

## **Accelerating climate plan timeline will hamper efforts to build much-needed housing**

by Richard Lyall on 23 Dec 2021



Toronto city council has accelerated the timeline for its TransformTO climate action plan in hopes of reducing community-wide greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions to net-zero by 2040 – 10 years earlier than initially proposed.

It's an ambitious strategy that sounds good on paper, and Toronto is presently one of only three big cities in North America with this 2040 target.

However, the devil is in the details and there will likely be some consequences as a result of the action.

Speeding up the timeline will put undue pressure on the building and development industry at a time when it is dealing with unprecedented challenges such as COVID-19, supply chain unpredictability, material and labour shortages, and productivity challenges caused by the uncertainty.

As an essential industry, Toronto's builders and trades have worked through the pandemic and, by implementing stringent safety protocols, continued to build essential housing and infrastructure. Pushing the timeline ahead by a decade will only exacerbate an already difficult situation for the construction community. Supply chain disruptions, in particular, are causing headaches for builders. Add in COVID-19 and the shortage of labour and it makes for a volatile mix.

The new strategy establishes a trajectory to reach net-zero by 2040. To be on target, the city would have to achieve a 45-per-cent reduction in GHGs from 1990 levels by 2025 and 65 per cent by 2030.

It's great that the city is showing leadership in the fight against climate change through implementation of the Toronto Green Standard (TGS) for new private and city-owned developments but moving up the city's climate strategy implementation ahead of the policies being established by higher-tier governments could result in unintended consequences and confusion.

RESCON sent a letter to council, objecting to speeding up the city's climate strategy. The original plan counts on renewable energy resources being readily available by 2050. The timetable for the renewables does not align with the target of the new plan. While some of the renewables exist today, they are still in their infancy and might not be developed and available for widespread implementation. This causes a whole series of problems that are out of the control of the building industry.

The plan could therefore increase construction costs and complexity for the industry and further affect the affordability of housing. Costs of housing have been rising dramatically. Many people have given up on the thought of ever owning a home. Speeding up this policy will make a bad situation worse.

The 2050 deadline for the original climate action plan already posed significant challenges for developers. Imposing this advanced timeline could propel our industry down a path that is not practical or sensible and force the industry to prematurely adopt practices that are not yet proven feasible.

City council has acted hastily without consulting members of the building community and gathering all the necessary information to make an informed decision about the impact of the change.

Moreover, data has not been provided to evaluate the projected costs associated with accelerating the timelines. In the end, the new policy could end up doing a lot more harm than good.

City council has directed the director, environment and energy to consult with members of the construction and development industry to identify challenges and solutions to ensure the goal is reached. However, the new target means that approximately 100,000 buildings must be retrofitted in the next eight years, or about 12,500 buildings per year, which is just simply not realistic.

The original plan pushed the limits of what is technically feasible for builders. There needs to be a more fulsome understanding of the technical merits and cost implications of the accelerated requirements.

We are fully supportive of measures to fight climate change, but they must be realistic and not be done in haste. Builders and developers must be given time to make adjustments and test new products.

The fight against climate change should not be a competition as to which jurisdiction can set the most rigorous targets first. It is about affecting meaningful and verifiable change to actually reduce greenhouse gas emissions. In my view, council should have stuck to the original 2050 timeline.

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