

Developing Kingston's First Student Housing Strategy

A Request by Impacted Community Associations

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Request

To strategically address the growth of the student population in Kingston, the Community Associations that represent the inner districts of the city, request that the Mayor, Council, and Planning Committee move and support a motion directing the Chief Planner and planning staff to develop a comprehensive Student Housing Strategy. This strategy should be created in consultation with the Post-Secondary Working Group (PSWG) and Community Association representatives. Once a strategy is finalized, a timely implementation plan should be established.

Background

The Community Associations are making this request on behalf of residents who have been sharing their concerns and solutions in relation to their evolving neighbourhoods. Residents in Kingston's inner districts are seeking approaches that both mitigate the erosion of established neighbourhoods and provide much-needed accommodations for students.

Permanent residents are particularly concerned about the *studentification*¹ of downtown neighbourhoods in the absence of a comprehensive plan to accommodate current and future post-secondary student populations.

¹ "Studentification is the movement of students attending higher educational institutions (HEIs) into residential areas. This typically occurs in near-campus areas. When enrolment growth exceeds university housing availability/ construction, growth is absorbed by local housing supply." Studentification can lead to: changes in services/amenities (school closures); increased rents, displacement of low-income renters; worsening town-gown relations; changes in housing type (PBSAs, rental conversions)" – Dr. David Gordon, Professor – School of Urban and Regional Planning, Queen's University, Presentation at SDA Town Hall, October 2025.

Equally important, the community associations have heard from student representatives advocating for affordable, safe, quality housing, in close proximity to campus.

We think the needs of both groups can be addressed through Kingston's first Student Housing Strategy.

A Student Housing Strategy should include:

- clear data, forecasting, and monitoring to inform actions;
- policies to protect and preserve housing stock for families and long-term residents;
- advocacy for expanding on-campus student housing;
- clear guidance (zones, policies, design, etc.) for off-campus purpose-built student housing;
- institutional partnerships and collaboration between the City of Kingston, Queen's University, and St. Lawrence College on student housing matters.

A proactive approach is essential to maintaining balanced, complete neighbourhoods while supporting the continued success of our valued post-secondary institutions. That is why we are calling on our elected representatives to accelerate the establishment of a comprehensive Student Housing Strategy and incorporate a long-term vision for student housing in the next Official Plan.

The Ontario Provincial Planning Statement now recognizes the need to address student housing in Official Plans. Other cities in Ontario, such as Toronto, Waterloo, and Edmonton have developed and implemented student housing strategies that we can learn from to develop a Kingston-centric solution.

To date in Kingston, we have emphasized city-wide solutions over area-specific intensification. This approach does not sufficiently account for the geographically concentrated housing demand generated by Queen's University and St. Lawrence College and relied on assumptions about on and off-campus development that did not materialize. The resulting mismatch between supply and demand has contributed to sharp housing cost increases (for students and permanent residents), declining property standards, and threats to established neighbourhoods in the downtown core.

Given that post-secondary students account for approximately 20% of Kingston's population, we are pleased to see that the first draft of the new Official Plan recognizes the impact student housing has on the overall supply and demand for housing. The draft Official Plan states that "an intentional strategy and focus must be made to address the unique housing pressures associated with post-

secondary students”. There cannot be a complete City of Kingston housing strategy without specifically addressing student housing.

Student housing demand and the shortage of family and affordable housing are closely linked. In Kingston, growing student demand has increased pressure on the housing market, contributing to the conversion and displacement of family and affordable rental units. Similar patterns are evident in other Canadian municipalities with post-secondary institutions, where insufficient availability of purpose-built student accommodations on or near campuses has shifted student demand into the broader rental market.

At Toronto Metropolitan University, an \$83 million Build Ontario Fund investment in affordable student housing reflects provincial recognition of post-secondary students as a distinct housing group – an approach Kingston has been more hesitant to adopt.

Quantitative Data

The data supports our request for a Student Housing Strategy. For the last ten years, Kingston has been in a housing crisis. In 2016, the City’s vacancy rate was 0.6%; since then, its 2024 vacancy rate has improved to 2.8%, but still hovers below the 3 to 4% needed for stability.

Moreover, while rental prices have decreased across Canada for 14 straight months, Kingston rental prices have outpaced all other municipalities in the nation, with annual growth of 23.5% year-over-year, according to Rentals.ca.

Since 2020, another fast-moving housing pressure has emerged. The Queen’s University student population has nearly doubled since 2000 from 17,773 to 34,977 in 2025. According to Queen’s own information, roughly 20% of these students are housed on campus while all others live off campus.

Lastly, the 2023/2024 City of Kingston Growth Study predicts that the combined post-secondary student population will increase by approximately 14,000 students over the timeline of the Official Plan to a total of 48,300.

Objectives

1. Enable City Planning staff to work with community association representatives and the Post-Secondary Working Group to create a Student Housing Strategy, which will include collecting data, a supply and demand analysis, up-zoning goals in campus adjacent areas, putting forward best PBSA practices that meet local needs, and enhancing collaboration with post-secondary institutions.

2. Start the Landlord Registry program, which was duly voted in February 2024 by City Council to enable accurate data collection.
3. Work with local post-secondary institutions to identify opportunities and timelines for expanding on-campus student housing to meet their obligations under Bill 185.
4. Collect data from post-secondary institutions or student associations through the creation of a researcher-led, disaggregated housing survey to address the gap in census data regarding student populations.
5. Request a market feasibility study to inform development goals in near campus areas.
6. Examine and report on pressures upon public amenities in the affected districts.

Implementation

There is an urgent need for the City of Kingston to clearly signal to residents, developers, and post-secondary institutions that student housing will be addressed through a coordinated, strategic approach. We are seeking Council's support for a motion to develop a Student Housing Strategy, with work beginning as early as possible in 2026.

With leadership from the City through the Post-Secondary Working Group, collaboration with local post-secondary institutions, and input from community association representatives, a reasonable timeline would see the foundational principles and framework for a comprehensive Student Housing Strategy established by September 2026. Once in place, the strategy could be reviewed annually by the Post-Secondary Working Group using updated data.

The outcome would be a more balanced housing approach that supports complete and sustainable neighbourhoods while providing safer, more reliable student housing in locations that effectively serve student needs.

Data Sources & Background Materials

City of Kingston: Population, Growth and Employment Analysis

[https://pub-](https://pub-cityofkingston.escribemeetings.com/filestream.ashx?DocumentId=5575)

[cityofkingston.escribemeetings.com/filestream.ashx?DocumentId=5575](https://pub-cityofkingston.escribemeetings.com/filestream.ashx?DocumentId=5575)

CMHC 2024 Rental Vacancy Rates

[https://www03.cmhc-schl.gc.ca/hmip-](https://www03.cmhc-schl.gc.ca/hmip-pimh/en/TableMapChart/Table?TableId=2.1.31.2&GeographyId=35&GeographyTypeId=2&DisplayAs=Table&GeographyName=Ontario)

[pimh/en/TableMapChart/Table?TableId=2.1.31.2&GeographyId=35&GeographyTypeId=2&DisplayAs=Table&GeographyName=Ontario](https://www03.cmhc-schl.gc.ca/hmip-pimh/en/TableMapChart/Table?TableId=2.1.31.2&GeographyId=35&GeographyTypeId=2&DisplayAs=Table&GeographyName=Ontario)

Rentals.ca

<https://rentals.ca/national-rent-report>

Queen's University Institutional Research and Planning, Student Population

<https://www.queensu.ca/planningandbudget/irp/institutional-data/student/enrolment>

City of Toronto Academic Housing Strategy

<https://www.toronto.ca/legdocs/mmis/2025/ph/bgrd/backgroundfile-254146.pdf>

Town and Gown Committee – Waterloo Student Accommodations Report #: CTTEE2023-002

<https://www.waterloo.ca/media/vz1oskqu/student-accommodations-report-2023.pdf>

Government of Ontario: Ontario Investing \$83 Million to Support Affordable Student Housing in Downtown Toronto

<https://news.ontario.ca/en/release/1006725/ontario-investing-83-million-to-support-affordable-student-housing-in-downtown-toronto>