

Government unveils plan to jump development hurdles

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by Neil Sharma 29 Sep 2017

The provincial government today announced its plan to eradicate systemic issues plaguing the construction industry – issues that ultimately affect some of Toronto’s most vulnerable citizens.

The formation of the Housing Delivery Group fulfills a Fair Housing Plan recommendation intended to cut through red tape and other impediments to timely construction developments. Helmed by Paula Dill, an experienced urban planner with around 30 years of experience, the Group will intervene should developers run into obstacles with permits, zoning, site plans or anything else.

In particular, the Housing Delivery Group will dedicate its efforts to increasing the supply of rental units and affordable housing. Part of that plan is to build those housing types near transit, like subways, GO Trains and LRTs.

“Part of the mix of affordable housing is making sure people have the ability to get to work and school, or wherever they need to go, because not everybody can afford a car,” said the provincial Minister of Housing, Peter Milczyn. “Securing affordable housing around (transit) is part of the overall need to make life more affordable, certainly for vulnerable populations by making their lives easier in every respect, not just housing, but their mobility and their community.”

The aforesaid vulnerable communities include families and seniors.

The building industry welcomed the announcement because, in Toronto specifically, development hurdles often contribute to dropped projects.

“The process is slow and you have to look at how much construction is not happening,” said Michael de Lint, Director of Regulatory Reform and Technical Standards at the Residential Construction Council of Ontario (RESCON). “The Fraser Institute showed that a very long process reduces supply. If a developer has five projects, one or two will be particularly complex, so they might have to drop some of those.”

“You might see a lot of cranes, but how do you know you wouldn’t see more if the process was more efficient,” added de Lint.

Housing affordability advocates are cautiously optimistic about the Housing Delivery Group’s announcement. Greg Suttor, Senior Researcher at Wellesley Institute, and author of *Still Renovating: A History of Canadian Social Housing Policy*, says Dill’s role is badly needed to

help with “troubleshooting and untangling some of the sticking points because it can save time and money, mediate conflicts and start projects.”

But he says the city’s vulnerable face hurdles that, at times, can seem insurmountable.

“First, rent levels average \$1,300 a month for an apartment, and that’s high for anyone whose income is \$20,000 to \$30,000,” said Suttor. “Also, there are few openings and vacancies, and when you’re in that kind of market, landlords are in a position to choose who they see as a preferred tenant. For someone with a history of arrears or irregular employment, or if they have kids, that puts them at a real disadvantage.”