cost and construction time, particularly for non-market and supportive housing.

Zoning and Land Use Tools

Design and construction innovation only matters if the zoning underneath it allows housing to be built where it's needed. This Blueprint pairs delivery reforms with land use tools:

- **Reduce case-by-case rezoning.** With the new official plan still to be approved, there is opportunity to ensure we get this right — expanding as-of-right permissions for multiplexes and missing-middle housing across more neighbourhoods, so smaller-scale non-market and market projects don't each require a case-by-case rezoning process.
- **Adopt inclusionary zoning.** Inclusionary zoning requirements for larger developments, calibrated with industry input so requirements add affordable units without stalling projects that wouldn't otherwise proceed.
- **Set minimums on public land.** Require a minimum non-market or affordable unit share on City-owned sites brought to market or offered under long-term lease for development, so public land consistently produces public benefit.
- **Continue to connect density to transit.** Align zoning and density permissions with the Integrated Mobility Plan so higher-density and non-market housing locates near transit, reducing transportation costs for the residents who need affordability most.

10. Paying For It

Kingston cannot fund this through property taxes alone, and it won't try to. Instead we will:

- **Use public land as a tool, not a transaction.** Where land is contributed to housing, the City will favour long-term leases over outright sale where doing so preserves affordability and public ownership over time.
- **Leverage community investment.** Support tools like Community Bonds so residents and local institutions can invest directly in affordable housing and earn a return, instead of relying on government funding alone.
- **Encourage community Land Trusts.** Support Land Trust models that separate land from building ownership, locking in affordability permanently rather than for a single project cycle.
- **Be funding-ready.** The Housing Office will keep a standing inventory of shovel-ready and worthy sites and partnerships so Kingston is first in line when provincial and federal dollars become available, including existing

infrastructure programs Kingston already draws on.

- **Help ensure growth pays for growth.** New development should occur where infrastructure exists or is planned, so existing taxpayers aren't left covering the cost of that growth. The City will pursue infrastructure funding tied to housing delivery and adopt new technologies to improve the lifecycle of infrastructure, reducing long-term maintenance and replacement costs for future generations.
- **Report the true cost of stewardship.** Every year, the Housing Office will report the estimated value of land and revenue directed toward non-market housing, so the trade-off between short-term proceeds and long-term public benefit is visible, not buried.

11. Accountability

Residents deserve to know whether this is working. Every year, the City will publicly report on:

- Non-market and social housing units funded, contributed to, or directly built, measured against the published target;
- Municipal land and money committed to housing, and the outcomes achieved;
- Housing Office project pipeline and funding secured;
- Progress against Kingston's overall provincial housing targets, reported alongside, not instead of, non-market progress.

Success will not be measured by plans written. It will be measured by homes built, targets met, and Kingstonians permanently housed.