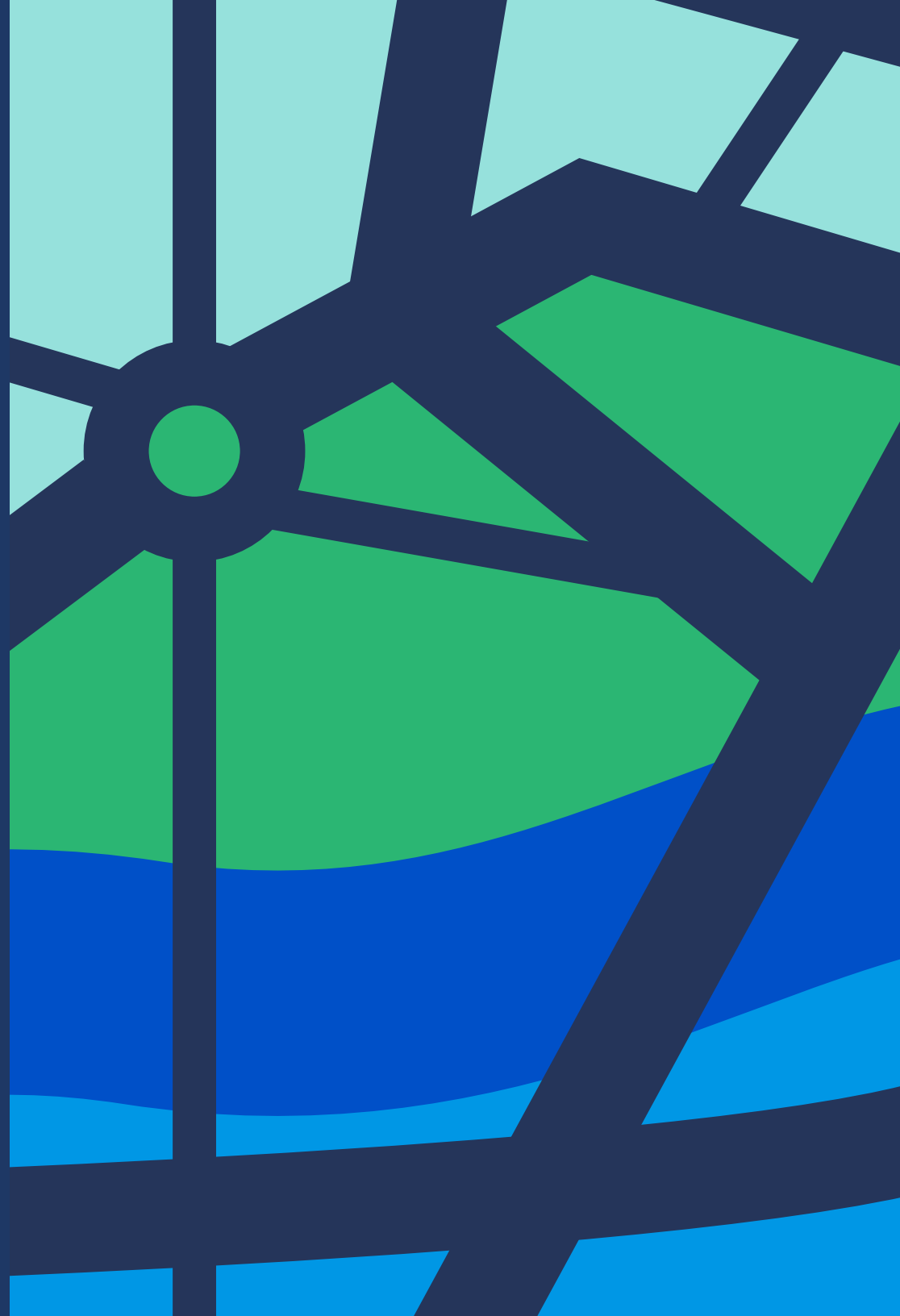




The Affordable Housing Challenge Project

Community Land Trusts
as a Tool for Affordable Housing
Provision in Toronto

City Research Insights
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In recent years, as affordable housing becomes an increasingly significant issue in urban centres around the world, community land trusts (CLTs) have emerged as a vital model and method for provisioning affordable housing by removing property from the speculative market.

CLTs also have an important role to play in raising public awareness about the impacts of gentrification, affordable housing, displacement and eviction, and linking these phenomena to anti-racist, anti-oppression and settler-colonialist frameworks.

The Affordable Housing Challenge Project (AHCP), an initiative of the School of Cities, is answering the call for more affordable housing in Canadian cities by investigating and supporting the growth of CLTs in Toronto. The AHCP is a collective that brings together scholars from across disciplines and campuses at the University of Toronto. Under the supervision of AHCP project leads **Susannah Bunce** (Human Geography, UTSC), an international expert on CLTs, and **Alan Walks** (Geography, Geomatics and Environment, UTM), an international expert on the financialization of housing and housing policy, the AHCP collective explores issues related to housing affordability with the goal of working collaboratively to discuss and research the causes, processes, policies and consequences of declining housing affordability.

“Our vision is of a city in which housing is seen as a human right. One that makes us all better for it, one that we protect because it is the right thing to do. Our vision is of a city in which housing is a key ingredient in making people feel like they belong. You – we – all belong here.”

-Affordable Housing Challenge Project website,
affordablehousingchallenge.ca/about/

ISSUE AT A GLANCE

About the <i>Affordable Housing Challenge Project</i> (AHCP)	2
Defining Community Land Trusts	4
Community Land Trusts in Toronto	5
Policy Recommendations to Support Community Land Trusts in Toronto	8
What's next for the <i>Affordable Housing Challenge Project</i>	9
An Interview with the AHCP Project Leads	10
About the School for Cities	11
Contact Us	12



The AHCP network undertakes a wide range of activities to push forward their affordable housing research and advocacy goals. The AHCP's Affordable Housing Seminar Series has hosted eleven events since 2019 on topics such as housing financialization, alternative housing models, and the evictions crisis. The AHCP also supports two research clusters. The first is the Faculty and Students Research Cluster, a community of interdisciplinary U of T scholars and graduate students focused on exploring a range of issues related to Toronto's affordable housing crisis; the second is an NGO Research Cluster, dedicated to raising awareness of Toronto's affordable housing shortage and advocating for housing policy reform. Importantly, the AHCP team also offers outreach and advocacy support to organizations that are working to expand access to affordable housing and has been at the forefront of community initiatives to advocate for and build alternative housing solutions in Toronto, particularly the community land trust (CLT) model.

In this issue of City Research Insights, we examine the AHCP CLT Team's important work to champion CLTs, and to build a networked approach towards resource sharing, support and expertise to bolster their growth in Toronto. We also explore recommendations based on AHCP's work for decision-makers on how to support the development of CLTs in their own cities and neighbourhoods.



Photo: annapolis_rose, 2017

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What is a Community Land Trust (CLT)?

A community land trust, or CLT, is both a model and a method for the community-based stewardship and ownership of land. A CLT is a non-profit or non-governmental organization that acquires land in trust for a community. CLTs can differ in structure, but they generally focus on the acquisition of donated or purchased land within a defined geographical area and with an emphasis on social justice.

The goal of a CLT is to hold land in perpetuity, and legal restrictions are placed on the resale of CLT-owned land and/or the buildings on the land to prohibit profit-making from resale. The legal restrictions that CLTs create in the form of a ground lease separate the land title, which is held by the CLT, from the building or housing title with the intention of lowering the cost of housing. Ideally, holding land in a CLT can lead to the decommodification of both land and housing stock. Any buildings within the CLT can be owned or rented by individuals or families, and caps on rental increases can provide deep rental affordability for tenants.

CLTs work collaboratively with local community residents, who may or may not be members of the CLT organization, to identify uses for the land. Often the use of CLT land is geared towards affordable housing provision. However, CLTs can also include uses like social enterprises and community gardens.

The Social Justice Origins of CLTs

The modern roots of CLTs were laid by African-American tenant farmers in the southern United States as part of the civil rights movement of the 1960s. The first CLT was founded in rural Georgia in 1967 as an act of resistance against anti-Black racism and the lack of available opportunities for African-American land ownership. The first urban CLT was created in Cincinnati in the early 1980s in a majority Black inner-city neighbourhood as a way to resist government disinvestment in housing and to retain the land for community use.

CLTs Around the World

In addition to urban land trusts like the ones in Toronto and other Canadian cities, the land trust model is being utilized in a wide variety of ways globally. In the Global South, CLTs are being used in countries like Bangladesh, Kenya and Brazil to advocate for land ownership in informal settlements and address refugee resettlement. There is considerable mobility of policies and ideas across CLT networks, as well as advocacy towards increased implementation of CLTs across the globe.



The Growth of Community Land Trusts in Toronto

The first generation of CLTs started to develop in Canada in the 1980s and differed from existing land trusts, which focused on conservation of agriculture and wilderness areas. In the context of a broad lack of legislative and public policy support for CLTs, they were formed by cooperative housing federations, non-profit developers, and activist groups. The second generation of CLTs have emerged since 2012 due to renewed interest in affordable housing development and as a response to gentrification pressures in urban areas such as Toronto, Vancouver and Montreal. Many of these second generation CLTs have formed connections with existing first generation CLTs as well as the international CLT movement.

Locally, the activism of these CLT organizations has often extended beyond the land trust model itself, and responds to broader urban issues such as the impact of rapid gentrification and displacement, decreases in affordable housing supply, advocacy for urban food security, and solidarity with racialized and culturally diverse communities, including building allyship with Indigenous peoples. Although CLTs have existed in Toronto since the 1980s, many of the CLTs that are now emerging – including the Parkdale Neighbourhood Land Trust, and the Kensington Market Community Land Trust – exemplify the second generation of Canadian CLTs.



PHOTOS
ABOVE LEFT
Scott Web, 2016

ABOVE RIGHT
Jason Ng, 2022

LEFT
Adam Krawesky, Courtesy of
Parkdale Neighbourhood Land
Trust, 2021



Parkdale Neighbourhood Land Trust

Founded in 2014, the Parkdale Neighbourhood Land Trust (PNLT) is Toronto's first neighbourhood-based CLT. Between 2017 and 2022, PNLТ successfully preserved a community-owned agriculture site, two at-risk rooming houses with over fifty units, and 81 properties across the west end of Toronto, totalling 153 mostly family-size units.

PNLT's work sparked a growing momentum amongst community members and organizers in Toronto to develop more CLT models in the city. As a part of this momentum, the AHCP CLT Team, with leadership from PhD student **Kuni Kamikazi**, has been working to support emerging CLTs in Toronto including the Kensington Market Community Land Trust and the Toronto CLT Network.

PHOTO:
Courtesy of Parkdale
Neighbourhood Land
Trust and Greenest
City, 2021

Kensington Market Community Land Trust

Kensington Market Community Land Trust (KMCLT) was created in 2017 in response to the increase in “ghost hotels,” gentrification, and displacement in the Kensington Market neighbourhood.

After the owner of a rental building in the heart of the Market attempted to “renovict” his tenants, the neighbourhood’s community advocates, residents, and the KMCLT fought back. They managed to acquire the building under the Trust with the support of a \$3 million grant from the City of Toronto in May 2021. The CLT Team, including graduate students **Sinead Petrasek** and **Chiyi Tam**, has played a key role in this work.

The Toronto Community Land Trust Network

When CLTs are starting up, they often face a common challenge – the need for resources and technical expertise to assist with housing acquisition and stewardship. To support CLTs in this challenge, the CLT Team has been supporting the development of the Toronto Community Land Trust Network, located within the Parkdale Neighbourhood Land Trust. The purpose of the Network is to provide support and to build collaboration between start-up CLTs and those that are already established. Graduate student **Laura Vaz-Jones** and **Kuni Kamizaki** spearheaded action-oriented policy-relevant research to explore the impacts of a networked approach to CLT support.



PHOTO: © Ryan Rubin, 2021

What is a “Ghost Hotel”?

A ghost hotel describes a listing on Airbnb that is not owner-occupied. A ghost hotel is essentially a short-term rental, often managed by a company and advertised on Airbnb under a fake profile. Ghost hotels can contribute to the housing crisis by removing rental units from the housing market, and they create safety concerns due to lack of ongoing property supervision.

Policy Recommendations

to Support Community Land Trusts in Toronto

1 Immediately increase and expand variegated forms of funding support for CLT organizations.

The funding should allow for organizational support, including funding for staff positions, land acquisition, and the development of affordable housing on the acquired land.



2 Modify Government of Canada charity regulations to allow for more flexibility in the charitable status of non-profit organizations such as CLTs.

This will allow CLTs to accept charitable donations of land, to fundraise, to have an advocacy voice, and to acquire land through purchase all under one non-profit organizational umbrella.



3 Increase public recognition of the CLT model as a viable form of community organizing for the provision of affordable housing and other community uses at the local scale.



4 Local governments should increasingly work in partnership with CLT organizations to allow CLTs to own land title.

Government partners, municipal policies, and bylaws must facilitate and support the development and expansion of CLT efforts and land/affordable housing portfolios.



5 Local governments should work with CLT organizations to identify abandoned properties that can be marked for expropriation and transfer the properties to CLT ownership.

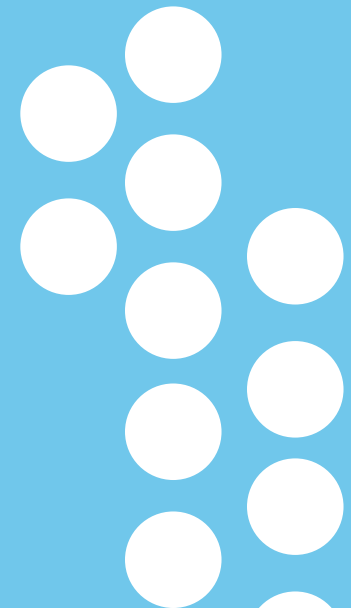




PHOTO
“Pedestrian Sunday
winds down for another
Summer”
© Ryan Raz, 2017

What’s next for this project?

The Affordable Housing Challenge Project network, and the AHCP’s CLT Team, are continuing their vital research and advocacy for policy solutions to the affordable housing crisis in Canada.

Upcoming for the AHCP collective:

- Investigating the impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic on housing affordability and the provision of affordable housing during and after the pandemic.
- Exploring the issues and impacts of the financialization of housing.
- Examining the role of community organizations and affordable housing activists tackling these issues in Toronto and other cities.

Upcoming for the AHCP’s CLT Team:

- Continuing to support the development of the Toronto Community Land Trust Network to foster collaboration and support between established and emerging CLTs in Toronto, and to address the need for resources and technical expertise to support housing acquisition, preservation and stewardship for start-up CLTs.
- Conducting action-oriented research that explores a networked approach to a support system for CLTs start-ups.

Learn more about the Affordable Housing Challenge Project [here](#).

Sign up for our [newsletter](#) to keep up-to-date!

Interview with Susannah Bunce and Alan Walks

Tell us about your work CLTs and the Affordable Housing Challenge Project more broadly.

Susannah: I started researching community land trusts in 2009 when I received a SSHRC grant to do a comparative study of urban community land trusts in the US, Canada and the UK, including a few in Toronto such as the Parkdale Neighbourhood Community Land Trust. That research evolved into my work with the Affordable Housing Challenge Project in 2019. We wanted to do community-engaged work around affordable housing provision in Toronto. My interest in community land trusts and Alan [Walks]'s interest in affordable housing provision have coalesced around the CLT model as a way to support community organizations to build capacity, create supportive organizational structures, and acquire land for affordable housing.

How has the affiliation with the School of Cities facilitated this project?

Susannah and Alan: The School of Cities has provided funding, staffing, and communications support since the formation of AHCP in 2019. The support of the School of Cities has allowed us to build a tri-campus network of faculty and graduate students working on affordable housing issues across the University of Toronto. In terms of specific activities that have been supported, we've hosted a popular annual public seminar/webinar series and as a blog series, engaged in community-based outreach with affordable housing advocates and organizations, and advanced support for community land trust initiatives in Toronto.

What impacts have the AHCP had to date?

Susannah and Alan: In addition to the core work of the AHCP, we have also directly supported CLT organizations in Toronto. Several graduate students who are members of AHCP including **Kuni Kamizaki**, **Chiyi Tam**, **Sinead Petrusek**, and **Laura Vaz-Jones** have been vital in this work. AHCP has supported the property acquisition and community planning process of the Kensington Market Community Land Trust and the development of a Toronto community land trust network made up of Toronto-based CLTs. We have placed a lot of emphasis on building trustful and supportive university-community collaborations, where the needs of communities are placed front and centre.

[Read the full interview here.](#)



Susannah Bunce is Associate Professor of Human Geography at the University of Toronto Scarborough. Her research focuses on the role of sustainability in the context of spatial planning, development and redevelopment practices in urban communities and neighbourhoods.

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Alan Walks is Professor of Geography, Geomatics and Environment at the University of Toronto Mississauga. His research is concerned with understanding the causes, forms, and consequences of rising urban social and political polarization.

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About the School of Cities

The School of Cities is a solutions incubator for urban-focused researchers, educators, students, practitioners, and the general public to explore and address the complex global challenges facing urban centres. A living laboratory, the School leverages urban data and lived experience to improve policy and decision-making, and collaborates with communities around the world to make cities and urban regions more sustainable, prosperous, inclusive, and just.

About City Research Insights

Community Land Trusts is the sixth in our series of City Research Insights, designed to link the urban research being conducted at the University of Toronto with the public, other institutions, and decision-makers.

With this series, the School of Cities seeks to leverage our extraordinary community of urbanists and urban-oriented researchers to create a rich, multidisciplinary community of urban faculty, researchers, and students across disciplines and perspectives. In addition to facilitating interdisciplinary research projects, partnerships and funding opportunities, we provide a hub for urban-focused interdisciplinary and collaborative learning.



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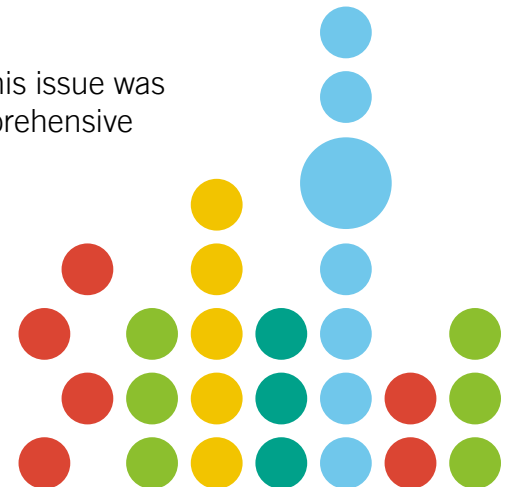
For members of the media looking to speak to an expert on urban topics and city issues, [visit our directory of affiliated faculty.](#)

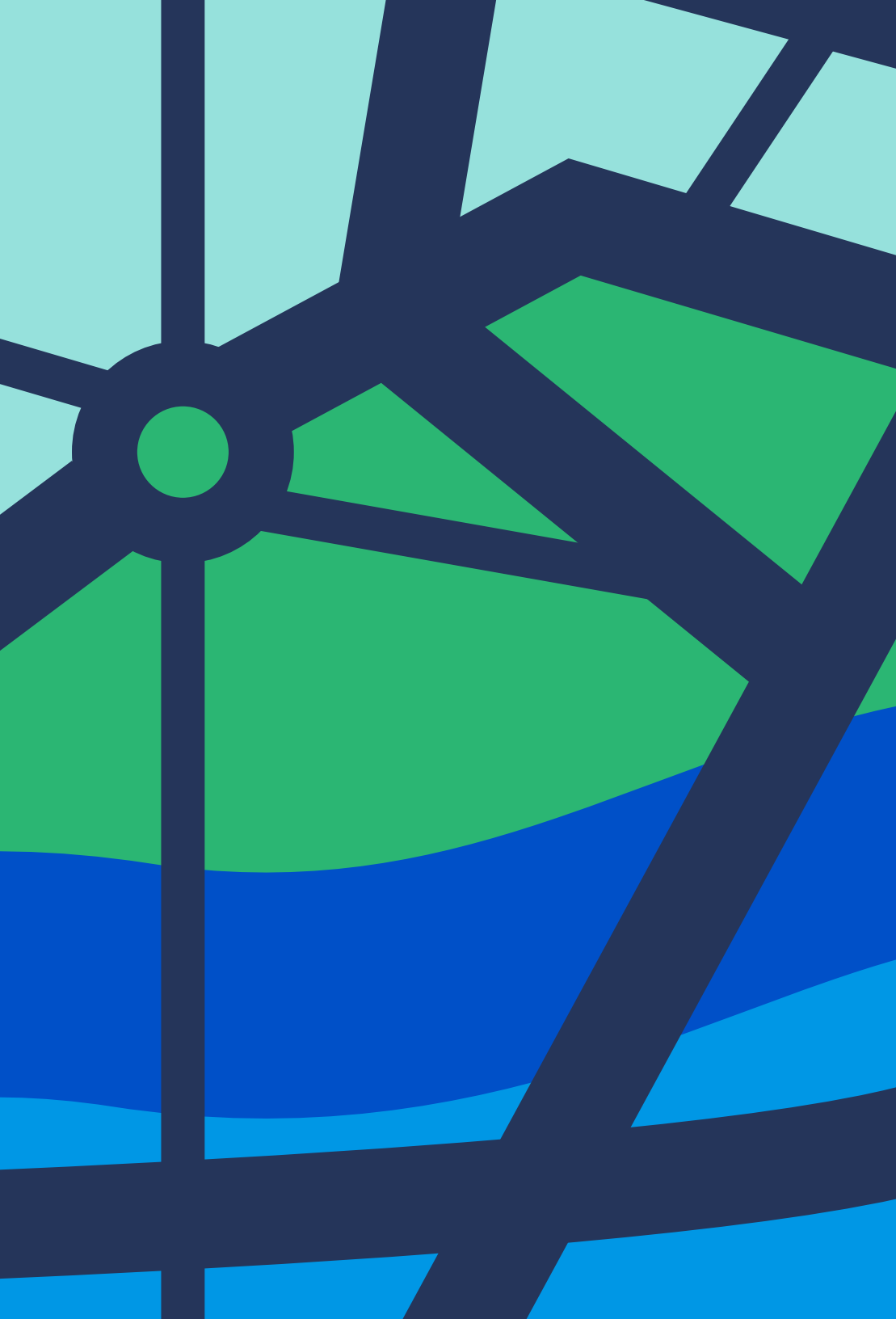
Unless otherwise noted, all information is based on the work of the researchers. Some of the content of this issue was closely sourced from the AHCP website at <https://affordablehousingchallenge.ca/> and the upcoming comprehensive Affordable Housing Challenge Report.

Photo credits:

Ric Amis, Adam Krawesky, Jason Ng, Ryan Raz, annapolis_rose, Ryan Rubin, Michael Stevens, and Scott Web.

[Learn more about the Affordable Challenge Housing Project here](#)





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