



RESCON: Time to connect the dots

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There is a huge connect between residential and transit planning - there are consequences to leaving transit out of the housing supply equation.

It's time to align housing supply, population growth and transit

Municipalities have a lot of work to do if they are going to tackle Ontario's housing crisis. I'd suggest starting by linking housing supply, population growth and transit.

One of the few people I know who really gets this concept is Minister of Municipal Affairs and Housing Steve Clark.

He has spearheaded some of the province's ongoing shrewd moves to increase supply and cut red tape, which RESCON applauds. Clark is a very forward thinker who extolled the virtues of linking a mix of housing around future transit stations in transit-oriented communities at a recent industry conference.

While individual municipalities control the approvals process, zoning and site planning, the GTA is one big entity and the engine of growth for Ontario.

So here's my big ask of the minister: considering that housing and transit were the hottest issues of the election his government won, why not appoint a housing/transit czar who can link housing supply (including the missing middle), population growth and transit?

For its efforts to boost supply, I commend the City of Toronto. It launched HousingTO 2020-2030, a progressive 10-year plan in December to tackle the city's housing crisis. The plan includes building 40,000 affordable rental homes, helping seniors and the homeless, and recognizing that housing is a right. These are all important.

But let's focus on housing supply for a second – 4,000 rentals per year is just a drop in the bucket compared with how many people scour the city for a rental home, or for those rentals to impact housing prices. Meanwhile, it's going to take 10 years to build each of those 40,000 rentals from permit applications to ribbon cuttings.

Simply put, the City of Toronto and the GTA as a whole are not producing enough housing units to accommodate about 115,000 people that come here every year. We need more supply in rentals and new housing to stabilize the market.

A tip of the hat to respected housing analyst Ben Myers, who recently crunched these numbers from Canada Mortgage Housing Corporation on new housing:

- Housing completions for the Toronto census metropolitan area (CMA) have been above the 20-year average (32,000) at a five-year average of 37,000 units, but square footage has shrunk.
- In the Toronto CMA, the 41 million sq. ft. of housing space built in 2019 was the lowest amount of housing supply delivered since 1996. The 20-year average is 59 million sq. ft.
- Last year, builders/developers built 73,000 bedrooms – that's down from 148,000 in 2002.

We also need to think more about transit. There is a huge disconnect between residential and transit planning – we need to bring both sides to the table at City Hall more often so that we can plan to build more complete communities.

Millennials, seniors and the disabled need to have access to transit so they can live out their everyday lives. There are consequences to leaving transit out of the housing supply equation, as well as not getting enough housing supply to the market.

The missing middle – mid-rise condos, stacked townhomes, row homes – is still missing and must be part of the intensification solution if government and industry work together to ensure these homes are prioritized and built.

They will give more people badly needed, diverse housing options in downtown and urban areas near transit (or future transit) stations, and they can be built with wood to lessen the carbon footprint.

From there, people can commute to their jobs around the GTA.

Let's get someone to connect the dots so that we can build transit-oriented communities more efficiently and effectively.

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