

**To:** COUNCIL

**Meeting Date:** 07/27/21

**Subject:** School of Architecture Research Partnership – Supporting Tiny Homes as part of an Affordable Housing Strategy

**Submitted By:** Cheryl Zahnleiter, Deputy City Manager – Corporate Enterprise  
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**Prepared By:** Brooke Lambert, Director of Corporate Strategy  
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**Report No.:** 21-209(CD)

**File No.:** C1101

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## Recommendations

THAT Council receive Report 21-209(CD) – School of Architecture Research Partnership – Supporting Tiny Homes as part of an Affordable Housing Strategy;

AND THAT Council approve the allocation of \$15,000 from the Community Development Administration budget to support the UW School of Architecture Tiny Home research partnership as outlined;

AND FURTHER THAT staff review how to integrate the outcomes of the Phase Two School of Architecture Tiny Homes research project as part of a comprehensive approach to providing more attainable housing options in the City of Cambridge.

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## Executive Summary

### Purpose

- In May 2021, staff were directed by Council to begin evaluating options for a more comprehensive Tiny Homes strategy in Cambridge.
- The University of Waterloo’s School of Architecture approached the City with an opportunity to partner on a second phase of research related to the use of tiny homes as part of an affordable housing solution, specifically focused on vulnerable populations.

- Staff have evaluated this opportunity and identified a strong alignment with the Strategic Plan.
- The School of Architecture requires a commitment to partner in order to apply for additional funding as part of Phase Two of the research.

## Key Findings

- This opportunity aligns with both Council direction related to tiny homes, as well as the newly adopted Strategic Plan and Strategic Actions – specifically to Increase Housing Options in the community.
- Staff are recommending that Council approve this partnership and provide a financial contribution that will be leveraged for additional research.

## Financial Implications

- It is recommended that a financial contribution of \$15,000 be provided to the University of Waterloo School of Architecture from the Community Development Administration budget.

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## Background

In May 2021, the City of Cambridge Council approved several motions related to the exploration of tiny homes<sup>1</sup> as part of a more comprehensive strategy to increase the number and types of attainable housing in the City of Cambridge. Specifically, staff were directed to:

“evaluate options for encouraging development of small and tiny dwellings, including best practices, acceptable sizing, requirements, land use, and any other necessary requirements to allow for the development of Tiny Homes and request staff to report back to Council by the 4th quarter of 2021.”

In the Spring of 2021, the City also received a request to explore a potential partnership with the University of Waterloo’s School of Architecture to participate in a research project looking at how tiny homes could be part of an affordable housing solution - specifically for vulnerable populations experiencing housing insecurity.

With the approval of the refreshed Cambridge Connected Strategic Plan and Action Items in May 2021, staff reviewed the partnership opportunity and have identified several areas where this opportunity is aligned:

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<sup>1</sup> While there is no universal definition of “tiny homes”, they are generally understood to be dwelling units with significantly smaller floor areas than traditional houses.

- Addresses all three goals of people, place and prosperity by meeting the following strategic objectives; wellbeing, belonging, vibrant neighbourhoods, inclusion; planning for growth and resiliency;
- Relates directly to the Strategic Action “Increasing Housing Options” - which was identified as a high priority for city collaboration and support; and
- Delivers on the City’s new Public Value statement, specifically with respect to the principals of Sustainability, Leadership, Collaboration and Engagement.

The following report outlines staff recommendations related to this opportunity and recommends it be pursued as one part of an overall approach to increase housing options as outlined in the Cambridge Connected Strategic Plan. This partnership would also form one component of a broader strategy regarding tiny homes in the City of Cambridge – to be considered by Council in the Fall of 2021.

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## Analysis

### Strategic Alignment

PEOPLE To actively engage, inform and create opportunities for people to participate in community building – making Cambridge a better place to live, work, play and learn for all.

Goal #1 - Community Wellbeing

Objective 1.4 Promote, facilitate and participate in the development of affordable, welcoming and vibrant neighbourhoods.

Innovative strategies to expand affordable housing options in Cambridge will be necessary to meet long-term growth goals. Tiny homes is one such strategy.

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## Comments

### Cambridge Connected – Moving Towards Attainable Housing Options

Partnerships were recognized as an important part of achieving the overall vision of the strategic plan: Cambridge Connected.

One way the City can support innovation and the strategic goals related to people, place and prosperity, is to partner with stakeholders in industry, academia and at other municipal levels for the purposes of collaborating on common priorities.

**Increasing Housing Options** was identified as one of 13 Strategic Actions the City could take to have the biggest impact in the community in relation to the creation of more attainable and affordable housing – a challenge being faced across Ontario and Canada more broadly.

In Spring 2021, the University of Waterloo School of Architecture began Phase 1 of a MITACS-funded<sup>2</sup> research initiative “Prototyping Tiny Homes for Affordable Housing in Cambridge”. As part of the research the team is looking at how tiny homes have been used elsewhere as part of the housing solution and some of the practical planning, building and servicing implications of these types of units.

Phase 2 would involve working with industry partners to build actual tiny home prototypes and to initiate a broader discussion around their application as part of a broader housing continuum.

The University of Waterloo School of Architecture has asked that the City support a subsequent MITACS application for **Phase 2** of this research through a commitment to partner on the next phase of the research, as well as a financial contribution of \$15,000.

### **Opportunity for Community Impact**

In addition to being a part of this innovative research partnership, the City anticipates that the results of this work will provide additional benefits to the community. First, there is the practical lessons learned (construction, building code, site planning, costing and servicing) that will help shape our upcoming work on zoning by-law amendments that look at permitting rear yard dwelling units (anticipated to be brought to Council in the Fall of 2021). Secondly, the prototypes developed as part of the School of Architecture’s studio program will serve as tangible examples that can be explored “in-person” by the larger community. Lastly, it is anticipated that this partnership will allow for the initiation of a broader conversation around tiny homes, attainable housing and how communities can grow and accommodate people at all income levels, socio-economic status and housing needs.

As part of this, staff are excited to work closely with the School of Architecture and learn about best practices and identify other partnership opportunities to help achieve the goals and objectives as outlined in the Cambridge Connected strategic plan.

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### **Existing Policy/By-Law**

There is no existing policy/by-law.

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### **Financial Impact**

The City would provide a one-time payment of \$15,000 to the University of Waterloo for this project through the 2021 Community Development Administration budget. If Council supports the recommendation, an adjustment to the budget would be completed through an upcoming forecast change.

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<sup>2</sup> Mitacs is a non-profit national research organization that, in partnerships with Canadian academia, private industry and government, operates research and training programs in fields related to industrial and social innovation.

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## Public Input

Posted publicly as part of the report process.

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## Internal/External Consultation

Staff in several divisions were consulted on the opportunity outlined in this report. This included the Building Division, Planning, Finance, the Mayor's Office and Corporate Strategy.

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## Conclusion

In May 2021, staff were directed by Council to begin evaluating options for a more comprehensive Tiny Home strategy in Cambridge. At the same time, the City was approached by the University of Waterloo's School of Architecture to partner on a second phase of research related to the use of tiny homes as part of an affordable housing solution. Given the alignment with both Council direction as well as the newly adopted Strategic Plan and Strategic Actions, staff are recommending that Council approve the contribution of \$15,000.

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## Signature

### Division Approval



**Name: Brooke Lambert**  
**Title: Director, Corporate Strategy**

Reviewed by the CFO

Reviewed by Legal Services

### Departmental Approval



**Name: Cheryl Zahnleiter**  
**Title: Deputy City Manager – Corporate Enterprise**

## Departmental Approval



**Name: Hardy Bromberg**

**Title: Deputy City Manager – Community Development**

## City Manager Approval



**Name: David Calder**

**Title: City Manager**

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## Attachments

None