

Cutting red tape key to boosting housing supply



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One of the most critical issues facing Ontario Premier-designate Doug Ford is housing, specifically our flawed housing supply chain.

The housing approvals process needs to be streamlined and made efficient to help increase the supply of housing: cutting red tape to help businesses thrive and create jobs was a plank of Ford's election campaign, so there is hope that he can effect change.

In my opinion, there has never been more urgency to help new-home buyers (especially millennials) in the GTHA get into housing they can afford.

I strongly believe that Ford needs to remove waste, barriers

and bureaucratic duplication so the government can lubricate the province's bureaucratic machinery, open up supply so that more people can get into the new homes they want and deserve, and — ultimately — boost the provincial economy.

There are a number of stats and studies that I believe raise the alarm bell for the amount of red tape covering residential construction in this province:

- According to the World Bank, Toronto (representing Canada) ranks 54th in the world in "dealing with construction permitting."

- Between 2006 and 2016, according to a University of Toronto report, zoning changes for high-rise residential buildings have gone from nine months to almost 3.5 years.

- There are at least 45 different government agencies involved in the approvals process.

- New-home costs have increased

dramatically thanks to red tape, according to a recently released C.D. Howe report, which says government-imposed costs per unit now exceed \$200,000 on average.

- A report by the Toronto Region Board of Trade shows median incomes to housing prices have put Toronto on par with London (England, not Ontario). While Toronto aspires to be a major global city, Toronto is not in the top tier and it is not London, and should not have the same affordability issues as the British capital.

Previously in Ontario, past policies and repeated claims to "assure an adequate supply of housing" by government have been nothing less than abject failures. The consequences of a broken housing supply chain have economic, investment and employment impacts, among others — research shows that substandard existing housing increases health care costs. Can we afford not to change?

Meanwhile, Millennials are delaying or just giving up on having a family. It's completely unfair.

Attracting investment and new jobs to the region have been impaired because of a lack of housing that is affordable, including the dysfunctional rental market. This, in turn, affects infrastructure and transit planning.

This supertanker of a problem has to be turned around. To do this, housing supply has to be given priority policy status over other considerations. Government funding depends on a healthy economy which in turn depends on a healthy housing market.

There are three things government can do: firstly, the approvals process needs to be dramatically streamlined with appropriate performance standards, transparency and accountability.

RESCON has a blue ribbon group which has identified best practices for the province (more in this space

in the coming weeks).

Secondly, government needs to partner with and support industry to increase productivity on construction sites through means of innovation.

Finally, new-home buyers cannot be saddled with development-related charges which far surpass any reasonable calculation. They cut the legs out from under the next generation.

Let's face it: the housing situation has continued to get continuously worse over the last generation. It's time for an emphasis on values, expectations, desires and dreams. It's time to try something new.

Mr. Ford deserves a chance to prove he can do it.

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The power of social: No turning back now

PAUL BARKER

Special to Postmedia Network

The social media revolution is not slowing down anytime soon when it comes to the buying or selling of a home and for real estate agents that will either work in their favour or potentially put them out of business.

Speaking at a recent "fire-side chat" on the monumental impact it is having on the real estate industry organized by housing market research firm Trimart Corp., Clarence Poirier, president of and creative director of P&B Marketing said much has changed since the days when newspapers were the only game in town.

Poirier referenced one broker who created a Web site prior to the opening of a sales office of 200 residential units on The Kingsway in Etobicoke, conducted a direct mailing campaign and then tracked all responses electronically.

A marketing exercise that cost an estimated \$22,000 resulted in commissions for the broker of \$330,000

"Everything is changing at such a very fast pace," he said. "Once you are online your story is everywhere and your builder's story is everywhere."

Poirier distributed a one-page handout to real estate professionals and builders in

attendance — the 2018 edition of *This Is What Happens In An Internet Minute*, which demonstrated just how fast the pace is moving.

Created by Lori Lewis and Chadd Callahan of Cumulus Media, the following took place in one 60-second span: 18 million text messages, 4.3 million videos viewed on YouTube, US\$862,823 spent online and 973,000 Facebook logins.

One year earlier, the numbers were as follows: 16 million text messages, 4.1 million videos viewed on YouTube, \$751,522 was spent online and in terms of Facebook, there were 900,000 logins.

Elio Gatto, president of social media market services firm Social Know How, who also spoke at the event, said that in a society where "we are sharing every moment and everything we do," people today expect their broker or agent to be cognizant about being social.

"Social media is a powerful tool," he said. "When people start the cycle to buy a home, before they get to an agent or broker, they are going to be online."

This is particularly true of millennials, who have been weaned on social media since they were old enough to turn on a Mac, PC or smart phone.

In a blog entitled *Here's*



Networking can happen with anyone in the world at any given time for business of any size.

Why Businesses Need Social Media, Gatto wrote that the Internet has revolutionized the way people do business and as a result, social media has been a major contributing factor to business success.

"With each passing day

social media and its uses in our daily lives evolve. Continuous enhancements are being made to social networking platforms, whose numbers of active users continue to grow, making them a necessary business tool.

"Social media usage statistics are staggering with numbers increasing daily. This means increased exposure and brand awareness for companies using social media. Companies with a social media presence that engage

and interact with their followers regularly are creating an advantage over their competitors who are not doing so."

Networking, he added, can happen with anyone in the world at any given time for businesses of any size.