

PCs say growth plan update will create more housing

by Neil Sharma 16 Jan 2019



The Progressive Conservative Party of Ontario has proposed changing the Greater Golden Horseshoe's growth plan in what it says is a bid to create more housing supply.

Premier Doug Ford's government has acted quickly in its six months of power to tackle what it believes is a bloated bureaucracy, which many believe is the reason housing delivery lags well behind demand. The proposed changes would reduce the density targets introduced by the Liberals to combat urban sprawl.

Under the original growth plan, developments would have had to accommodate a minimum of 80 jobs per hectare, a number that would increase in the immediacy of transit. However, in a statement, Municipal Affairs and Housing Minister Steve Clark says the proposed amendments would empower municipalities to govern themselves without outside intrusion.

"We believe there are too many barriers standing in the way of creating housing and attracting investment in the region," he said.

Andy Manahan, executive director of the Residential and Civil Construction Alliance of Ontario, believes technology has rendered the original job density targets unrealistic anyway.

“This really did come from the municipal sector saying that even though the Liberal government wanted them to achieve those numbers, the reality is there’s diversity with employment clusters around the Greater Golden Horseshoe and a lot of industries are automated,” he said. “The number of workers per hectare is less than what they would have been with, say, an automotive plant in the 1990s.”

Another reason Manahan believes new targets are sensible is the process whereby these decisions are made has also changed.

“Nowadays, decisions have to be made with big data,” he continued. “With diversity of employment land uses, it will be more difficult to come up with employment planning policies that will be effective in whatever zoning or planning framework you have. You need to have flexible rules that allow you to change and be competitive.”

The proposed changes to the growth plan have drawn the ire of the Liberals and NDP, who believe changing course is a precursor to eventually opening the protected Greenbelt to development. However, most municipalities have already pledged not to and, moreover, substantive servicing requirements would first need to be met.

The growth plan, introduced in 2005 as the Places to Grow Act, hasn’t been without growing pains, though.

“The province, through transportation investments, was slower in linking those investments to where they wanted growth to occur, and that’s why growth planning got out of whack,” said Manahan. “My recommendation for the current government is to link investments and tell municipalities that they must adhere to its directives.”