



# Engagement and Action Report

## Accelerating Backyard Suites

DECEMBER 8, 2025



# Acknowledgements

The Action Accelerator series is supported by funding from Nova Scotia's Department of Energy through their Training Strategy Fund and led and managed by Building to Zero Exchange (BTZx).





## Building to Zero Exchange

Building to Zero Exchange (BTZx) is enabling conditions for net-zero buildings by increasing capacity and facilitating collaboration. Together, we are accelerating action to retrofit and construct net-zero buildings at scale through innovative building retrofit programs and targeted net-zero training initiatives.

## Action Accelerator Series

The BTZx Action Accelerator series is designed to convene partners on key issues relevant to the transition to net-zero buildings by identifying and addressing the key gaps with clear actions for collective impact.



# The Context

Nova Scotia is experiencing an urgent housing crisis, with a growing need for accessible, affordable, and sustainable housing options. At the same time, the province must meet ambitious climate goals by reducing emissions from the built environment and increasing density in existing neighborhoods.

In 2020, Halifax Regional Council approved amendments to land-use by-laws to allow secondary and backyard suites with the intent of increasing supply and improving the affordability of housing. Backyard or secondary suites, also known as laneway houses, garden suites, or accessory dwelling units (ADUs), are a promising solution that can help address these challenges while increasing gentle density. Through this Action Accelerator, we aim to deepen the understanding of barriers limiting the development of backyard suites. We plan to identify tangible actions to unlock the potential of backyard suites as an affordable, energy efficient and practical housing option.



# Our Approach

We brought together a group of key representatives from across the building sector for a roundtable discussion. Together, the group discussed actionable strategies and innovative solutions to address current barriers to building and streamlining the development process for backyard suites in Nova Scotia.

To encourage conversation, we framed the discussion with a main challenge question, and three follow-ups:

**“How might we attract more investment in backyard suites by streamlining (speeding up) the process and reducing costs for property owners?”**

1. How could we streamline/speed up the process and make it more integrated?
2. How could we reduce costs to attract more investment by property owners?
3. What actions must be taken to build momentum? If implemented...
  - a. What would it look like?
  - b. What are the key facilitators / success factors to move this idea forward?
  - c. What barriers might get in the way?

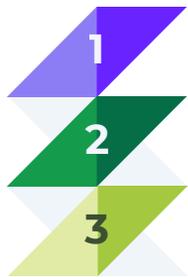
## Who was invited:

- Property owners
- Planners
- Municipal representatives
- Industry
- Policy makers
- Investors
- Current or potential owners of backyard suites in NS, and
- Anyone in the residential sector who has an interest in backyard suites and seeing the process streamlined.

# What we heard

## A summary of discussions

Participants at the roundtable expressed facing challenges and barriers in building backyard suites. Overall, the discussion revolved around three issues:



1 The lack of a centralized information hub

2 The lack of accurate cost estimates and available funding opportunities

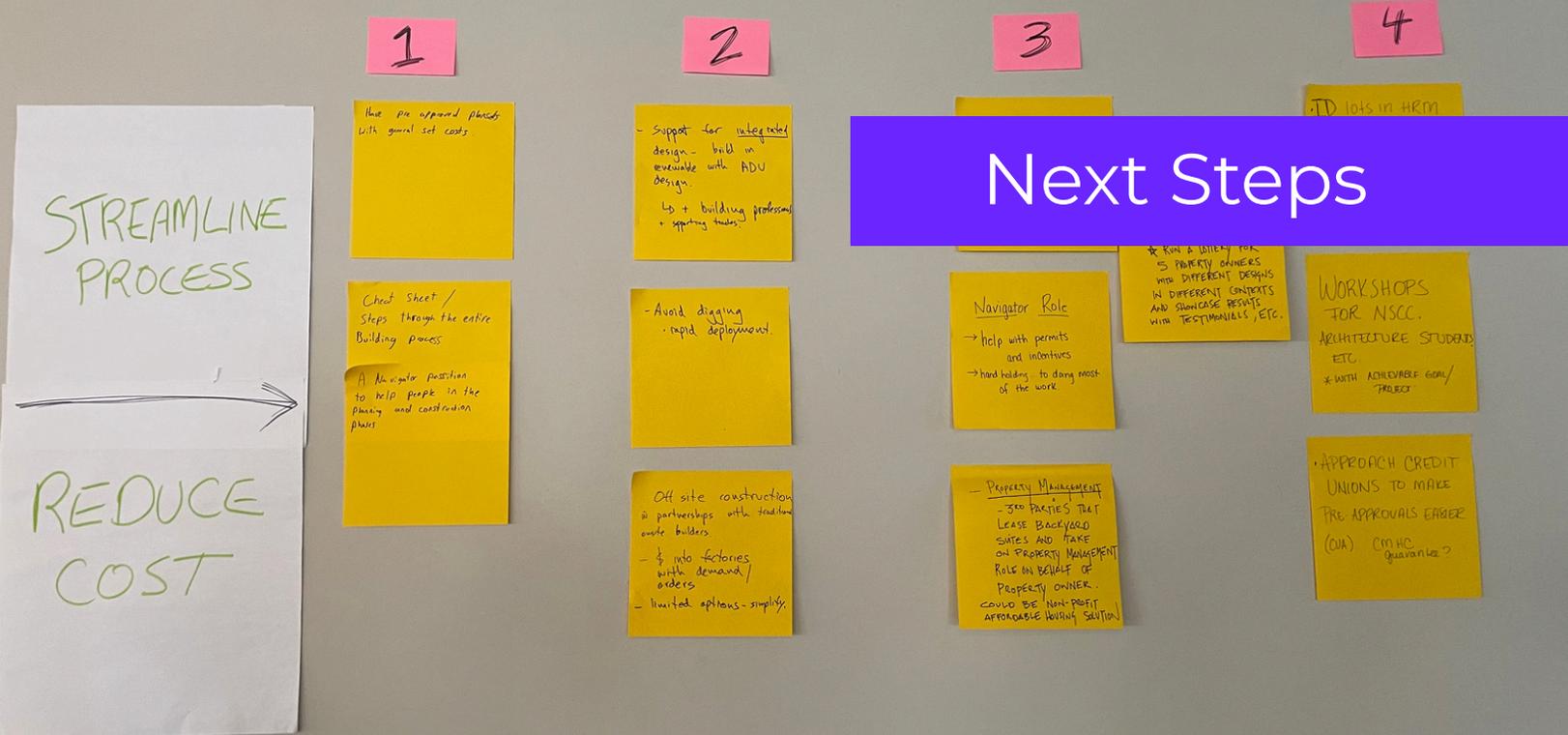
3 A need for accessible designs and pilot projects to jumpstart development

There was consensus around the idea that there is a lack of accessible information and guidance on developing backyard suites. Community members are struggling to find the relevant information, and industry is struggling to balance on-the-ground building work with shepherding clients through the permitting, granting and planning process. Both community and industry identified a need for a centralized information hub for the development process, backyard eligibility, available funding, step-by-step guidance and a roadmap for the backyard-suites process. A navigator role was brought up more than once as a missing component to help bridge the gap between permitting, planning and construction.



Participants expressed multiple times that processes need to be simplified in order to be streamlined. There are currently no mainstreamed publicly available standardized designs for backyard suites, which increases costs during the planning and development process. There was also conversation around the need for integrated net-zero designs and how different building techniques, such as modular or penalization, might be utilized. Having a centralized location for designs and planning information would help standardize the process.

Cost was the centre of the discussion at this Action Accelerator, and participants often cited that it's currently the biggest barrier to the increased development of backyard suites. Homeowners are frustrated with how complicated it is to determine development costs. There are currently no standard estimates and planners often give different answers. Participants also felt there is a lack of transparency regarding additional costs such as water, electrical connections and meter installations. Funding opportunities are scattered, not well publicized, and, in many cases, only provide a small amount of the necessary funds. There was expressed interest in developing tools to help breakdown the cost, compare cost-effectiveness of different building techniques, and provide a comprehensive list of the benefits and savings.

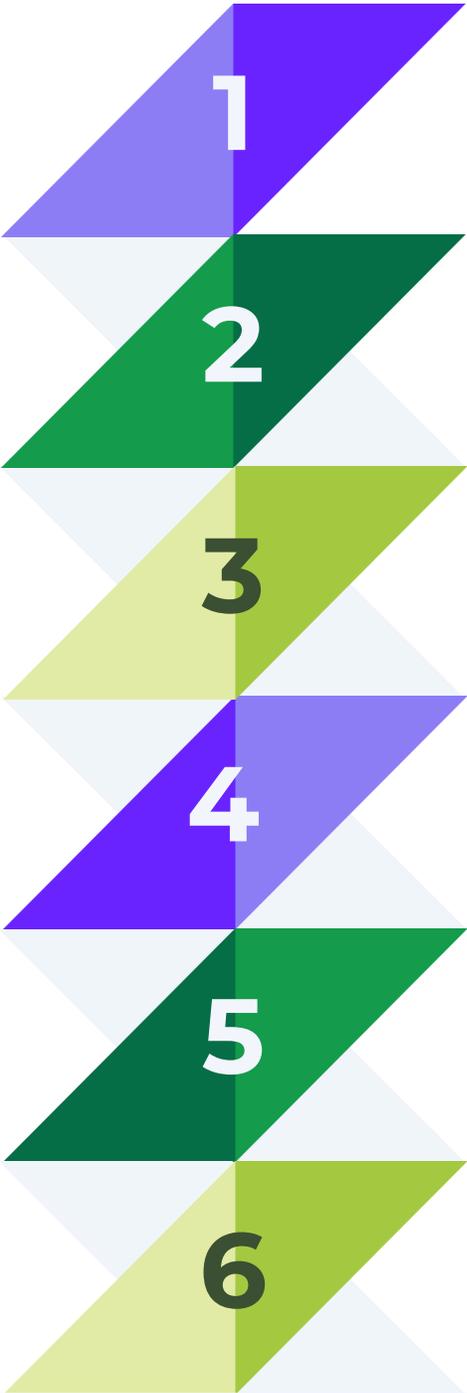


BTZx roundtables focus on actionable insights and recommendations. These conversations are the start of ongoing dialogue and partnerships to work towards a solution.

There is consensus that centralizing information is essential to addressing the challenges in streamlining backyard suites. Participants emphasized the need for more cross-pollination between sectors and actors to allow for an all-inclusive solution to these issues.

As we move forward, partnerships and shared commitments will help to drive change to this system to address affordability and increase gentle density in Nova Scotia.

# Strategies and Actions



1

**Centralized Hub:** One-stop shop resource hub for community to access information on permitting, planning, development, and implementation, as well as determining eligibility for projects and funding.

2

**Guiding Resources:** A step-by-step guide that outlines what's necessary to undertake, build, and maintain a backyard suites project.

3

**Navigator Role:** A person or group to provide tailored support for homeowners throughout the process and be a touchstone for communicating and interacting with industry and planning professionals.

4

**Standardized Designs:** A set of pre-approved designs for backyard suites that are accessible and easy to implement.

5

**Accurate Cost-Analysis:** Funding resources and cost breakdowns tailored to specific projects and inclusive of the differing costs for building sizes and techniques.

6

**Pilot Projects:** A selection of already-built projects that can be utilized as examples of the different backyard-suite designs, sizes, and building methods.