



## Keesmaat plan well-intentioned but unrealistic

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Toronto mayoral candidate Jennifer Keesmaat's ambitious affordable housing plan simply isn't realistic, according to the **Residential Construction Council of Ontario's president**.

In particular, **Richard Lyall** thinks Toronto's billowing bureaucracy will prove itself a spanner in the works, as earnest and well-intentioned as Keesmaat may be.

"She says 100,000 units over 10 years, and that's 10,000 units a year," said Lyall. "I'm not confident in any kind of blazing speed occurring within government. Then you've got to design buildings, find partners, raising financing, and do all those other things associated with that. Then you have to get building permits and get the whole thing approved. You're not going to get a shovel anywhere near a piece of ground for five years.

"We've got 45 different agencies and ministries that have a say in the approvals process, and there's limited coordination there."

If Lyall sounds pessimistic, he can be forgiven. While he lauds Keesmaat's idea, at least conceptually, he has watched the wheels of bureaucracy turn at a snail's pace for far too long. If any kind of change is to occur, it has to start with the development approvals process.

"In the last decade, with respect to tall buildings, it's taken longer and longer to get projects approved," continued Lyall. "I thought [Keesmaat's plan] is misleading and not realistic. I don't mind the idea itself, but there's no quick solution to what she's talking about and it certainly won't be 10,000 units a year. At best, maybe 20,000 units over five years."

Another glaring issue with Keesmaat's plan is the fact that, given the principles of market economy capitalism, developers will only agree to build the units if their costs are somehow reduced. The sheer amount of taxes and fees builders pay all three levels of government make building affordable housing economically ruinous.

That doesn't mean a solution cannot be concocted.

"You have fees, charges and levies, and procedural costs. I'm astounded that the biggest player in the homebuilding industry is the government," said Lyall, adding that other occupants in the building might have to subsidize the affordable units.

"They have these questionable solutions to a problem created, in large part, by the process through which projects get approved."

Tosin Bello, Turn Key Realty Point's broker of record, recounts Daniels Corp.'s Regent Park development as a dazzling example of how affordable units can be built properly. However, asked about Keesmaat's proposal to build 100,000 affordable units in a decade, he is doubtful.

"There's a need for affordable housing, 100%," said Bello. "There's a need and we have the capacity to support a development company in doing it, but 100,000 units in 10 years is ambitious and that's because our city doesn't move that quickly. With respect to getting a draft plan approved, getting a site plan approved, getting permits and being able to excavate, I think the bureaucracy alone would stall the whole thing. There's a demand for 100,000 units, but I don't think it's realistic to have them built in the next 10 years."