

Two takes on inclusionary zoning

Re: Cities can insist on affordable housing, March 14

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Congratulations to chief planner Jennifer Keesmaat for backing inclusionary zoning, which would require private developers to designate some portion of new housing as affordable. But the Ontario Home Builders Association has warned that inclusionary zoning would push up the price of new homes and be unfair to new homebuyers.

I suggest that developers should pay their fair share of development fees. Development charges are evenly applied across the city, so developers can build in certain neighborhoods, while paying only a fraction of what their projects are likely to cost the city.

The system should be changed to ensure that developers pay directly for pressure put on particular surrounding infrastructure. Why should the taxpayers subsidize multimillion dollar developments? Residents must understand that they have been paying for improvements on infrastructure through higher property taxes and utility bills for many years. This is totally unfair.

Christopher Hume said that Toronto has great ideas, and it's time to seize hold of them, whether it be through development fees, or tolls on the road. Toronto needs money. But first, create one transportation body, Toronto working with the suburbs, and everyone realizing that better transit will not come cheap.

We must move faster on high-occupancy toll lanes from Burlington to Toronto, and not a needlessly long, four-year provincial government trial pilot project, from Oakville to Burlington? Field tests are unnecessary when tolls are used in other jurisdictions, i.e., Highway 407.

Low-cost housing is in the works, so now let's address gridlock, quickly implement toll lanes, and allocate this money to improving transit for everyone.

Carole Wilson, Toronto

The allure of inclusionary zoning is easy to see: add more affordable housing by tweaking zoning requirements to require affordable homes in high-rise projects containing more than 300 units. Sounds like a win all around. But it is not.

On your average high-rise of 300 units, my back of the envelope calculation indicates that the buyers not eligible for the affordable units will pay about \$15,000 more per unit. The belief that developers will pay for affordable housing is a false one given financing requirements by banks and financial return criteria by investors.

What planners and politicians fail to recognize is that this is just another tax on the first-time buyer/middle class. Surely this can not be considered fair.

It also prices some of these buyers out of the market, which will ultimately reduce the supply of badly needed housing in the Greater Toronto Area. Equally objectionable is a new bevy of red tape that will envelope this proposal, slowing approvals and creating more deadening bureaucracy for both developers and government.

The answer to a lack of affordable housing lies in less red tape and more targeted government support programs. It is simply not realistic to assume that inclusionary zoning is a free ride for all.

Brian Johnston, Chief Operating Officer, Mattamy Homes

In the last 17 years development charges in Toronto have increased 1,259 per cent. It takes an average of 10 years to take a building project from concept to occupancy. Staggering numbers to be sure, which beg the question as to why this is the case?

Canada has already been cited as a nation that performs badly in dealing with construction permits – we rank 53rd out of 187 countries. Not a stellar ranking. There are 45 independent government bodies with their fingers in the building process with no real oversight on their collective actions. Hence the costs of producing housing of all every kind has increased dramatically in the past 20 years.

The time required to save for a down payment, for example, has increased from 5 years in 1974 to over 15 years now in the GTA according to a recent Star article quoting Professor Paul Kershaw's research. Social housing waiting lists and pressure on millennials continues to rise.

So, inclusionary zoning needs to be put in perspective. Its costs will be borne by new home buyers depending on their ability to pay. No one should fool themselves that further market distorting measures will solve a housing supply problem.

Rather governments for once at all levels need to look at the massive inefficiencies in the current regulatory and approvals process. There is a serious lack of analysis on the supply side economics of housing as well as huge gaps in accountability and transparency regarding how projects get reviewed and approved from land use planning to building permits.

In the past year, we have sponsored two separate reports by the Consumers Council of Canada and by the Canadian Centre for Economic Analysis, which respectively identify systemic barriers and provides a new accurate housing affordability index. The problem is responsibility for housing is divided between different levels of government and between a multitude of agencies therein.

The unfortunate reality is while government has remained adept at announcing new measures and ribbon cutting, it has yet failed to examine how their own existing system is driving up the cost of land and building. This is driving new housing further and further out of reach for an ever

growing share of the population who are on average experiencing real declines in incomes. This is not sustainable and inclusionary zoning is no a genie in the bottle.

Richard Lyall, president, Residential Construction Council Of Central Ontario, Vaughan

Inclusionary zoning is definitely a viable path. I take exception to “in return . . . builders can be granted more favourable density allowances, etc. to help offset their forgone profits.” I think it must be a good 30-plus years that developers have been worried about not making profits. Why should the municipality?

It’s obvious that costs for affordable units would just be distributed among the rest of the development or could be. But the true question is : when is more density enough! Surely, when there are no schools, insufficient parks or community centres for the neighbourhood.

Surely, when congestion of cars and buses (including those busing the children to school now) is strangulating. Surely when you can’t get on the packed bus or subway. Surely when there is no neighbourhood shopping because developers provide only condominium retail (costly for the shoe repair, barber, convenience store).

Developers are managing fine. Perhaps we should stop selling our out density everywhere beyond the point where it is suffocating.. and ask our developers to step up to the game changing plate.