

Residential Construction Council of Ontario wants to continue to “get the red out”

Ian Harvey March 23, 2018



Looking into his crystal ball for 2018 and beyond, **Richard Lyall** mostly sees red — as in red tape.

As president of the **Residential Construction Council of Ontario (RESCON)** he’s been seeing a lot of red tape and working to cut through it for a couple years now and says there’s no question the same theme will continue through the next year.

The good news, though, he says, is that they’re getting both provincial and municipal governments’ attention and support.

With a steering committee in place and discussions underway about a pilot project to prove the value of streamlining the development approvals process through digital technology, he’s more than hopeful of a breakthrough.

“We’ve made tremendous progress on this issue and brought in Michael de Lint and he’s making a lot of connections with the right people,” says Lyall.

“We have approval on a task force around this and three working groups leading up to some reports in May. We’re nudging them (government) along so it doesn’t get lost.”

The need is palpable. While Toronto has moved to 54th from 57th out of 190 places in the world in ranking of development pace, it still has a long way to go.

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— **Richard Lyall**

Residential Construction Council of Ontario

While there was some suggestions in Toronto’s mainstream media that some of the bottlenecks in development were the result of land banking, Lyall says the biggest issue holding back supply remains red tape and the duplication of approvals process.

“Yes, developers bank land, that’s not news,” he says.

“They’ve always done that because, as a developer told me, some of their projects have taken 22 years to get built.”

Also, developers don’t ramp up office staff to get the maximum numbers of projects through in a given year. They prefer a steady stream of projects moving through at a sustainable rate with few bottlenecks and delays. Projects which could be delayed tend to get put on the backburner to allow more viable developments to move through.

The big factor holding back the supply chain of housing, which in turn, would keep home prices in check is rooted in the approvals process, he says.

“Here, there are something like 45 agencies or ministries which have a role in decision-making,” he says.

“Other jurisdictions have nothing like that. This is why we want to shift to digital. Digital provides comparative data so we can start to look at the data and ask: why does it take five times longer to get an approval in this jurisdiction compared to this other jurisdiction?”

Also on the radar for RESCON through 2018 is the growing demand for taller wood frames multi-unit buildings.

“The problem now is that with past six storey wood you’re into mass timbers and specialty pieces,” he says.

“We just don’t have the supply but we’re working with the industry to resolve that. Once we do we’ll start to see more pressure for taller wood-framed structures.”

Other issues include bolstering the skilled trades' apprenticeship programs to ensure there are enough workers to supply the construction industry.

"It used to be that parents wanted their kids to go to university and become doctors and lawyers," he says.

"That's changing and people are now seeing construction trades as viable career paths with good jobs and earning potential for their kids. It's become technology heavy, working with digital plans, BIM and lasers and it's something many young people can adapt to. We have some programs in schools but we really need to get the kids looking at construction as a career much earlier, even earlier than high school."

Panel fabrication will also continue to grow as an option for multi-storey projects, he says and that too will mean jobs and growth.

It may cost a little more but in the big picture it means less wastage, higher quality, faster completion, less theft and better health and safety management.