



The GTA Housing Crisis Shows No Signs of Abating, Now What?



By Richard Lyall - Nov 17, 2021

The Greater Toronto Area (GTA) is in the grip of a very troubling housing crisis that shows no signs of abating. Prices of homes have skyrocketed. Unfortunately, reports indicate that [many people between the ages of 18 and 40 have now given up](#) on the dream of ever owning their own home.

With the province's population expected to grow by over 2.6 million people in the next decade, requiring another 910,000 homes, it is time for governments at all levels to work with industry to address the problem.

The Province of Ontario has taken some positive steps, namely the More Homes, More Choice Act in 2019 which is the most comprehensive set of housing reforms in a generation, the use of MZOs to speed-up approvals, and sweeping new legislation that will make it easier to build housing atop or adjacent to transit stations along the routes of the province's four priority subway projects.

A new federal \$4-billion Housing Accelerator Fund that will support municipalities that innovate to speed-up zoning approvals and increase densification through public transit-oriented and mixed housing developments, and a standalone ministry for housing, are also steps in the right direction.

In Toronto, an initiative known as Concept 2 Keys is radically transforming and modernizing the processes and technology used to review planning and development applications.

Though well-intentioned, these measures will still not be nearly enough to offset the housing crisis. There's a labyrinth of issues and to move the needle, the feds, province, and Ontario municipalities must all be working in synch. Minor tweaking will not get us to where we need to be.

To tackle the problem, we do not need to reinvent the wheel. There are lessons that can be gleaned from other jurisdictions around the world such as New Zealand and California — and

closer to home in Vancouver — that are facing similar problems and have come up with novel solutions.

In Vancouver, for example, city council has voted to embark [on drafting a new city-wide plan](#), which is centred on the need for more housing through more density, especially in the many neighbourhoods zoned for single-family homes. A council vote on the plan will be held in mid-2022.

A lot of land is under-used in Vancouver because it is zoned low-density for single-family houses only. Half of this land is devoted to just 15 % of the city's housing. However, the draft plan proposes to increase development near rapid transit and shopping areas and allow more types of housing in neighbourhoods of detached single-family homes. This will increase housing in the years to come.

Instead of single-family homes, the city wants a variety of housing in all neighbourhoods that would include townhomes, fourplexes and small apartment buildings of up to six storeys in height.

New Zealand, meanwhile, which is plagued by a real estate market that is even more unaffordable than Canada's, is proposing a law to quash restrictive planning rules that hinder development in urban cores.

The federal government wants to end single-family zoning in five of the country's biggest cities. Property owners would be allowed to build as many as three homes on one lot up to a maximum of three storeys without requiring consent from municipal authorities. If such legislation was enacted in Toronto, builders wouldn't have to seek local approval to build a laneway house.

California has gone a step further, passing legislation that limits local zoning control and overrides some local powers that are used to block affordable housing projects. Letters have also been sent to cities, telling them to change or simplify their planning codes to comply with state law.

In the GTA, there is an urgency to the situation. Lack of housing is taking its toll on the local economy. The Toronto Region Board of Trade and WoodGreen Community Services indicated in a report that the shortage is [costing the region up to nearly \\$8 billion annually](#), or almost \$38 billion over a five-year period.

The [Residential Construction Council of Ontario](#) (RESCON) is urging all levels of government to take immediate action to tackle the problem. We are arranging a housing summit that will bring representatives from all levels of government to the table with developers and construction industry leaders.

Our economic recovery will stall if we don't find a way to bring more housing on stream. With the anticipated population growth in the GTA, we can no longer just tinker around the edges of the status quo.