Identifying secondary suites in Hamilton, Ontario.

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University of Toronto, Toronto, ON
Research Context

- Few purpose-built apartment buildings created since the 1970s;
- Lack of funding for social housing;
- Increasing income polarization;
- Rapidly rising real estate prices in urban areas;
- Secondary market offers greatest range in rental cost, and unit layout.

Context Questions Method Results Discussion Limitations Further Research
The Secondary Market

• Secondary rental market includes all buildings with six or fewer rental units including purpose-built units.

• This study focuses on secondary units in single-family homes.

• The term ‘informal housing’ is used as these units tend to skirt regulatory mechanisms such as zoning by-laws, building code and/or fire regulations, or to evade taxation.

• In Hamilton, estimates in the media put the number of informal secondary units between 8,000 – 23,000.

• Threatened by gentrification and de-conversion activities.
Research Questions

• What are the external (street-level) visual characteristics of secondary units?

• Can a visual survey tool be used to enumerate informal secondary units?

• What is the prevalence of this type of housing?

• How is this type of housing distributed across space at the neighbourhood level?
Study Areas

Context Questions Method Results Discussion Limitations Further Research
Beasley Streetscape

- Residential stock is largely dominated by single family homes built between the 1870s – 1930s
- Sporadic redevelopment and infill has occurred since the late 1940s onwards.
Rolston Streetscape

- Housing stock primarily built between the 1950s – 1990s
- Large stock of single-family homes
- Outer boundaries of the neighbourhood contain an abundance of large social housing in high-rise apartment buildings and townhomes
The Method

• A list of 18 visual indicators of secondary units was compiled through the review of relevant literature, and observation.

• A field tool was created to ensure that records of visual data collection were consistent and complete.

• A systematic visual field census of two pre-selected neighbourhoods was conducted between August 2015-November 2015.

• The field census was comprised of all single family homes in the two neighbourhoods including semi-detached, row houses, and townhouses.
Method Cont.

Behavioral

1 Primary

2 or more Secondary

Physical

1 Primary

2 or more Secondary

Context  Questions  Method  Results  Discussion  Limitations  Further Research
Method Cont.

**Primary Behavioural Indicators**
- Multiple mailboxes
- Presence of rental signs
- Unit numbers (ABCD, 1234)

**Primary Modification Indicators**
- More than one hydro meter
- More than one water meter
- Fire escape(s)
- Converted lawns
- Accessory building for habitation

**Secondary Behavioural Indicators**
- 3 or more recycling bins
- More than three vehicles
- Multiple satellite dishes

**Secondary Modification Indicators**
- Multiple front entrances
- Side entrance
- Back entrance
- Basement entrance
- Addition to primary dwelling
- Increase to building height
Preliminary Results: Beasley

### Total Number of Dwellings in Beasley
- Without indicators: 16%
- With indicators: 84%

### Secondary Units as a Proportion of all Housing Units in Beasley
- Total # housing units
- Total # observed secondary units
- 30%
- 70%
Preliminary Results: Rolston

Total Number of Dwellings
- Without indicators: 2%
- With indicators: 98%

Secondary Units as a Proportion of all Housing Units in Rolston
- Total # of housing units: 95%
- Total # observed secondary units: 5%
## Significant Indicators: Beasley

### Most observed indicators:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Indicator</th>
<th>Count</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Multiple mailboxes</td>
<td>83</td>
<td>54%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Visible unit numbers</td>
<td>70</td>
<td>46%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Multiple electric meters</td>
<td>65</td>
<td>42%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Converted lawns</td>
<td>49</td>
<td>32%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Side entrance</td>
<td>41</td>
<td>27%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### Least observed indicators:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Indicator</th>
<th>Count</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>More than one water meter</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Visible back entrance</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rental sign(s)</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Increase to building height</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Accessory building for habitation</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Context  Questions  Method  Results  Discussion  Limitations  Further Research
## Significant Indicators: Rolston

### Most observed indicators:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Indicator</th>
<th>Count</th>
<th>Percentage of Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Multiple satellite dishes</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>42%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>More than one front entrance</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>25%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>More than one doorbell</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>17%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Three or more recycling bins</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>17%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rental sign(s)</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>17%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### Least observed indicators:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Indicator</th>
<th>Count</th>
<th>Percentage of Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Visible fire escape(s)</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Addition to building footprint</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Visible unit numbers</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Increase to building height</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Accessory building for habitation</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Distribution of Secondary Units

**Beasley:**
- Main retail and commercial areas are void of these units due to the absence of single-family homes.
- A striking number of the remaining delivery units contain secondary dwellings.
- Highest density of secondary units observed in north western corner of the neighbourhood, and the central east side close to the boundary of the neighbourhood.

**Rolston:**
- Single-family homes on the interior streets of the neighbourhood did not express indicators of secondary units.
- Very few local delivery units contain secondary dwellings.
- Homes with secondary units were observed on the edges of the neighbourhood boundaries, on major roads, close to commercial spaces, and on bus routes.
Visual Indicators: Urban

Context Questions Method Results Discussion Limitations Further Research
Visual Indicators: Urban
Visual Indicators: Suburban
Preliminary Discussion

• None of the primary or secondary indicators emerged as being of equal importance for identifying informal housing in both Beasley and Rolston.

• Indicators that proved to be of less importance included accessory dwellings, and additions to building height.

• The relevance of secondary indicators needs to be further explored.

• Characteristics of housing stock, location, and threshold for entry into homeownership may impact the prevalence of secondary units.
Further Research

• The next steps in the research project are:

  – to explore the relevance of primary and secondary indicators across neighbourhoods;

  – to compare results to property assessment;

  – to compare results to Multiple Listing Service data;

  – to expand the field survey to observe socio-spatial patterns across the wider study area.
Acknowledgements

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Dr. Richard Harris and Dr. Bruce Newbold

and

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Questions?
Real estate listings and secondary units

Property Details

- ID: H3170567
- Style: Other
- Beds: 7
- Baths: 5 (Full: 4 3/4: 0 1/2: 1)
- Other: 0
- Status: Active
- Total Rooms: 20
- Parking Type Description: 
- New Construction: No