

# Critics back proposal to end ‘single-family zoning’ but see red flags in province’s housing task force report

Affordability and cutting speculation that makes homes more expensive are missing from sweeping proposals to remake the housing system.

By [Tess Kalinowski](#) - Real Estate Reporter  
Tue., Feb. 8, 2022

Ontario’s Housing Affordability Task Force makes scant mention of affordable housing construction or the speculation and investment buying many believe are driving up home prices.

But among its 55 recommendations released Tuesday, critics and politicians agreed the proposal to end exclusionary zoning — the restriction that shuts off 70 per cent of Toronto’s residential land to anything but single-family homes — will be key to solving the housing crisis.

The proposal will almost certainly be controversial with homeowners. But the transition has already begun, with the introduction of policies permitting laneway, garden-suite and multiplex housing in those neighbourhoods, said Mayor John Tory.

Without introducing that gentle densification, he said, “We simply will not be able to sustain the growth in an equitable and fair manner and make sure everybody can find the city to be a home for them.”

Tory said the city will be able to persuade residents the proposal is in the best interest of maintaining stable neighbourhoods and their children’s housing futures.

“Stable neighbourhoods don’t necessarily have to mean static neighbourhoods,” he said. It is ironic, added the mayor, that large houses now owned by one family used to be houses in which there were two or three flats.

Removing single-family zoning is just part of a vast public planning makeover proposed in the report of the Ontario Housing Affordability Task Force released Tuesday. It says Ontario needs to build 1.5 million houses in 10 years. That's almost twice as many as it built in the last decade, although last year, there were 100,000 housing starts, according to the province.

The task force says municipalities will have to open established neighbourhoods to more affordable units, take the politics out of development approvals and encourage more rentals and modern construction techniques and materials.

It's not clear whether the province will adopt any or all of the recommendations. Municipal Affairs and Housing Minister Steve Clark said on Monday that he has time to act on the findings before the June 2nd election.

Toronto City Councillor Mike Colle, who was behind a motion at city council last month to ask the province to implement anti-flipping and speculation measures, said his reading of the report was "a humungous buffet for developers," with "no requirements for affordability whatsoever."

"Unless you put in some kind of restrictions, (speculators) will just see another opportunity to make windfall profits for years to come," said the former Liberal MPP. Meantime, he said, residents will be taking out huge mortgages they can ill afford.

NDP housing critic Jessica Bell said zoning reform is "a smart and sustainable approach that will allow for the construction of more affordable townhomes, duplexes and triplexes." Those are typically \$500,000 cheaper than a semi-detached house and more in line with what a family can afford, she said.

But, she said, there are red flags among the recommendations, notably the proposal to expand municipal boundaries into nonenvironmentally protected areas, putting urban sprawl on farmland.

"It is not sustainable," she said. "It locks people into epic, soul-destroying two-hour commutes. And it is expensive for municipalities to provide the infrastructure and the services to new subdivisions."

Green Party Leader Mike Schreiner called it a “significant contradiction” that the report talks about protecting farmland and the environmentally sensitive Greenbelt, while also suggesting housing be aligned with Highway 413, which, “is going to supercharge sprawl and supercharge climate pollution.”

Schreiner said the task force was focused entirely on the private sector’s role in bolstering housing supply rather than assigning a role to the provincial and federal governments.

“Part of why you’re seeing a housing affordability crisis is that both the provincial and federal levels of government got out of housing in the mid-1990s. The housing affordability crisis has been getting worse every year since then, and it’s reached a breaking point,” he said.

Real estate expert John Pasalis says there are some good things in the report, including a limit on public consultations that are used to stonewall housing development. But he’s not convinced the task force’s proposals will lead to increased affordability. Nor is it entirely realistic.

“We’re building 65,000 homes (a year) on average in Ontario. How do you get to 150,000,” he said. “We’re not going to more than double our housing completions in 10 years. You can’t solve that problem with a two-month task force.”

He also doesn’t believe the private sector will provide more affordable rental housing. “Builders are building what’s most lucrative and it’s higher-end rentals and not because they’re evil people but because they’re businesses and they want to make a profit,” he said.

The composition of the task force and its homebuilding agenda completely missed any discussion of the other ingredients it takes to build a community, said Cathie Macdonald, co-chair of the Federation of North Toronto Residents’ Associations (FONTRA).

“It’s complicated. It’s not just churning out development applications,” she said.

Macdonald said FONTRA also takes exception to the report’s proposal to limit public and stakeholder consultations, saying they build better developments and communities.

“Consultation is important in bringing perspective and knowledge about the neighbourhood — what works and what doesn’t work,” she said. “The province has certainly been cutting as many opportunities as possible to do this.”

**[Tess Kalinowski](#)** is a Toronto-based reporter covering real estate for the Star. Follow her on Twitter: [@tesskalinowski](#)