

# Ontario affordability task force recommendations can be harmful

Expected recommendations from a panel mostly representing real estate interests will push back against NIMBYism but also empower developers

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A Housing Affordability Task Force commissioned by the Ontario government will deliver its recommendations on Monday (January 31) on how to cool real estate prices, which are especially heated in the Greater Toronto Area. However, their path to more affordable housing could empower developers to steamroll over environmental and social concerns.

**CBC reported** details from a leaked draft of the report. Many of the recommendations are being celebrated for pushing back against NIMBYism, but

there are some that should raise concerns, especially as they suit the bottom line for the real estate developers that Doug Ford's government regularly bends a knee to. This should surprise no one since according to the Toronto Star the **task force is made up mostly of people representing the interests of the real estate industry**, like Ontario Real Estate Association headed by former PC party leader Tim Hudak. He regularly advocates for building more everywhere while dismissing any other potential solutions to cool the market, whether its taxes or an **end to blind bidding**.

According to the CBC report, an early draft of the 31-page report makes multiple recommendations that would build more intensification into urban areas. Real estate experts have spoken to NOW on multiple occasions about the **lack of density in Toronto**, pointing out that most Bloor-Danforth subway stops are surrounded by single family homes rather than condos and multi-unit residences. Slow and expensive municipal approval processes along with neighbourhood demographics resistant to the changing face of their "quiet" (read: privileged) urban streets are barriers to introducing "missing middle" homes to areas that can sustain them.

CBC reports that many recommendations are designed to help make intensification easier by allowing homeowners to cut through the red tape when adding laneway suites and secondary units. That alone would add more units to what the Toronto Regional Real Estate Board (TRREB) is calling **a tight rental market**. Available condo rental listings were down almost 50 per cent year-over-year in Q4 2021, according to TRREB, signalling the Toronto market's rebound from the time when pandemic lockdowns and remote work setups pushed people to search for more affordable real estate away from the city. The average one-bedroom condo rental in Toronto in Q4 was \$2,099.

According to the CBC, the task force will also push back against "exclusionary zoning" in neighbourhoods with a recommendation that municipalities with more than 100,000 residents allow housing with up to four storey and four units on any single residential lot, which is a welcome pushback against NIMBYism that can also ease the rental market.

But the recommendation that raises concern calls for allowing urban boundaries to expand. The Ford government would love this because it essentially means urban boundaries can eat into the Greenbelt, allowing real estate developers to plow through nature protected for the sake of the environment to build more housing or projects like Highway 413 that encourage even more development. They've been **angling for this forever**.

Several recommendations, according to the CBC, empower real estate developers. They are given new rights to appeal and their costs are being reduced at every turn. Meanwhile, the task force recommends that if any third party, like a local community group, wants to appeal a development (what they call “nuisance” appeals), they pay a \$10,000 fee (the current fee is \$400).

Empowering real estate developers is totally on brand for Ford, who recently put together a **\$45 million fund** that would streamline approvals for developers under the guise of tackling the housing crisis. His way of investing in affordable housing is putting more money in the pockets of developers – while they claim to let the savings trickle down – instead of actually investing in affordable housing units.

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Radheyen's first assignment for NOW was reviewing the Ice Cube heist comedy First Sunday. That was back in January 2008. He's been covering Cube and much more ever since. Rad is also the film critic for CTV's national breakfast show Your Morning and the pop culture columnist for CBC Syndicated Radio.