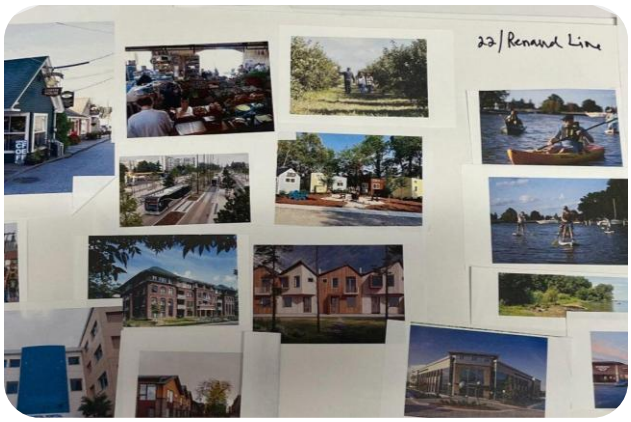
A Comprehensive Development System for Municipalities

Submitted By: Centre for Cities (C4C) Housing Systems Innovation Lab, Faculty of Law, University of Windsor, Canada



Organization Profile

Organization Name: Centre for Cities Housing Systems Innovation Lab

Organization Type: University and research institution

Website: www.centreforcities.ca/housing-lab

Practice Details

Country(ies): Canada

City(ies): Lakeshore

Start Year: 2025 **Ongoing:** Yes **End Year:** N/A

Main Adequate Housing Components:



Housing Thematic Areas:

- Housing Affordability & Financing
- Housing Rights & Social Inclusion
- Housing, Land & Spatial Planning
- Housing Policy, Legislation & Governance

Relevant SDGs:



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Problem & Context

Canada faces a generational housing crisis. The dominant response to the crisis is a reliance on object-focused amendments—zoning reforms to permit higher density builds, reduction of parking minimums, pre-fabricated and 3D-printed dwellings, modular homes. While useful in isolation, these measures do little to overcome the systemic barriers to widespread housing delivery. Canada's bloated regulatory approvals system is one of the slowest in the OECD. Development applications must navigate overlapping regulations, siloed departments, redundant processes, and political conflict. This administrative bloat adds uncertainty, cost, and delay, often deterring development altogether. Further, municipalities are left in a largely responsive position in which developers drive the form of growth, making addressing environmental sustainability and protection of biodiversity, public health, social cohesion, and municipal fiscal responsibility while increasing housing almost impossible.

Solution Developed

1. C4C's Housing Systems Innovation Lab has partnered directly with the Municipality of Lakeshore, Ontario through a formal collaboration to pilot a Comprehensive Development System (CDS). This partnership positions Lakeshore as a testbed municipality, where C4C provides research expertise, facilitation, and systems-level analysis, while the Municipality contributes local knowledge, land-use context, and implementation capacity. Together, C4C and Lakeshore are building and testing a new model for housing approvals and delivery that can be scaled across municipalities nationwide and internationally. The CDS being piloted in Lakeshore directly tackles the challenge of addressing the housing crisis in an integrated and multi-solve way.

2. Instead of one-off fixes, the CDS offers a holistic, community-engaged systems approach that restructures the development pathway to align planning, design, finance, and approvals, allowing the municipality to lead the kind of growth it desires while responding to sustainability and equity goals. 3. Innovative approaches include comprehensive community engagement, pre-approvals, pattern book designs and tax increment financing.

Implementation

1. Comprehensive Development System - deep and ongoing community engagement/charretting, target market analysis, pattern booking, pre-approvals, tax increment financing of affordable housing projects.

2. University of Windsor Faculty of Law's Centre for Cities; Municipality of Lakeshore, Government of Canada (funder - Housing Accelerator Fund).

3. May 2025-April 2028 partnership; dialogue with municipality began in February 2024 and partnership agreement signed in May 2025. Commitment to federal government for implementation of the system pieces as well as 800 unit housing starts is April 2028.

Enablers & Obstacles

1. Political buy-in was key to the creation of this collaboration and its ongoing success - all of municipal council was in support, and mayor has been a key champion. Community engagement is robust and continuing, including in schools, among cultural and community groups not usually engaged, and including walking tours and other hands on activities as well as design charettes. Parnership with the university has allowed for strong data collection and analysis capacities.

2. Anticipated obstacles included NIMBY-style resistance such as been encountered in neighbouring municipalities (including demonstrations against 15 minute cities). However to date the approach taken has avoided such opposition.

Results & Impact

1. To date (still early in the collaboration), the results have been largely focussed on community engagement outcomes - as evidenced by participation, feedback, and lack of opposition being voiced at municipal council. Reporting from local media has been very positive as well.

2. Impacts on low-income and marginalized groups: this municipality is a higher income area in the region and has very limited rental and low-income housing. There has been an over-reliance on single family dwellings. Already several months into the collaboration we are seeing a shift towards an openness to individuals and households across the socio-economic spectrum, and an openness to social housing and community land trusts.

3. The CDS is set up to address community, economy, environment (including ceasing the loss of biodiversity and farmland in this largely rural municipality) in parallel. Indigenous, French settler, and Black (Underground Railroad-descended) communities will see their communities meaningfully included in the process.

Replication & Scale Up

Most municipalities in Canada are facing similar challenges. At a minimum municipalities under approximately 100,000 residents would be in a position to apply this practice.

Replication and scale up can happen both through partnership with C4C/University of Windsor and through sharing of wise practice in open-source materials. Government of Canada programs can also adopt similar approaches at scale. As a border region, the results found here both apply wise practice from Michigan, and will help to advance practice in Michigan and Detroit.

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Policy Uptake

This housing practice has informed or been partially integrated into policy discussions, strategies, or pilot-level policy instruments.

We have submitted 4 initial reports to municipal council to comply with their obligations to the Government of Canada who are funding this work through the Housing Accelerator Fund for municipalities. The collaboration is impacting all levels of municipal decision-making in Lakeshore, and we are regularly reporting on this pilot, and making submissions to provincial and federal ministries, on policy-related topcs based on our experiences in Lakeshore.

Lessons & Takeaways

It is early days to be able to reflect on this, but the challenges of working in a very integrated team across municipality and university are already evident. Even more work at the beginning to bring municipal employees at all levels along may have advanced our progress, or would have made evident the need to revise the structure of our collaboration.