

Building complete communities



There is an opportunity to educate all participants in the public planning process during the upcoming provincial consultations, according to the GTA building industry.

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Updated bylaws can connect vision and city building

The Province of Ontario launches consultation aimed at improving municipal land-use planning

When the provincial government introduced the Places to Grow Act in 2006, it spurred a significant shift in Ontario's regional development. With a goal of guiding growth, the policy promoted intensification — urban development that went up, not out. The GTA is now seeing the execution of that vision and a significant shift to high-density development in the City of Toronto. At the same time, the plan has constrained the supply of developable land in the outlying regions and the unintended consequence of increasing new home prices.

"Places to Grow was a game changer," says Neil Rodgers, vice-president of land development at Tribute Communities. "It's changed how people in Ontario will live, how municipalities plan their communities and how our industry operates." The building industry recalibrated its approach accordingly, shifting from ground-related homes to high-density development.

Yet, many municipalities — despite being mandated by the province to update their official plans to reflect the new land-use directives — continue to operate with outdated zoning bylaws, he says.

"There is a significant disconnect there and it is creating conflict instead of having everyone work together to revitalize existing communities while building new ones for new residents to enjoy."

It's a disconnect that has prompted Linda Jeffrey, Ontario's minister of municipal affairs and housing, to launch a series of consultations this fall aimed at improving the land-use planning and municipal development approval process.

Room for improvement

"Ontario's planning system has served us well, but there have been a lot of changes over the past decade," Jeffrey notes. "We think it's time for a refresh. So, we're going to talk to municipalities, industry stakeholders and community groups about what's working well and what we can do to improve."

Rodgers, who is also chair of the land council of the Building Industry and Land Development Association (BILD), heads a group that will be providing industry feedback during the consultations. He says the province must do more to encourage municipalities to update zoning bylaws to reflect the intent of Places to Grow by pre-zoning and

pre-designating lands where intensification meets the vision of the provincial plan.

Most municipal zoning bylaws are outdated and don't reflect the future needs of communities within a region that will grow by up to 100,000 people and 50,000 jobs every year for the next two decades. This means landowners must apply to rezone land that is already earmarked in their municipal Official Plans to meet housing and employment requirements of those communities.

The experience is typically adversarial, pitting developers against communities and councillors who might reject otherwise sound development plans for political reasons. Oftentimes the matter ends up before the Ontario Municipal Board for adjudication. This is one of the reasons why the building industry association has stated that "the OMB plays an essential role in our current development approval process."

Jeffrey acknowledges the issues here. "There are communities in various states of readiness — some are up to date; some are very far behind. But it's in their best interest to get their official plans up to date. It provides predictability to the devel-



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opment community, which wants to work where they know there aren't going to be any surprises."

The province has undertaken reviews of the land-use planning system before.

Since 2003, a variety of legislation, policies and plans have been introduced and changed. Some examples are the Greenbelt Plan, Places to Grow and the Provincial Policy

Statement.

Just a few weeks ago, Jeffrey released two documents that specify what the consultations will cover, some of the questions she is seeking answers for and how people can get involved.

"People tell us there are gaps in the system and they're unhappy so we want to ask people what they think — and before we make any changes we want to make sure we don't create any new problems," she says.

According to the consultation documents, predictability, transparency, cost-effectiveness and responsiveness to the changing needs of communities are the desired outcomes of the review.

From the development industry's perspective, those outcomes are important steps in the building of homes and businesses that people can afford. The consultation is also an opportunity to educate all participants in the public planning process — existing residents, future residents, municipalities, the building and development sector and the provincial government — and make it make sense to all involved, said Rodgers.

Outdated zoning bylaws cause headaches for renovators

New-home builders aren't the only ones struggling to deal with outdated municipal zoning bylaws. The problem is also causing headaches for the renovation industry.

If a renovator's work seeks to go beyond the existing land-use parameters for a particular property — say, the renovation will substantially increase the home's square footage or its height — the permit approval process could be brought to a grinding halt. The permit application must go to a committee of adjustment for review, which can add 10 to 16 weeks to the timeline, and that's before the builder applies for and receives a building permit,

which can take several more weeks.

"This causes delays for a number of stakeholders, whether it's renovators, builders or the end users, who are the ones burdened with the cost," says Lefteris Karagiannis, chair of the Renovators Council of the Building Industry and Land Development Association (BILD). "Delays cost and inconvenience everyone, but especially the homeowner. It's a domino effect."

And it's another example of how outdated zoning bylaws are working against the provincial goals for intensification, an issue BILD plans to raise



during the provincial consultations.

"The province mandates [intensification], but the municipality implements it, and there may be a disconnect in that regard," says Karagiannis. "It's definitely one of the challenges we face."

This is the third in a 4-part series sponsored by BILD. Look for the next one on Sat., November 9.



WORKING TOGETHER TOWARD A GREATER GTA

Building healthy, complete communities is a team effort. That's why BILD works closely with our partners in government to establish fair and effective policies that affect the land development, home building and professional renovation industry in the GTA. We are always at the table on behalf of the industry and new home buyers.

So why is advocating on your behalf so vital to us?



BECAUSE THE GTA IS OUR HOME TOO

