

Province's housing plan draws concern from municipal leaders

By Brock Weir

Just one day after the 2022 Municipal Election, the Ontario Government's plan to increase housing supply came under scrutiny from municipal leaders.

The Ministry of Municipal Affairs and Housing announced details of their More Homes Built Faster Act, which will see sweeping changes to planning processes.

While the Province claims it will speed up the process of making more housing units a reality with measures allowing up to three additional dwelling units to be created on a single lot, municipal leaders say it takes planning powers away from communities

If passed, up to three additional residential units would be permitted 'as of right' on most land zoned for one home in residential areas without needing a municipal bylaw amendment, said the Ministry. Depending on the property in question, these three units could all be within the existing residential structure or could take the form of a residence with an in-law or basement suite and a laneway or garden home. These new units must be compliant with the building code and municipal bylaws. These units would also be exempt from development charges and parkland dedication fees.

Proposed changes to the Planning Act would remove site plan control requirements for most projects with fewer than 10 residential units (with limited exceptions). This would reduce the number of required approvals for small housing projects, speeding things up for all housing proposals, while building permits and robust building and fire code requirements would continue to protect public safety. Proposed streamlining changes also include focusing responsibility for land use policies and approvals in certain lower-tier municipalities to eliminate the time and costs associated with planning processes by upper-tier municipalities. This would give the local community more influence over decisions that impact them directly, clarifying responsibilities and improving the efficiency of government services for citizens.

The plan will emphasize the building of complete, sustainable communities centred around transit by reducing approval timelines and focus, in part, on building more affordable and purpose-built rental housing across the Province.

Ontario is proposing regulatory changes to provide certainty regarding inclusionary zoning rules, with a maximum 25-year affordability period, a five per cent cap on the number of inclusionary zoning units, and a standardized approach to determining the price or rent of an affordable unit under an inclusionary zoning program. Ontario is also taking action to help streamline the construction and revitalization of our aging rental housing stock that in some cases is many decades old, grossly energy inefficient, and is starting to fail.

Ontario is calling on the federal government to come to the table and work with us on potential GST/HST incentives, including rebates, exemptions and deferrals, to support new ownership and rental housing development. All levels of government need to work together to get more homes built and address the housing crisis.

Affordable and attainable housing was a hot button issue in municipal elections Ontario-wide this fall, and Caledon is no exception. Mayor-elect Annette Groves says she's 'deeply concerned' about the Bill's impact and the impact it will have on this community financially as well as the fact that we would not have much say in zoning.

This is not the right way to get more housing and Bill 23 has no regard for the Planning Act or the Conservation Act, says Groves. I am also concerned about how we will pay for the infrastructure to support these new housing development as well as the fact that citizens will not be able to appeal these decisions. This is not a good thing for our municipality and myself and Council will be having discussions with staff to understand what other impacts this Bill will have on us.