MUNICIPALITIES' HOUSING CHAMPIONS

ANALYZING THE AFFORDABLE HOUSING CONCIERGE PROGRAMS OF CANADIAN MUNICIPALITIES

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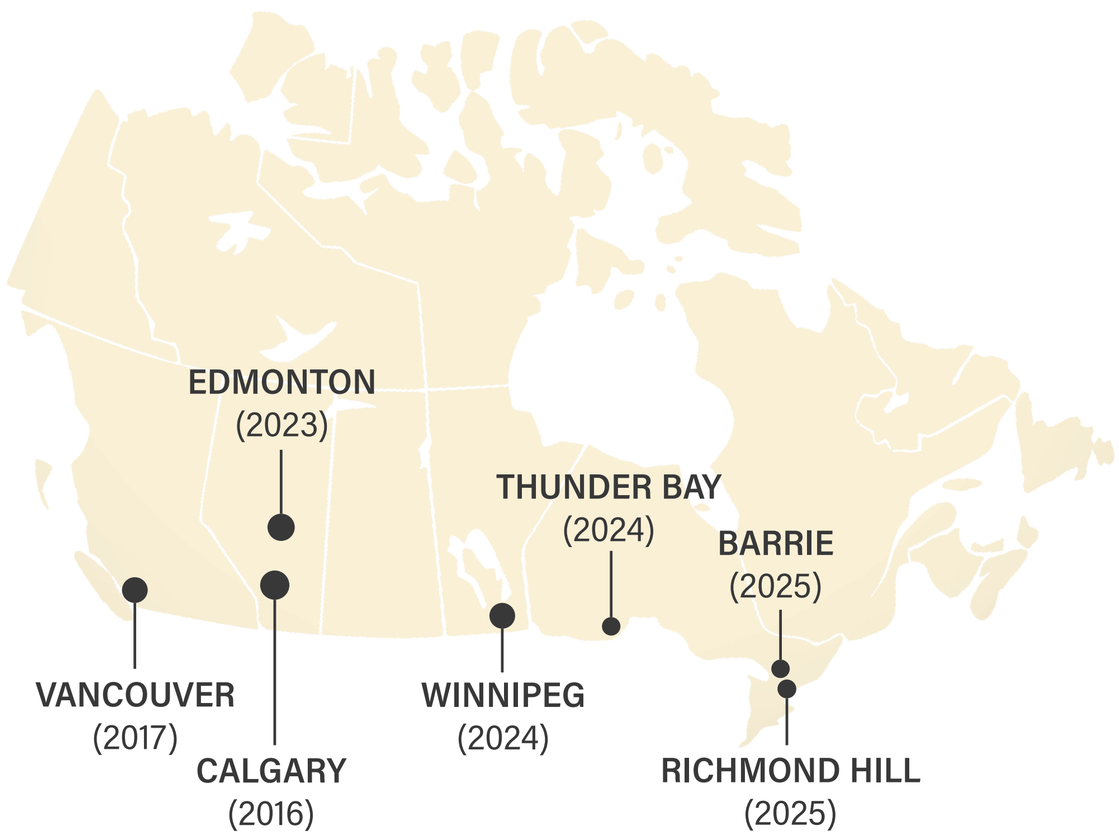
BACKGROUND

Housing affordability is a pressing issue, and municipalities across Canada have been attempting to increase the supply of affordable housing through a variety of policies and programs. One common approach has been the implementation of affordable housing concierge programs that help developers navigate the process of municipal development approvals.

This capstone research project examines the **function**, **impact**, and the **lessons** that can be learned from the affordable housing concierge programs of seven Canadian municipalities. The studied programs are identified on the map below along with the date they were created.



RESEARCH METHODS

This research was based on **semi-structured interviews** with a total of 19 municipal staff, affordable housing developers, and consultants who have experience with affordable housing concierge programs.

The perspectives provided in these interviews were qualitatively analyzed and compared to build an understanding of affordable housing concierge programs across Canada.

FINDINGS

How do affordable housing concierge programs function?

Municipalities have created concierge programs to encourage the development of affordable housing. These programs typically consist of one to three municipal staff who support eligible affordable housing developers, which are typically private, nonprofit, or government organizations.

The services that concierge programs provide include:

Concierges improve communication with municipal departments by providing a single point of contact, faster response times, and extra meetings. — **Enhanced Communication**

Concierges help developers early in projects to understand their options, prepare for applications, and get ahead of potential issues. — **Early Guidance**

Concierges expedite development approvals by streamlining processes when possible and ensuring that affordable housing applications are prioritized. — **Expedited Approvals**

Concierges advocate for projects to ensure their needs are understood by municipal staff, funders, and other stakeholders. — **Mediation & Advocacy**

Concierges build relationships between stakeholders to create additional capacity in the affordable housing development sector and gain developer's trust. — **Relationship Building**

In addition to assisting developers, some concierges also help identify and implement improvements in the development processes of their municipalities. — **Process Improvement**

What is the impact of affordable housing concierge programs?

Most programs do not collect exact statistics to track their results or were too new to have had a measurable impact. However, every studied concierge program is creating a positive impact through at least one of the services identified. Developers provided positive feedback on concierge services but also highlighted that tangible assistance like funding and fast-tracked approvals are needed to incentivize affordable housing development.

Further research is needed to determine the exact effectiveness of concierge programs as compared to other municipal approaches to housing affordability.

RECOMMENDATIONS

1 Implement Well-Resourced Concierge Programs

Concierges are an effective way for municipalities to encourage the supply of affordable housing, but to succeed they need enough resources to effectively catalyze development.

(a) Municipalities should recruit at least two experienced and well-connected people to lead concierge programs, to ensure their resilience in the event of staff turnover.
(b) Municipalities should integrate and disburse funding programs with their concierge program to make the most of concierges' relationships with developers.

2 Empower Concierges to Lead Innovation

Concierges have unique expertise because they interact with the entire development approvals process and work closely with developers. They should use this experience to lead improvements to municipal processes and policies.

(a) Concierges should be empowered to recommend changes to city strategies and policies on development.
(b) The solutions-oriented nature of concierge programs should be implemented more broadly across development approval processes.
(c) Municipalities can expand concierge programs to encourage other desired kinds of development.

3 Provide a Consistent Fast-Tracking Service

For concierge programs to effectively incentivize developers to provide more affordable housing, they need to provide a service which reliably reduces costs, delays, and risk.

(a) Concierges should identify elements of the development approvals process which can be reduced or bypassed for affordable housing projects.
(b) Concierges should have the ability to effectively advocate for projects to be prioritized within the review process.

4 Target Engagement Towards Nonprofits

When demand for their services is high, concierges need to prioritize nonprofits and more inexperienced developers who benefit more from their guidance.

(a) Private developers mainly benefit from a concierge expediting their applications, so simply flagging their projects for priority reviews would be beneficial and allow the concierge to spend more time assisting nonprofits.

5 Actively Stimulate Affordable Housing Projects

To drive the development of affordable housing, concierges should use their unique relationships to proactively communicate with developers and encourage the initiation of projects.

(a) Concierge programs should host networking events and create partnerships that spark development projects.
(b) Concierge programs can connect affordable housing developers with initiatives related to sustainability, accessibility, or reconciliation, encouraging them to design higher quality affordable projects.

6 Identify and Address Funding Challenges

Securing funding is a difficult and crucial aspect of affordable housing development and concierge programs can assist developers by learning about these challenges and helping to solve them.

(a) Concierges should create innovative supports like resources that summarize funding opportunities and help developers stack funding, or education to help new developers with financial literacy and grant applications.
(b) Concierges should be advocating for projects to funders, clearing up communication issues, and assisting developers with meeting funding deadlines.

7 Collaborate to Make Funding Easier to Access

Concierges, funding bodies, and all levels of government need to align their incentives for affordable housing development and make it easier for nonprofits to access funding.

(a) Communication should be improved to raise awareness of funding streams and to clarify the eligibility and application processes of these streams.
(b) Funders should coordinate and integrate their programs to reduce the number of applications and deadlines that developers need to navigate.

8 Maintain Support for Nonprofit Development

The capacity of municipalities and developers to build affordable housing has been growing, but this it will be wasted if federal and provincial governments do not maintain consistent funding.

(a) While innovative approaches to housing delivery are important, government funding should build on the existing infrastructure of nonprofit affordable development.
(b) Federal and provincial governments can leverage the benefits of concierge programs by funding them or even establishing larger networks for these kinds of services.