



Industry pressures government to amend bylaws

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by Neil Sharma 07 Mar 2019



Intensification mandates entwined transit and real estate development, but in Toronto they remain as disparate as ever. However, using one to fund the other might be the long-awaited panacea.

“Redevelop transit stations to include construction above it,” said Michael de Lint, director of regulatory reform and technical standards at the Residential Construction Council of Ontario. “It can be used to fund transit station improvements and, potentially, investing in the transit system overall as they’ve done in Hong Kong and Melbourne. There are huge opportunities to add supply near transit stations through up-to-date zoning and future transit stations by using innovative funding approaches that use land value capture and air rights to invest in a system.”

Current zoning bylaws have long been identified as the greatest impediment to meeting the provincial growth strategy’s goals. Given that the Greater Toronto Area is on the precipice of a population explosion, de Lint believes there’s little choice but to tackle the issue head-on.

“I think we have a problem of areas around transit stations being underutilized and under-zoned,” he said. “We have a growth plan that says we should have development in so-and-so area but the zoning lags behind. We recommend zoning is updated within a year with associated

planning documents. Implement community development permits, which combine site plan control and zoning, because you want these buildings looking good and you don't want a delay in site plan control."

A report prepared by the Ryerson University's Centre for Urban Research and Land Development, with funding from the Ontario Real Estate Association and Ontario Home Builders' Association, has called on the provincial government to mandate as-of-right zoning around 200 transit stations in the province. The goal, says OREA's CEO Tim Hudak, is to build 20,000 new housing units a year by preapproving development heights and creating livable communities.

But the equation isn't solely composed of large towers protruding from below-grade transit systems.

"A significant part of this is missing middle housing," said Hudak. "We've identified 200 transit hubs around subways, LRTs and GO lines. Depending on where you are in Toronto, Hamilton or Ottawa, you look at a high level of four- to six-storey buildings and within 800 metres of a station you'd see height decline to stacked townhomes and ground-level housing. That short 15-minute walk would create walkable communities with a nice mix of mid-rise and stacked townhomes, retail and restaurants."

While it is too early to call the Places to Grow Act of 2005 a failure, it certainly hasn't executed as hoped. Much of the blame can be pinned on municipal politicians who, for reasons like NIMBYism (Not In My Backyard), would rather not ruffle the feathers of their constituents.

"I put it down to not enough political courage to make necessary decisions that allow more millennials find a place to call home," said Hudak. "The problem is the current red tape, and strength of the NIMBY phenomenon has meant all the bold ideas since 2009 have not come into reality. There are some positive signs in the Ryerson report—for example, Hamilton up-zoned areas around their LRT before they were built. Ottawa similarly allowed greater intensification around their LRT line, and that's highly commendable because it means people will find places to live around transit lines. However, if we want to take a significant bite out of the problem, we need the province to mandate as-of-right zoning."