A Study of
LANEWAY HOUSING
In Toronto

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Three Part Study commissioned by the CMHC

Part 1  
To understand the **historical context** of Laneway Housing  
To conduct a **survey of Laneway Housing** - both recent and vernacular  
To document the **approvals process** and address regulatory concerns

Part 2  
To propose **Prototype Designs** taking into consideration:
- Sustainability
- Social Issues
- Planning Issues
- Construction
- Cost

To propose an **Alternative Approvals Process** which would encourage and control laneway housing

Part 3  
To **construct a laneway dwelling** to test an alternate approvals process and verify design assumptions
5 PROPOSITIONS

1. **Laneway Housing has always been part of the built form of Toronto.** It has historically provided small scale affordable dwellings and businesses, and the efficient use of urban land. The 19th century city was land resource efficient. The high cost of transport and energy was overcome by density.

2. **Densification is a municipal policy** - The existing sprawl of cities is not sustainable, especially in southern Ontario. Energy consumption, infrastructure costs, loss of agricultural and natural land are serious regional problems. Ways must be found to increase the density of cities.

3. **Toronto is continuing to increase in population** - many thousands of people each year move to Toronto. More dwellings must be built in Toronto.

4. **Laneway Housing is an existing land resource**, where appropriate can offer new, affordable homes which convert underutilized land and make use of existing infrastructure. Laneway Housing can be an alternative to large scale development which may disturb existing neighbourhoods.

5. **Standards for laneway housing must be developed** to make Laneway housing a viable option. A new approvals procedure, based on well developed standards, is necessary to regularize the process and make the land resource more accessible. At present only a small number of laneway dwellings are being built - almost all by architects, who can underwrite the design and lengthy approvals process.
Toronto in the 1890s, looking northwest from Front St.
Planning Issues Affecting Laneway Housing

Proponents of laneway projects should anticipate the planning concerns related to the type of development and organise their applications and design to adequately address the issues.

Density

The city encourages densification, particularly along its main streets. If the proposed site coverage of a new building exceeds the allowable site coverage of the Zoning By-law, then careful attention must be paid to: scale, form, privacy, and quality. A more progressive form of planning for density would take an overall view of a block’s density, rather than looking at a lot in isolation.

Housing Quality

Many of the proponents of recent laneway developments report that individual city planners, members of the Committee of Adjustment, and Ontario Municipal Board are unfamiliar with the history and existence of laneway dwellings in Toronto, and express concern over the desirability of laneway housing. There is an assumption that laneway dwellings are substandard. Laneway proponents must make the case for the quality of their proposal.

Scale

An important and easily overlooked issue. Scale is not the same as size but relates to proportion, the ratio of solid to void, and to units of construction. Laneway proposals should consider the overall mass of the proposed building in relation to surrounding buildings and open spaces, carefully proportioned facades with adequately sized openings and units of construction which relate the building to the viewer.

Open space

Adequate exterior open space must be included in the proposal. Access to sunlight and air positively affects housing quality. In several cases extensive rooftop gardens have been proposed though the city does not accept roof top gardens as amenity space. The city should be encouraged to accept roof top gardens as an alternative to backyard space.

Overlook

Privacy and overlook are sensitive issues in Toronto. In all urban settings, when buildings are higher than one story, overlook is unavoidable. Carefully placed screening of windows and balconies ameliorate the issue. Attention should also be given to organizing the building programme such that exterior related rooms face away from neighbours.

Parking

In the inner city areas, the standard requirement of one car space per dwelling may be untenable. There may be conditions, such as adjacent parking or open street parking, which make it reasonable to omit a garage or parking space from a dwelling, including laneway dwellings. The location of laneway dwellings in the inner city may encourage less car ownership.
Public Works Issues Affecting Laneway Housing
Public works deals with the operational infrastructure of the city and the relation of uses and buildings to that infrastructure. Careful consideration must be given to meeting public works criteria.

Garbage
In most areas of the city garbage is picked up at the curb only. Laneway development must be located on an assumed laneway for garbage pickup or the development must have access to an adjacent street.

Sewage and Water
This is probably the single most difficult issue to overcome in laneway development. Often, city records do not always show existing services and, where no service is shown, the city will require a new service. New servicing is potentially expensive because of the restricted nature of laneway development. Feasibility of servicing is an important consideration in laneway lot selection.

Electricity
Usually distributed above ground in Toronto. This can make the servicing of laneway lots simple and usually feasible. Where an electrical service does not exist in the laneway, then either making a new connection is costly or an agreement must be made for service support with existing adjacent homeowners.

Natural Gas
Distributed below ground along the street. For a new connection, the small pipe may be tunnelled below the laneway or brought through a neighbouring property by agreement with that owner.

Parking
Every dwelling unit requires a parking space
Building Code Issues Affecting Laneway Housing
The building department approves the construction of buildings and administers the Ontario Building Code.

Fire Fighting
Access for firefighting is an important issue and is stipulated by the Ontario Building Code. In general, the front entrance to a dwelling must be accessible by firefighters and no more than 45 metres from the pumper truck. The pumper truck may be no more than 45 metres from a hydrant.

Fire Resistance Rating and Restricted Openings
Openings are restricted in size if less than perpendicular or parallel to the property line and are not allowed if less than 1.2m, the 'limiting distance', from a property line. Openings may be allowed if they are protected by an automatic closure. Openings would also be restricted on the wall adjacent to the street-facing house and the neighbour's wall across the laneway, since the limiting distance is measured between the exterior faces of buildings. Walls on property lines must have fire ratings and must be built with non-combustible cladding.

Change of Use
A few legal, non-conforming sites, as so named by the current zoning controls, are left in older Toronto neighbourhoods. Thus, sites formerly occupied by industrial uses would require soil testing to assure that toxins are not present and soil remediation, if toxins are present.
Laneway Lot Criteria

**Severance:** The minimum lot width is 6 metres. Only lots 6 metres or wider were considered. Lots with an existing lot coverage far in excess of 30% were not considered. We deemed the density would be too high without these considerations.

**Access to servicing** Lots were chosen based on the ability to reach the street with servicing. Some laneway lots must have a service and access corridor from the street to the dwelling; the corridor also gives the dwelling a street address. The service corridor would require the consent of the street-side property owner. Servicing laneway lots is a major consideration dealt with more fully in Phase 2 of this study.

**Fire Fighting:** Proximity to fire hydrants and fire fighting access is an important concern. The Ontario Building Code stipulates, in Section 3.2.5.5, that the unobstructed path of travel for a fire-fighter from the fire-fighting vehicle to the principal entrance of the building must not be more than 45 metres. For a building not provided with a fire department connection, a fire department pumper vehicle must be located such that the length of the access route from a hydrant to the vehicle plus the unobstructed path of travel for the fire-fighter from the vehicle to the building is not more than 90 metres.
Laneway Lot Types

SLOT LOTS

KEY LOTS

CORNER LOTS

Island Lots
We have found that Laneway housing is part and parcel of the Toronto urban fabric. The use of laneways, for commerce as well as housing is as old as the City itself and is particularly characteristic of Toronto. The laneway has helped to give Toronto a density and humane scale, which contribute to the liveability of the city. Laneways were and are practical resources of land and encourage small scale economic development. We have researched the experiences of relatively recent laneway development, and have surveyed a portion of the city to document existing vernacular laneway dwellings. We have also documented existing empty laneway lots in our study area and have analysed the potential for new laneway development. Laneway development could increase the number of dwellings in Toronto by 5 to 10%. This is a significant number of dwellings and represents a substantial addition to the tax base of the city. According to Statistics Canada the historical, pre-amalgamation city holds some 123,000 owned dwelling units. If 5% of these were candidates for laneway development a potential increase of 6,150 homes could be added to the city. At a modest tax rate of $1,800 per home the increase in annual municipal revenue would be $11,070,000.00 without substantial infrastructure changes. As well the city would receive some $30,750,000.00 in development charges.
Some buildings may need to be upgraded, the neighbourhood may be poorly integrated with its surroundings, or residents may face hardship, social vulnerability or difficulty in accessing essentials such as healthy foods. Strategies and specific measures may be needed to revitalize and improve these priority neighbourhoods to address such issues.

Each revitalization strategy may address factors such as improving community-based services, developing new parks, improving streets, sidewalks, bikeways and pathways or building community capacity to enhance the broader social infrastructure. Strategies to improve these priority neighbourhoods will vary with local conditions. Some may be led by the City while others may be community-led. To support these efforts the neighbourhood may be designated a Community Improvement Area.

### Policies

1. **Neighbourhoods and Apartment Neighbourhoods** are considered to be physically stable areas. Development within Neighbourhoods and Apartment Neighbourhoods will be consistent with this objective and will respect and reinforce the existing physical character of buildings, streetscapes and open space patterns in these areas.

2. Developments in Mixed Use Areas, Regeneration Areas and Apartment Neighbourhoods that are adjacent or close to Neighbourhoods will:
   a) be compatible with those Neighbourhoods;
   b) provide a gradual transition of scale and density, as necessary to achieve the objectives of this Plan through the stepping down of buildings towards and setbacks from those Neighbourhoods;
   c) maintain adequate light and privacy for residents in those Neighbourhoods; and
   d) attenuate resulting traffic and parking impacts on adjacent neighbourhood streets so as not to significantly diminish the residential amenity of those Neighbourhoods.

3. Intensification of land adjacent to neighbourhoods will be carefully controlled so that neighbourhoods are protected from negative impact. Where significant intensification of land adjacent to a Neighbourhood or Apartment Neighbourhood is proposed, Council will determine, at the earliest point in the process, whether or not a Secondary Plan, area specific zoning by-law or area specific policy will be created in consultation with the local community following an Avenue Study, or area based study.

4. The functioning of the local network of streets in Neighbourhoods and Apartment Neighbourhoods will be improved by:
   a) maintaining roads and sidewalks in a state of good repair;
(b) may be reduced by 1.0 metre for each dwelling unit that does not have an individual private driveway leading directly to the front of it; and

(D) despite (A), (B) and (C) above, if a lot has a townhouse with one or more dwelling units not fronting directly on a street, the required minimum lot frontage is 30.0 metres.

10.10.40 Principal Building Requirements

10.10.40.1 General

(1) Application of this Article
The regulations in Article 10.10.40 apply to buildings or structures in the R zone, other than ancillary buildings or structures which are subject to Article 10.6.80 and Article 10.10.80.

(2) Number of Residential Buildings on a Lot
A maximum of one residential building is permitted on a lot in the R zone.

(3) Number of Dwelling Units on a Lot
If a zone label applying to a lot in the R zone on the Zoning By-law Map has the letter “u”, the numerical value following the letter “u” is the maximum number of dwelling units permitted on the lot.

(4) Minimum Width of a Dwelling Unit
In the R zone, the required minimum width of a dwelling unit in a townhouse is:
(A) 5.0 metres if the dwelling unit does not have an individual private driveway leading directly to the front of it; and
(B) 6.0 metres in all other cases.

(5) Building Orientation to a Street - Buildings with Dwelling Units
In the R zone, a building, or an addition which is not attached above-ground to the original part of a building, is not permitted if:
(A) it has dwelling units and is in the rear of another building or the original part of the same building; or
(B) it is in front of a building, or the original part of the same building, with dwelling units, so as to produce the condition of a building with dwelling units in the rear of another building.

10.10.40.10 Height

(1) Maximum Height
The permitted maximum height for a building or structure on a lot in the R zone is:
(A) the numerical value, in metres, following the letters “HT” on the Height Overlay Map; or
(B) if the lot is in an area with no numerical value following the letters “HT” on the Height Overlay Map, 10.0 metres.

(2) Maximum Height of Specified Pairs of Main Walls
In the R zone, the permitted maximum height of the exterior portion of main walls for a residential building, other than an apartment building, is the higher of 7.0 metres above established grade or 2.5 metres less than the permitted maximum height in regulation 10.10.40.10(1), for either (A) or (B) below:
(A) for no less than 60% of the total width of:
   (i) all front main walls; and
   (ii) all rear main walls; or
(B) all side main walls:
   (i) for no less than 60% of the total width of the side main walls facing a side lot line that abuts a street; and
   (ii) for no less than 100% of the total width of the side main walls that do not face a side lot line.
Sewer and Watermain Standards

These construction standards are for City staff and consulting engineers working on capital improvement projects and for consulting engineers working for the development industry preparing engineering designs and drawings for private developments in the city of Toronto.

These standards provide the technical information necessary for designing and constructing any sewer or watermain infrastructure.

Contractors bidding or constructing capital improvement projects should fully review all applicable specifications and standard drawings, to ensure compliance with the contract documents.

Users have the option to view or download the specifications or drawings either as individual PDF's or as a combined PDF.

You may need the free Adobe Flash Player® to view certain PDF files created as portfolios.

Construction Specifications for Sewers and Watermains – W1

- View and download individual specifications
- Save and download all specifications in one PDF (8 MB)

Construction Drawings for Sewers and Watermains – W2

- View and download individual drawings
- Save and download all drawings in one PDF (24 MB)

Ontario Provincial Standards

View and download the Ontario Provincial Standards.

Other Specifications

- Rehabilitator Specifications
- Natural Specifications

Archives

- Archived Construction Specifications
- Archived Standard Drawings

Revision Information Sheets

- Release Notes No. 11 - Apr 2015
- Revisions List for Specifications - Apr 2015
- Release Notes No. 10 - Jan 2015
- Revisions List for Specifications - Jan 2015
- Revisions List for Drawings - Jan 2015
- Release Notes No. 9 - Apr 2014
- Revisions List for Specifications - Apr 2014
- Revisions List for Drawings - Apr 2014
- Revision Information Sheet No. 8 - Apr 2013
- Revision Information Sheet No. 7 - Nov 2010
- Revision Information Sheet No. 6 - Nov 2009
- Revision Information Sheet No. 5 - Apr 2008
- Revision Information Sheet No. 4 - Nov 2007
- Revision Information Sheet No. 3 - Jun 2007
- Revision Information Sheet No. 2 - Nov 2006
- Revision Information Sheet No. 1 - Mar 2006