

Industry Perspectives: Toronto's Concept to Keys initiative a homebuilding game-changer

Richard Lyall August 18, 2021



The old adage, “May you live in interesting times,” certainly describes the environment that builders find themselves in today.

With the COVID-19 pandemic, material shortages and lack of supply dramatically driving up prices of new homes for consumers, this is indeed one of the most challenging periods of our generation.

It is becoming increasingly unaffordable for a first-time homebuyer to get into the housing market. We have seen huge price spikes for new and existing homes. Low interest rates have enabled consumers to take on bigger mortgage amounts which has contributed to escalating prices.

The Toronto Regional Real Estate Board reports in July the average sale price of a detached home in the GTA surged 21.7 per cent. Semi-detached homes and townhouse prices also increased. The lack of inventory has resulted in bidding wars for existing homes and rentals as well.



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The clouds have been gathering for some time now, but they have combined to cause a perfect storm precisely when we need new housing the most.

More than 400,000 new immigrants are expected to enter Canada in 2021 and 2022, so the situation will only become more dire.

The lack of housing will hamper our economic recovery coming out of the pandemic. A recent report by the Toronto Region Board of Trade and WoodGreen Community Services indicates the shortage of affordable housing is already costing the

GTA up to \$7.9 billion annually. Over a five-year timespan, those cumulative losses could amount to an estimated \$29.4 billion to \$37.9 billion.

The key, of course, is to speed up the build of more housing. To accomplish that, however, unnecessary red tape needs to be eliminated.

Thankfully, the City of Toronto has an initiative underway called Concept to Keys, or C2K, that is aimed at dramatically transforming the approach to reviewing development applications. The aim of the initiative is to have a more efficient development review system that will enable housing to be delivered faster and therefore reduce costs for consumers, renters and those in need of social housing.

This will obviously help consumers as builders are often stymied by long waits to get applications approved.

The new review process will help to ensure problems with applications are identified and resolved early on, with the goal of producing more efficient reviews.

As part of the process, C2K will improve communication and collaboration between development applicants and city staff. Application co-ordinators will provide progress updates on applications and resolve minor issues. There will also be relationship and issues management staff who can escalate complex issues for resolution by city leaders, as well as review teams to keep applications moving.

A new issue review process is being set up to help to ensure problems with applications are identified and resolved early on, with the goal of producing more efficient reviews with shorter turnaround times.

Meanwhile, technology will be used to make submitting a development application more convenient and transparent for applicants and easier and less time-consuming for city staff to process.

In the first phase of the project, 21 affordable housing development projects were prioritized and expedited. As part of the process, a new application management function was set up to oversee development applications.

The second phase of the project was launched in June and is focused on applications in the Etobicoke-York geographic planning area. The idea here is to test the process and technology improvements.

In time, the initiative will be rolled out to other areas of the GTA.

This will dramatically overhaul and accelerate the system by radically transforming how planning and development applications are reviewed by modernizing organizational structures, processes and technology.

It is clear the old way of doing things is just not working. We are in the middle of a housing crisis and are not building homes fast enough to keep pace with demand. We need to change our approach.

Toronto's C2K initiative is an essential element in making that happen.

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