Feedback on Build Canada Homes Market Sounding Guide

August 2025

About Redwood Park Communities

Redwood is a Barrie, ON-based supportive housing provider founded in 2009. We create safe, affordable, hopeful housing where people thrive in supportive community.

Redwood is moving beyond social service to create social change, strengthening and transforming communities by building people-centred homes that offer stability, connection, and opportunity.

Since opening the doors of our first housing community in 2013, we have provided affordable housing with support to over 500 women, men, and children.

This includes:

- Women who experienced gender-based violence but are now in new careers and healthy relationships
- Children who were in foster care but were able to return home once their parents secured safe, affordable housing
- Men who were working three jobs but still living in their cars due to the cost of housing

Building on our direct experience, Redwood has learned that the success of supportive housing depends not just on unit counts, but on thoughtful design, sustainable financing, and integration into communities.

Our recommendations below draw on over a decade of delivering people-centred housing, highlighting what works, what challenges remain, and how a program like *Build Canada Homes* can maximize both impact and sustainability.

In alignment with Canada's legislated commitment to the right to housing, the government must prioritize those in greatest need in federal budgets and initiatives like *Build Canada Homes*. This includes people experiencing homelessness, low-income households, and groups disproportionately impacted by housing precarity.

We are all better off when everyone has a safe, affordable, hopeful place to call home.

Recommendations

1. Elevate Supportive Housing as a Core Component
We strongly endorse the inclusion of supportive housing—combining affordable homes with on-site wrap-around services for individuals and families experiencing homelessness—as an essential element of the *Build Canada Homes* mandate. The Market Sounding Guide already acknowledges this need; however, we urge that supportive housing not be subsidiary, but rather prioritized as a foundational building block toward ending homelessness.

2. Address Construction Financing Barriers
As an affordable housing charity, one of our most persistent obstacles is securing affordable construction financing. The financial systems currently in place for supportive housing developers like Redwood take 12-24 months to work through approvals and often involve as many as 6-10 financial underwriters, even for just a modest build of 6 to 12 units. These lengthy financing processes and their associated barriers for affordable and supportive housing must be addressed to allow non-profit developers to build. We welcome the proposed tools such as low-interest loans, equity, risk-sharing mechanisms, and contributions. It's vital that these instruments be streamlined, predictable, and accessible—especially for non-profits, co-ops, and Indigenous housing providers whose capacity to absorb complex or costly financing terms is limited.

3. Consider Smaller, Distributed Supportive Housing Projects
Build Canada Homes emphasizes large-scale projects of 300+ units or portfolio deals. While this may suit market housing, it risks sidelining community-based non-profits who are building the supportive housing needed to address homelessness. For supportive housing, smaller, dispersed developments are critical: they promote social inclusion, reduce stigma, and allow services to be tailored to local needs. A portfolio approach that combines multiple smaller projects can achieve scale while ensuring community integration and tenant well-being.

4. Define "Affordable" Based on Household Income, not Market Prices
We support expert recommendations that affordability definitions be anchored in household income standards—specifically, rent or housing costs at or below 30% of pre-tax income—rather than tied to market pricing or vague "moderate income" labels. Clear, income-based affordability definitions ensure that *Build Canada Homes* truly serves those most in need rather than middle-market segments.

5. Centre Non-Profits as Long-Term Partners
While *Build Canada Homes* intends to promote deep affordability, the current model risks repeating past mistakes that resulted in poorly maintained housing and segregated communities. A stronger approach is to directly support proven non-profit housing organizations whose sole mission is affordability, helping them scale into larger projects while preserving their community-driven values.

Non-profits like Redwood not only provide housing, but also integrate supports, employ social service workers, and ensure long-term stewardship of buildings—outcomes that for-profit developers are not structured to deliver.

6. Target Outcomes, Not Just Outputs
While scaling up unit counts is critical, *Build Canada Homes* must measure success through outcomes such as reductions in homelessness, core housing need, and housing insecurity, not just the number of units built. Outcome-driven metrics will better reflect real-world impact and guide equitable resource allocation.

7. Balance Speed with Long-Term Affordability and Efficient Operations
Build Canada Home's focus on modern methods of construction, like off-site manufacturing, modular, low-carbon materials, and rapid assembly, is promising for reducing build time and cost. For housing operated by non-profit providers, it is equally important to invest in materials, designs, and systems that reduce long-term operating and maintenance costs (e.g., energy efficiency, durability, low-carbon design). A holistic lens that balances speed of delivery with affordability in operation ensures sustainable housing over its lifecycle.

8. Encourage Collaborative, Locally-Led Implementation
We urge Build Canada Homes to embrace models where regional or municipal consortia lead project identification and delivery, in collaboration with provincial/territorial partners, local governments, and community housing providers. This collaborative groundwork ensures responsiveness to local needs, smoother planning approvals, and deeper alignment with existing social and infrastructure frameworks.

9. Support for Indigenous-Led Housing
While Redwood is not an Indigenous-led housing organization, we strongly endorse initiatives that are "for Indigenous, by Indigenous." Indigenous communities have unique housing needs and priorities, and supporting Indigenous-led solutions is critical to ensuring culturally safe, effective, and community-driven housing outcomes.

Redwood is encouraged by the *Build Canada Homes* initiative and the opportunity it presents to expand supportive and affordable housing across Canada. We hope these recommendations help ensure that investments result in housing that is equitable, sustainable, and integrated into communities—providing not just shelter, but stability, opportunity, and connection for those who need it most. In doing so, Build Canada Homes can advance Canada's commitment to the right to housing and ensure everyone has a safe, affordable, hopeful place to call home.