

## Action plan sets out measures to reduce barriers to building housing in Ontario

Angela Gismondi May 10, 2019



A new provincial housing supply action plan which aims to remove barriers to building homes and to increase the mix of affordable homes across Ontario is a step in the right direction, say development industry stakeholders.

More Homes, More Choice: Ontario's Housing Supply Action Plan includes legislative changes to 13 government acts.

If passed, it would streamline the development approvals process which slows down the construction of new homes and remove unnecessary duplication and red tape in order to make costs and timelines more predictable. The legislation was introduced by Steve Clark, Minister of Municipal Affairs and Housing, May 2.

“There is no silver bullet but there is a whole package of changes here that are going to help move things along faster and create more certainty,” said Michael Collins-Williams, director of policy, Ontario Home Builders' Association, who is also a professional planner.

“The provincial government took a comprehensive look at the entire housing system with the objective of how to bring on more housing and more choice to increase housing supply. There is certainly more work to be done, more dialogue to be had but the big pieces are moving in the right direction. We think that once these changes are implemented we will be able to get more shovels in the ground to deliver more housing.”

**Richard Lyall, president of the Residential Construction Council of Ontario**, said the elephant in the room is the process.

“The development approvals process and the planning system, that’s where the big problems are,” Lyall stated, adding the consultation process for this action plan was thorough.

“The government has connected the dots here. Now that doesn’t mean to say they’re going to get it right out of the gate and they’re not saying that. They’re saying this is the beginning of a process to correct problems that have been around for years.”

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— **Richard Lyall**

#### **Residential Construction Council of Ontario**

Lyall said one of the issues with an unpredictable system that requires a lot of time to get through is that it kills innovation and the potential introduction of new methods and materials.

“By the time a builder developer gets to the point where they can put shovels in the ground they don’t want to try anything new, they just want to get something built and they want to get it built as quickly as possible,” said Lyall. “The downside of that is innovation is stifled because no one wants to take a risk when you’re at the end of a very long approvals process.”

For the development community, one of the biggest changes in the plan is to the Local Planning Appeal Tribunal Act (LPAT), formerly known as the Ontario Municipal Board (OMB), an adjudicative tribunal that hears cases in relation to a range of municipal planning, financial and land matters.

According to the plan, the proposed changes will allow the LPAT to hear appeals with fresh evidence for major land use planning decisions; increase powers to manage and decide cases to reduce delays; appoint additional adjudicators to address the backlog of cases that has tied up about 100,000 units in Toronto alone and to manage ongoing and future caseloads; and move towards a system that is more self-sustaining, ensuring that access to the LPAT is not so expensive to the point that cost would be an obstacle for those seeking to launch an appeal.

For OHBA, one of the most significant changes is that the LPAT would make decisions based on good planning principles, as opposed to a conformity test.

“The previous system brought in a few years ago was merely a conformity test which actually reduces the number of housing units that would be able to be brought on,” explained Collins-Williams. “We think in the long run that will not only bring about more housing supply but it will ensure that good planning principles are adhered to, that we are protecting the environment and that we are focused on infrastructure capacity and complete communities.”

Proposed changes to the Planning Act would also help municipalities address local housing needs by allowing the use of inclusionary zoning around major transit areas.

For major transit station areas, the province will ensure that its investments are maximized by requiring sufficient density through zoning, explained **Andy Manahan, executive director of the Residential and Civil Construction Alliance of Ontario.**

“There is a recognition that if the province is going to make major transit investments around the region then we really do need density around stations and around where the transit routes are,” Manahan noted.

“This is at the bill stage so there can be some changes after committee process but the direction they are going in right now is that the province is jumping in and saying to local governments this is how we want things done and we’re going to make sure that they are done. That’s a massive change because, before, provincial governments were reluctant to weigh in.”