

SMART INFRASTRUCTURE

What are Canadian cities doing to protect and build rental housing?

What We Did

We reviewed policies, plans, and by-laws in 15 Canadian cities to understand what each municipality was doing to protect existing units and build new rental. The cities fell into three categories:

- Small to mid-size (200,000-400,000): Regina, Sherbrooke, Windsor, Victoria, Saskatoon
- Mid-size (400,000-1,000,000): Winnipeg, Mississauga, Hamilton, Waterloo, Halifax
- Large (over 1,000,000): Calgary, Montreal, Ottawa, Vancouver, Edmonton

We also conducted a survey of municipal planners, developers, and non-profit housing staff involved in rental housing provision. The survey provided firsthand insights into the municipal approaches that are not available in publicly available documents, e.g. aspects of implementation or the success of key policies. In the next phase of the research, we will be looking for similarities and differences across the cities.

What We Found

The policy analysis revealed four groups of policies across the case studies: universal, common to some, uncommon, and unique. There is considerable variation in the strength of each policy and the intent of the municipality to actually implement it using dedicated funding or programs. The unique policies may be a result of particular constraints in the municipality, or unusually strong provincial-municipal collaboration. Vancouver, Edmonton, Calgary, Saskatoon, Winnipeg, Montreal, and Sherbrooke show several innovative approaches and strong policy language, backed by funding to implement them.

The survey showed that municipalities have had some success in overcoming identified barriers, such as low levels of coordination/collaboration, resistance to affordable/rental housing, and lack of developer interest in rental housing. Respondents felt that their municipalities were more successful in the development of new rental housing than in the protection of existing units. Factors associated with this success include a range of policy tools, such as capital grants and policies encouraging rental housing, as well as locally-specific characteristics such as good capitalization rates and very strong non-profits who act as developers. Respondents' advice to other municipalities focuses on stronger partnerships, communication, and coordination; stronger policy language and enforcement; and incentives and policy tools that work for developers.

Why Did We do This Comparison?

As urban planners, we wanted to explore how cities have, or have not, overcome barriers to developing and protecting rental housing across Canada. We will be using these policy ideas from other cities to facilitate policy learning among local stakeholders in rental housing development. Using policy ideas as inspiration can help planners and policy makers in other cities develop solutions to their own problems.

Research Funding

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What We Recommend

Some cities have built successful local/regional partnerships in order to develop new rental housing; others collaborate extensively with their provincial governments to develop incentive programs. Those with more innovative policies, strong policy language, and supportive funding and incentives may be more successful in developing new rental housing stock in the future. Most cities need stronger policies to protect existing rental units from redevelopment.



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