



Is Ontario Finally Ready to Tackle its Housing Affordability Crisis?

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Ontario residents, whether or not they want to be, have been inundated with news of the province's housing affordability crisis. It simply can't be escaped. It's regularly talked about during the evening news and dominates headlines in all major outlets. Heck, we've [written about it dozens](#) of [times](#) in the past month alone.

Well before COVID, Ontario was already battling its housing crisis. The province's population has been multiplying for years, and the critical need for new homes has left many young families and Ontarians struggling to find a place to live.

And, as [single-family home options lag significantly](#) behind sales, home prices continue to rise to unattainable highs, with the average price for a home in the province now sitting at \$912,763 — a 22.9% jump from October 2020. The dream of homeownership has become a nightmare for most.

So it should come as no surprise that young families are calling on all levels of government to work together to bring more housing supply online and keep the hope of homeownership alive. But are our governments ready?

On Thursday, Ontario's Minister of Municipal Affairs and Housing, [Steve Clark](#), announced the province is preparing to hold a provincial-municipal housing summit on December 16 for big-city mayors and regional chairs. Minister Clark is also set to hold a session on housing affordability with rural municipalities in January.

The goal for the summit is to work on solutions to address the "crisis" of housing affordability so more families can become homeowners.

"It's no secret that Ontario has a housing crisis, as demand has drastically outpaced supply over the past decade. While our government's policies are working to address affordability, including the tools we've provided to municipalities, we know that housing prices are still out of reach for so many Ontarians," said Minister Clark.

"As we move toward a period of economic growth, this housing summit gives us a chance to assess how the province and our municipal partners can build on our progress through continued partnership and identify new opportunities to collaborate on making housing more affordable for hardworking Ontarians and their families."

The latest plans from the Progressive Conservative government come after an earlier announcement that they would be starting a [housing affordability task force](#) that is also intended to look into the issue.

Ontario Real Estate Association CEO [Tim Hudak](#) says the summit is a good step toward greater collaboration on the issue and called for zoning bylaws to change to allow for more family-friendly housing.

While the province has given municipalities many of the tools needed to get more homes built, Hudak says there still continues to be resistance from local governments to build more family-friendly homes.

“It’s time for local governments to step up and they should start with rolling back exclusionary zoning. Currently, it is illegal in neighbourhoods in large cities to convert a single-family home into a townhome, duplex, triplex or fourplex without a zoning by-law change, which delays projects, costs additional money, and leaves people stranded without an affordable home. These outdated zoning laws encourage NIMBY forces to drive up costs of homes or drive away affordable homes in a neighbourhood entirely,” said Hudak.

“In too many Ontario cities, it defies common sense that you can take a bungalow and turn it into a monster four-storey home for one wealthy family, but you cannot build affordable townhomes for multiple families without red tape, runaround, and exorbitant costs.”

According to the provincial government, under the [More Homes, More Choice: Ontario’s Housing Supply Action Plan](#), Ontario is working to make housing more affordable by increasing the supply of the full range of housing options, from single-family homes to midrise housing to apartment buildings.

In 2020, the year after More Homes, More Choice was implemented, the provincial government says Ontario had the highest level of housing starts in a decade and the highest level of rental starts since 1992.

While holding a provincial-municipal housing summit and launching a housing affordability task force are steps in the right direction, surely more work needs to be done.

On a municipal level, the City of Toronto announced this week that it’s laying the groundwork for [expanding housing options](#) and facilitating more low-rise housing in residential neighbourhoods. The City says it’s working to expand opportunities for “missing middle” housing forms in Toronto, ranging from duplexes to low-rise walk-up apartments.

While all of these housing types can be found in many parts of Toronto today, they are still limited in where they can be newly built. The City says expanding the housing options is one solution among a range of initiatives to increase housing choice and access.

“I am determined to get more housing built for our growing city. Torontonians need more options to address their housing challenges including low scale or ‘missing middle’ housing,” said Toronto Mayor John Tory.

Tory said the City’s proposed approach would also help cut red tape, align with Toronto’s climate goals, and reduce the cost of housing.

More help is also coming from the federal government. During the Liberal government’s [throne speech](#) this week, Governor-General Mary Simon noted that a \$4-billion Housing Accelerator Fund will help municipalities build more homes while speeding up approval times. Canadian families will also be able to buy their first home sooner with a more flexible First-Time Home Buyer’s Incentive as well as a new Rent-to-Own Program.

The government noted in the speech that it will continue increasing immigration levels and reducing wait times, and also that the country’s prosperity depends on ensuring supply chains are strong and resilient.

“Lack of housing supply, in particular, was identified during the recent federal election as a critical issue that must be addressed because it threatens to derail our economic recovery,” said [Residential Construction Council of Ontario \(RESCON\)](#) president Richard Lyall. **“We are glad to hear that the government is committed to working with its partners to get real results on the issue and the industry is looking forward to helping find solutions to the problem.”**

Given the current state of home prices and the lack of housing options, it’s clear that more needs to be done to accommodate Ontario residents both now and in the future.

As archaic regulations, like exclusionary zoning, continue to slow down new housing developments and worsen the problem, the dream of homeownership remains out of reach for many millennials and young families.

Without a change, it’s not hard to see nearly everyone under forty soon being priced out of the province.