Toboggan Flats' Office-to-Coliving Conversion Pre-Assessment Checklist

For community housing providers

This checklist is designed to help community housing organizations conduct a quick pre-assessment of potential office buildings for conversion to coliving housing. It serves two main purposes:

1. **Early Screening:** Quickly rule out buildings that are clearly unsuitable for conversion—saving time, effort, and financial resources before engaging consultants or beginning due diligence.
2. **Information Preparation:** Identify the key technical, regulatory, and operational details you'll need to gather in advance. Having this information ready will streamline your process when working with architects, engineers, code consultants, and funding agencies.

The checklist includes questions across five categories: zoning, architecture, financing, building code, and engineering. While it does not replace a full professional assessment, it can help you prioritize viable buildings and come to those assessments more prepared and informed.

Once a building passes this initial screening, use the information gathered here to accelerate professional evaluations and funding applications—and move one step closer to creating affordable, community-oriented housing.

1.0 Zoning & Location

Confirm whether the building is in a zone that allows commercial residential use and whether it's accessible to your target community. Zoning regulations vary by municipality and may affect whether the project can proceed.

Assessment Question	Response Options	Guidance / Interpretation
Is the building located in a zone that permits residential or mixed commercial-residential use?	☐ Yes ☐ No ☐ Unknown	Check the local **municipal zoning bylaw**. Most conversions require the site to be in a zone that allows **residential or mixed-use residential-commercial** development.

What is the name/code of the zoning designation for this property?	[Insert municipal zoning code]	Knowing the exact zone will help planners or consultants identify potential limitations or approvals required.
Does the local zoning bylaw allow for coliving or shared accommodation models?	☐ Yes ☐ No ☐ Not specified ☐ Unknown	Many municipalities do **not explicitly define coliving**. If unclear, consult the planning department to determine if the model can be permitted under another category.
Are there any zoning overlays or site-specific exceptions (e.g., heritage, employment area, TOD zones)?	☐ Yes ☐ No ☐ Unknown	Overlays or exceptions may affect your ability to convert or renovate the building.
Is this building located close to your target community or employment centre?	☐ Yes ☐ No ☐ Somewhat	Consider **geographic alignment** with your organization's mission (e.g. near schools, job hubs, community supports).
Is this building accessible to your target community by public transit?	☐ Yes ☐ No ☐ Limited service	Transit access is a key success factor for coliving, especially if tenants rely on it to reach school or work.
Are there any special considerations for the persons served in your space (e.g. accessibility, cultural supports)?	☐ Yes ☐ No ☐ Unsure	Think about whether the building or its location can accommodate specific needs—such as **mobility, cultural services, proximity to healthcare**, or other community supports.

2.0 Architecture

This section will help you determine whether the building's layout, window exposure, and elevator placement are suitable for coliving. These factors influence both unit livability and design efficiency.

Assessment Question	Response Options	Guidance / Interpretation
Does the building have windows on at least three sides?	☐ Yes ☐ No ☐ Not sure	Windows determine the number of possible bedroom units. A **small rectangular floorplate** may work with **three sides of windows**, though **four** is ideal.
Are the elevators centrally located within the floorplate?	☐ Yes ☐ No ☐ Not sure	A **central core layout** (elevators, fire stairs, mechanical) is most efficient. It preserves **outer wall areas** for bedroom unit windows.
What is the total number of occupants you envision housing in this building?	[Insert number]	Helps evaluate whether the **size and floorplate** can support your programming and goals.
What is your target cost per square foot for this project? *(optional)*	[Insert value or range]	Helps evaluate financial viability. Actual cost will depend on site conditions and retrofit needs.

3.0 Finance

Evaluate the financial viability of your project, including funding options, rent targets, and capital constraints. This section also prompts you to consider how the building would fit with affordability goals and funding program criteria.

Assessment Question	Response Options	Guidance / Interpretation
What type of organization are you?	☐ Private company ☐ Not-for-profit organization ☐ Government agency ☐ Other: _____	Helps determine **funding eligibility** and project structuring.
What is your target monthly rent per occupant?	[Insert amount]	Helps assess financial feasibility and potential **alignment with affordability targets**.
What CMHC or other public funding sources do you plan to pursue, if any?	☐ Affordable Housing Fund ☐ Apartment Construction Loan Program ☐ Co-op Housing Development Program ☐ Affordable Housing Innovation Fund ☐ Housing Accelerator Fund ☐ Pre-development funding (via CMHC or municipal/ provincial sources) ☐ Other: _____ ☐ Not sure	Consider both **capital and pre-development supports**. Check which ones align with your organization type and resident profile, and verify that you qualify.
Would you prefer buying or leasing a building for conversion?	☐ Only buy ☐ Only lease ☐ Either, but prefer to buy ☐ Either, but prefer to lease ☐ No preference	Consider your long-term **financial model, control needs,** and **capital availability**.
If leasing, what is your ideal minimum lease term?	[Insert lease term]	Longer lease terms often provide greater **stability and viability** for residential conversion.

What is your estimated overall conversion project budget?	☐ $0–9M ☐ $10–29M ☐ $30–49M ☐ Over $50M	Rough budget range allows for early **scoping and funding strategy**.
Do you know where your equity or other non-debt funding (e.g. grants) will come from?	☐ Yes ☐ No ☐ Partially	This will impact your eligibility for **CMHC-backed financing** and affordability-focused programs.
Do you need to meet a specific affordability standard?	☐ Yes: _____ ☐ No ☐ Not sure	Define whether the project must meet a **regulatory or internal affordability threshold**. E.g., 80% of market rent, rent geared to income, etc.
Will your residents be eligible for rent subsidies or housing benefits?	☐ Yes ☐ No ☐ Not sure	Rent subsidy availability may improve financial feasibility and resident access.
Will your coliving space include a community manager or other onsite operational staff?	☐ Yes ☐ No ☐ Not yet decided	Staffing will affect your **operating budget** and **resident experience**. It may also be required for certain funding programs or populations served.

4.0 Building Code

This section helps you determine whether the building meets baseline safety requirements for residential use or will require costly upgrades. It highlights early deal-breakers like sprinkler requirements, means of egress, and fire pump capacity.

Assessment Question	Response Options	Guidance / Interpretation
Does the building currently have sprinklers?	☐ Yes ☐ No	Sprinklers may be required depending on building height and construction type.
How many storeys does the building have (above ground)?	[Insert number]	Sprinklers are **required** if: building has **6 or more storeys**, OR building is **brick & beam** with **4 or more storeys**.
Is the building a brick & beam structure?	☐ Yes ☐ No	Brick & beam buildings have a **lower threshold** (4 storeys) for required sprinklers.
➡ Based on the above, are sprinklers required for this building?	☐ Yes ☐ No ☐ Uncertain – consult a code professional	Reference National, Provincial, and Municipal codes. Many provinces are in the process of standardizing federally, though Ontario still differs.
Does each proposed unit have access to at least two fire exits?	☐ Yes ☐ No ☐ Unknown	All residential units must have **2 means of egress** for fire safety compliance. Creating new exits can be costly.
Have relevant building codes been consulted for this project?	☐ National ☐ Provincial ☐ Municipal	Consult all 3 levels of code. Note: **Ontario** is currently the most divergent; other provinces follow federal code with only **minor local nuances**.

5.0 Engineering

This section covers essential engineering factors like coring feasibility, HVAC configuration, plumbing capacity, and sound transmission. These will have a major impact on both construction costs and resident comfort.

Assessment Question	Response Options	Guidance / Interpretation
STRUCTURAL SYSTEM		
What type of structural system does the building use?	☐ Monolithic concrete slab ☐ Post-tension hollow-core slab ☐ Other	Structural system affects the **ease of coring** for new plumbing and ventilation. **Easiest:** Monolithic slab. **Most difficult/expensive:** Post-tension hollow-core.
Can the structural system accommodate coring for new plumbing and ventilation?	☐ Yes ☐ No ☐ Unknown	You'll need to know this before proceeding with engineering assessments. If unknown, identify the system type and **consult a structural engineer**.
ELECTRICAL SYSTEM		
What type of electrical service/voltage does the building have?	[Insert details]	Essential to determine if the system can support added residential load (kitchens, appliances, HVAC, etc.).
Is there a backup generator?	☐ Yes ☐ No	Useful for emergency systems and building resilience.
If yes, what type of generator is it, and how old?	[Insert type and age]	Older generators may not meet current safety or capacity needs.
HVAC SYSTEM		
What type of HVAC system is in place?	☐ Central air handling ☐ Terminal units per floor ☐ Perimeter units ☐ Mixed ☐ Other	**Best for coliving:** Terminal or mixed systems. Central-only systems lack flexibility and can contribute to sound transfer.

Is the HVAC system flexible and adaptable for subdividing units?	☐ Yes ☐ No ☐ Unknown	Coliving requires HVAC solutions that can be **individually controlled or zoned** to minimize noise and allow layout flexibility.
Are main air ducts located along the perimeter of the building?	☐ Yes ☐ No ☐ Unknown	Perimeter ducts may **conduct sound between rooms**. Layout and duct location should be reviewed by a mechanical engineer.
WINDOWS & SOUND		
What is the quality and condition of the windows?	☐ Poor ☐ Fair ☐ Good ☐ Excellent	Windows impact both energy efficiency and sound isolation. Replacing them can be costly.
Will unit walls be able to meet the exterior walls between windows (not attach directly to the window frame)?	☐ Yes ☐ No ☐ Unknown	Walls that terminate directly at windows tend to **transmit more sound**. Ideal layout allows walls to meet **between** window openings.
PLUMBING & FIRE PROTECTION		
What is the size of the building's **sanitary drain**?	[Insert known size or "Unknown"]	Engineers will need this to determine if the system requires **upgrading for residential capacity**.
What is the size of the **water service** to the building?	[Insert known size or "Unknown"]	As above—this affects feasibility and cost of conversion.
Does the existing fire pump meet flow and pressure requirements for residential use?	☐ Yes ☐ No ☐ Unknown	Fire pumps are **expensive to replace**. Pressure and flow must meet residential code standards—check with an engineer.

Passed the checklist? You're ready for the Co-Convert Compass!

Follow the link above, or head over to tobogganflats.com to find out more.