

For Immediate Release

Wawa's Needs More, and Smaller, Housing

16 April 2026 – The Municipality of Wawa needs more housing, especially smaller, one- or two-bedroom homes. This is the key finding of Northern Policy Institute's latest report "*Housing needs in Wawa*".

According to Zhexian Zhu, the report author, "even on a low growth forecast, an aging population will see overall growth in the number of households, especially single person households where the only member is over 65. The community does not currently have enough smaller homes to meet this forecast demand."

While overall affordability is not an issue at present, the average age of homes in the community and a limited supply of homes for sale do create concerns for long term affordability as demand rises if supply also does not improve. Zhu also notes that, "If the regional economy grows, Wawa will be faced with higher demand that will grow even faster."

The report emphasises that upgrading and converting existing housing offers the most immediate opportunity to expand small-unit and rental options while supporting aging-in-place needs. These measures align with the current municipal guideline's that prioritize intensification - maximizing use of current assets before pursuing large-scale construction. However, implementation may be constrained by limited contractor capacity and low uptake of shared housing among seniors.

The report also notes that improving housing outcomes in Wawa is not just a matter of good local planning and policy alignment. Success also depends to a great extent on the accessibility, flexibility, and responsiveness of external funding programs. Greater alignment between provincial and federal funding structures and the capacity realities of small and rural communities. Reduced administrative burden, more flexible cost-sharing arrangements, and targeted support for project readiness would enhance the feasibility of delivering a more diverse and sustainable housing mix in Wawa and similar communities.

Read the full report here: <https://www.northernpolicy.ca/housing-needs-in-wawa-zz>

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Media Interviews: Author Zhexian Zhu, and NPI President & CEO Charles Cirtwill are available for comment. To arrange an interview, please contact:

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About the Author:

Zhexian Zhu was born in China and has lived in Canada for the last ten years. He holds a bachelor's degree in economics and political science from the University of Alberta. He also holds a master's degree in economics from Lakehead University (in Thunder Bay, where he now resides). His research focus has been on Fiscal Policy and Macroeconomics, exploring the complexities of fiscal policy and its impact on the broader economy. Most recently, Zhexian has brought his econometrics and data analysis skills to bear on the issues of housing and regional transportation in Northwestern Ontario. For example, he has been exploring housing demand, population aging, and intra-regional mass transit through primary and secondary analysis and direct community engagement.

About Northern Policy Institute:

Northern Policy Institute is Northern Ontario's independent, evidence-driven think tank. We conduct research, analyze data, and disseminate ideas. Our mission is to grow Northern Ontario by supporting evidence-based decision-making through education and direct community engagement.

We believe in partnership, reconciliation, collaboration, communication, and cooperation. Our team seeks to do inclusive research that involves broad engagement and delivers recommendations for specific, measurable action. Our success depends on our partnerships with other entities present in or passionate about Northern Ontario.

Our permanent locations are in Thunder Bay and Timmins. During the summer months, we have satellite offices in other regions of Northern Ontario staffed by teams of Experience North placements. These placements are for university and college students working in your community on issues important to you and your neighbours.