

Toronto Star - Ontario needs to aim for 1.5 million new homes in 10 years

A provincial housing task force has set out a slate of 55 recommendations to end the housing crisis.

By [Tess Kalinowski](#) Real Estate Reporter

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The province's housing task force has released a set of 55 sweeping recommendations that, if implemented, would overhaul virtually every aspect of Ontario's housing system, from zoning and development charges to heritage designations and planning appeal rules.

The proposals are aimed at ending the province's housing crisis by enabling the construction of 1.5 million homes in the next decade, says the task force report released Tuesday.

Municipal Affairs and Housing Minister Steve Clark said bold action is needed if Ontario is going to reach that target. Even though there were 81,000 homes built last year, "we're going to have to build a lot more housing units a lot faster," he said.

The recommendations include putting an end to exclusionary zoning that shuts multi-family housing out of single-family residential neighbourhoods in about 70 per cent of Toronto. The task force also proposes ending the height restrictions on skyscrapers immediately near transit stations if city zoning doesn't accommodate the province's density targets within two years.

Municipal heritage designations would be prohibited once a development application has been filed for property and municipalities would have to pay property owners for the loss of value if their property is designated.

Property taxes on purpose-built rental buildings, which can be up to 2.5 times higher, would be aligned with houses and condos to encourage investors to build more rental apartments.

Clark says he has time to act on the recommendations before the June election and that he hasn't ruled out any of the task force proposals. But he plans to solicit feedback from municipalities.

He said he is aware some of the recommendations, including those that would allow more units on existing single-family lots, will be challenging.

"Municipalities are certainly aware that this is one option that we have on the table and we've had a very positive and constructive response," he said.

Among the other proposals is modernizing the Ontario Building Code and allowing for timber construction of buildings up to 12 storeys instead of the current limit of six. The task force recommended that development consultations should be limited to a maximum set out in the Planning Act and that a backlog of 1,000 cases needed clearing from the Ontario Land Tribunal.

Development charges and cash-in-lieu for parks would be waived for all residential infill homes up to 10 units or for any housing that doesn't require new infrastructure. Projects with a guarantee of affordability for 40 years would also be exempt from those charges.

The recommendations on Tuesday come as Ontario home prices soared to an average of \$923,000 last year from \$329,000 in 2011. In the same decade, incomes rose only 38 per cent.

The report notes that Toronto's population density falls well below those of other global cities with 450 people per square kilometre on average compared to 1,800 in London and 1,700 in New York.

The nine-member task force, chaired by Jake Lawrence, CEO of Scotiabank Global Banking and Markets, included real estate industry experts, developers, an academic, an Aboriginal housing expert and a representative of Habitat for Humanity.

When the committee was announced it drew criticism from at least one academic, the Ontario NDP and Green Party for being weighted toward the real estate and development industries.