

Ontario housing task force recommends ways to boost home supply

By Allison Jones



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TORONTO — Ontario needs to quickly and aggressively build more homes to address the provinces housing crisis, by increasing density, and limiting consultations and appeals, expert advisers said Tuesday.

A housing affordability task force convened last year by the provincial government released a report with 55 recommendations aimed at allowing more people in Ontario to find and afford a home — including a goal of building 1.5 million homes in 10 years.

House prices in Ontario have nearly tripled in the last 10 years, far outpacing income growth, the report said, but the province is 1.2 million homes — both rental and owned — short of the G7 average. Businesses and public services are having trouble recruiting and retaining workers because of a scarcity of nearby housing, which is harming the economy, while long commutes are contributing to air pollution, the report said.

For too long the province has focused on ways to cool the market, but that will not fill the housing need, the report said.

Building more homes will reduce the competition for our scarce supply of homes and will give Ontarians more housing choices. It will improve housing affordability across the board.

Municipal Affairs and Housing Minister Steve Clark said he's confident he can enact some of the solutions through legislation or regulation or both before the spring election.

We're going to have to do a variety of measures, small and then some bold as well, to get us closer to that number (of 1.5 million). So I'm quite pleased with the feedback we've received. And now I'm focused: How are we going to get this implemented? How are we going to build these homes faster?

When the task force was proposed in November, critics dismissed the move as meaningless, saying advocates and experts have long proposed solutions to the housing crisis. The task force's report Tuesday said it was able to work under such a tight timeline because, in almost all cases, viewpoints and feasible solutions are well known.

Pressure to designate buildings as heritage also stands in the way of development, the report said. Some municipalities list thousands of properties at a time as having potential heritage value, and neighbours often demand a building get a heritage designation as soon as a development is proposed, the task force said.

Reactive heritage designations — made after a development application has been filed — should be banned, as should bulk heritage listings, the report recommended.

The task force also recommends changes to the Ontario Land Tribunal, where it said a single person appealing a development can tie up new housing for years by paying a \$400 fee.

Potential appellants should have to ask permission — or seek leave — to appeal, the report recommends, and the right of appeal should be

removed for projects with at least 30 per cent affordable housing. As well, third-party appeals should require a \$10,000 fee, it said.

As one person said, My neighbour can tear down what was there to build a monster home, but Im not allowed to add a basement suite to my home, the task force said.

The province allowed secondary suites starting in 2019, but municipalities are still restricting their use — the total number of secondary suites has actually declined for the past three years, the report said.

Municipal approval steps should be removed for residential housing of up to four units on a single lot, secondary suites, garden suites and laneway suites, multi-tenant housing, and converting underutilized commercial properties to residential, it recommended.

As well, if in two years provincial density targets arent being met, zoning for unlimited height and density immediately around transit stations should be allowed, the task force said.

The task force was chaired by Jake Lawrence, CEO and group head of global banking and markets at Scotiabank. Members also included developers, real estate executives and the CEO of Ontario Aboriginal Housing Services.