

Response of the Village Canada Consortium to
Build Canada Homes: Market Sounding Guide

Preamble: The Village Canada Consortium welcomes this opportunity to provide input to Build Canada Homes' vision for housing in Canada. We are encouraged by your objectives of building non-market housing at scale and responding to diverse needs for housing that will remain affordable in the long term. The words "building strong resilient communities", "improving scalability, reducing environmental impacts" and "supportive and transitional housing with wraparound services" resonate with us. In this document we explore how our vision can complement yours and make a few suggestions for your organizational mandate.



Figure 1 Intergenerational Seniors Village - vision of architecture student in Azrieli School of Architecture & Urbanism - Carleton University, showing a portion of our vision

1. Introduction

The [Village Canada](#) Consortium envisions a non-profit, intergenerational, mixed income, functioning village located on Confederation Heights in Ottawa. This surplus federal land is approximately 188 hectares (465 acres), located about five kilometres south of Ottawa's downtown core and five kilometres north of the City's international airport. The Consortium wishes to begin on 23 acres that overlooks the Rideau River, at 875 Heron Road. This piece of land is adjacent to a transportation hub, shopping centre and a large, non-profit recreation and fitness centre. As well, since the construction of a pedestrian/cycling bridge across the Rideau

River, the site is within walking distance of Carleton University. Because this parcel is contiguous with other parts of Confederation Heights, there is ample room for the village to expand and incorporate other groups. We believe that the 23-acre site could accommodate up to 1000 people, and potentially more in the expanded area.

[Canada Lands Company](#), in conjunction with Public Services and Procurement Canada, has been consulting and planning for Confederation Heights for several years. Recent federal willingness to have portions of federal lands developed for nonprofit housing has encouraged Canada Lands to consider allowing for the development of this multi-purpose village. We have been working closely with MP Yasir Naqvi, whose riding the federal property is in. The City of Ottawa has funds for social housing; the provincial government is making its allotment for long term care funding less restrictive, is expanding services in the home, and there is potential for CMHC support for development financing. Our Consortium agency members have their own capital development plans, and projected rents and service fees contribute to the viability of the initiative.

2. Socio-economic considerations

A significant social challenge exists to providing accommodation and care options for the aging baby boom. Some seniors are living alone or as a couple in family houses which exceed their space requirements and are not adapted to their accumulating disabilities. Many of these houses could be available for younger families if the seniors had acceptable options in their communities. For those who are affluent, high-end condos or retirement homes may serve the purpose.

Modest-income and lower-income seniors on fixed income have almost no affordable options until such time that they become dependent on institutional care, for which there is a long line. Without substantial subsidies, it will not be possible to provide housing that they can afford. Moreover, the endless combinations of medical conditions and disabilities that restrict Activities of Daily Living (ADL) and I(Instrumental) ADL are obstacles to affordable market responses to seniors' needs for housing.

Affordable student housing has been a critical issue impacting the Canadian housing market and limiting access to post-secondary education. The intergenerational Village will provide bachelor or quad units in proximity to several post-secondary institutions in Ottawa. The intergenerational nature of the community will provide opportunity for exchanges between residents that have been proven to have psychological benefit to both parties.

Ottawa continues to have a shortage of group homes for adults with disabilities and Village Canada provides an opportunity to fill this gap in a supportive, innovative environment.

Our partnership with Carleton University and their AGE-WELL Sam3 Innovations Centre will provide an opportunity to utilize leading edge technology that will support the safety and quality of life of residents of all ages and abilities. The Village will provide a continuing research base to study the role of technology in providing care.

3. Objectives of Village Canada

Provide affordable housing at scale. The Consortium wants to build non-profit, affordable, housing for seniors, students and adults with disabilities – offering a range of life lease, share ownership and rental options. Housing could include co-housing, co-op housing and apartments, as well as assisted living and long-term residential care. A new stream in residential care is the provision of smaller, group-home style living arrangements, especially as the incidence of cognitive decline and dementia in the population increases. As the need for care increases for residents of varying abilities, the proximity of caregivers providing services in the same neighbourhood will increase the efficiency of service delivery and provide for continuity of care for residents.

4. How the mandate of Build Canada Homes can support Village Canada

We propose that Build Canada Homes could refine their approach using Village Canada as a demonstration initiative. This would meet your objectives of:

- a) *Building non-profit homes at scale:* Village Canada’s approach invites several organizations with differing mandates to collaborate to build a community while pursuing their own objectives. Our goal is to accelerate the timeline to develop federal land by securing an early agreement in principle to provide us with a long-term lease of at least 23 acres, with potential to access surrounding areas within Confederation Heights as the village grows. Build Canada Homes could facilitate this approach by providing a coordinating role.
- b) *Use of modular construction and replicating components:* While the housing units and types will vary, the opportunity to provide universal design of standardized components throughout, and to encourage the factory production of standardized modules or components to be used in different structures would provide a valuable testing ground for this approach. Our vision is of universally designed modular homes that are suitable for all ages and whose purpose can evolve as public and community needs change.
- c) *A flexible financial framework:* This would provide our independent organizations the opportunity to raise their capital and/or provide for rental or service fee income for their individual components as those sources come on stream. Process coordination

by Build Canada Homes could provide for timely convergence of multiple planning processes.

- d) *Equity financing*: In a development where the most likely arrangement is for long-term leasing of the land, federal equity financing could play a crucial role in providing the base that land ownership might otherwise provide. Moreover, rental income is likely to provide a steady income stream after the initial stages of planning, construction, operational set-up and residents own adjustments, for example, are accommodated.
- e) *Accelerating the process*: This is necessary because the leading edge of the baby boom is beginning to enter the age of frailty and cognitive decline so it is essential that progress in providing their accommodation be accelerated. If not, the care requirements will increase in complexity and will overwhelm the capacity of informal caregivers, who currently provide the majority of care for this generation. The service agencies and long-term care facilities cannot handle the demand at present and with the exponential increase, middle and lower income seniors will be without care or housing. It should be noted that Policy Horizons Canada, a federal agency, included such a scenario as one of the potential disruptions to Canadian society. ([Disruptions on the Horizon, 2024](#)).

A means of accelerating part of the process would be to start rehabilitation of the two buildings on the site that formerly housed the CRA. The two buildings have been deemed 'heritage' and we have been told that they have asbestos. Build Canada Homes could make an early intervention to have these buildings prepared for a residence, care facility, or community services home. This would help to kickstart our project and could permit capital and operational planning processes to proceed in parallel, rather than linearly.

- f) *Financial contributions, especially in the early phase, can make a critical difference*. We recommend that this potential be planned as a continuous intake model, rather than the more traditional "window of opportunity" approach used by CMHC, which tends to hold back important planning initiatives until the scheduled window opens. As many nonprofits will be forming new partnerships to take advantage of scale and modular construction, early provision should be made to provide finance to facilitate that process.
- g) *Convening partners and sharing risk*: For the nonprofit sector, much of the risk is "up front." The investment of staff and volunteer time in enterprises that require financial and planning resources to move ahead quickly. The reassurance of an institutional partner to share in the process can be instrumental to rapid progress.

The aerial view of Confederation Heights highlights the unique features of the river and parks surrounding the areas slated for development.



Figure 2 Confederation Heights - area in red of interest – 23 acres, adjacent to and below RA centre with plans for complementary services

5. Who is in our Consortium and what do they bring to the table?

At present, all Consortium members are non-profit service providers, academia centres of excellence or community associations. The names and links to the Consortium partners are listed at the end of the [Village Canada](#) document.

6. Last words...

We are excited that Build Canada Homes has been created and are confident that Village Canada provides a model to demonstrate the value of your approach to Canadian society.