

ONN POLICY PRIORITIES 2020-2021

PUBLIC LANDS AND CIVIC SPACES

Expanding nonprofit access to surplus public lands and ensuring critical social infrastructure is operated on a nonprofit basis

THE ISSUE

Public assets built with public dollars are being sold for short-term gain, without consideration for their community value. Public lands should remain in community hands.

Public lands (land and buildings owned by the government and broader public sector, including surplus school lands) are often sold to the highest bidder without consideration for their local community value. Once property is sold to the private market, its market value often becomes out of reach for nonprofits that provide affordable housing and community amenities. At the same time, privately owned assets that rely heavily on public operating dollars (such as nursing homes and child care centres) can be sold for private gain, leaving the public without necessary community infrastructure.

POLICY STATEMENT

ONN advocates for surplus public lands and buildings with community value to be transferred to nonprofit hands for community use (by gift, purchase, long-term lease, or other arrangement). Community access to civic spaces should be supported by strong government policy at the provincial and municipal levels. Governments and nonprofits should explore the [community land trust](#) model to provide permanently affordable housing, as well as community amenities like child care centres and social enterprises that are protected from real estate spikes. Infrastructure that is needed for services and housing for vulnerable people (like nursing homes, hospitals, and disability services) should be protected from being sold and re-sold on the private market.

NEXT STEPS

Advocate for the Ontario Government to:

- Mandate the inclusion of broader public sector lands (including school properties) in the existing [Nonprofit Lands Registry](#) as part of the updated surplus land disposal process under the Supply Chain Management Act with reasonable time frames so that qualified nonprofits may have the opportunity to purchase these lands in advance of their availability on the open market.
- Explore the [implications of the rapid closure of faith spaces](#) for provincially-funded nonprofit services such as parenting programs, food programs, and seniors' drop-ins and work with the nonprofit sector to plan and implement mitigation strategies.

Work with the Ontario nonprofit sector to:

- Explore opportunities and mechanisms for nonprofits to collaborate on social purpose real estate, that is, nonprofit-owned lands and spaces, as a way to address high rents, insecurity of tenure, and rising real estate costs for nonprofits and the households they serve.
- Share lessons and inspiration regarding opportunities to repurpose unused faith spaces and rejuvenate them as community-owned spaces.
- Explore the role and value of mechanisms such as [Community Land Trusts](#) in providing permanently affordable land for critical services such as nonprofit housing, child care, recreation facilities, and community food/urban gardening initiatives.