

# HOUSING SUPPLY SUMMIT



## LEADERS ALIGNED ON NEED TO BOOST SUPPLY

By Grant Cameron  
RESCON Blog

An online housing supply summit presented recently by RESCON provided plenty of fodder for discussion and, importantly, highlighted that the federal and Ontario governments, along with provincial party leaders and big city mayors are all aligned on the seriousness of the housing crisis.

There were some other key takeaways, notably that the time for talk is over and urgent action is needed, it is critical that all three levels of government work together on the problem, and that both the public and private sector must be engaged in the process to boost the supply of housing stock.

Speakers and panelists at the event also addressed the need for gentle density, building the missing middle, and putting more housing along transit corridors, along with the importance of embracing innovation. On labour, they indicated there must be more education and training to get youth into the trades.

"Today, our thoughtful speakers and panelists helped us better understand what caused the current crisis," RESCON president Richard Lyall said in closing remarks at the event. "They provided insights into what's being done about the problem, what's been done in other jurisdictions, how we can increase supply and how we can overcome things like the labour supply challenges we face."

"There's no doubt that a collaborative and co-ordinated approach by government, industry and other stakeholders is necessary and this day shows that is entirely within reach. Today was a critical moment to build momentum for change. It is my hope that this summit will spur even more discussion and solutions."

While there are no quick fixes, Lyall said it's important for action to be taken now.

"We know what the problems are in delivering new supply. It's going to take time, but we can do it. We have got to start

now, not six months from now, not a year from now, because the clock is ticking."

The four-hour event, called *Housing Supply Summit 2022: Solutions to Build More Homes*, was sponsored by the [Toronto Regional Real Estate Board](#), [Canadian Centre for Economic Analysis](#) and the [Federation of Rental-Housing Providers of Ontario](#). [Actual Media](#) hosted the event. More than 700 individuals who registered for the event heard from 27 speakers, politicians and panelists.

Influencers and innovators explained how we got to this point, what we can learn from other jurisdictions that have faced similar problems, and what thoughts and ideas should be considered going forward.



Jason Mercer

**Jason Mercer**, chief market analyst at the Toronto Regional Real Estate Board, set the table for the event and indicated in his presentation that a resurgence of growth through immigration will continue this year and next, leading to double-digit price hikes beyond 2022 mainly due to lack of listings.

2021 saw a record level of sales activity, he said, with the average sale price of a home in the Greater Toronto Area moving above the \$1-million mark.

There was a resurgence of growth driven by immigration last year, and that will continue in 2022 and 2023, he said, noting the flip side is that the newcomers will need a place to live.

The main issue, according to Mercer, is supply.

"The real problem is a lack of inventory. We've been a laggard in terms of home production in Canada compared to our G7 counterparts.

"The issue is that we're still not seeing a lot more supply on the ground."

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**Steve Clark**

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Federal Minister of Housing and Diversity and Inclusion **Ahmed Hussen**, provincial Minister of Municipal Affairs and Housing **Steve Clark**, and Barrie Mayor **Jeff Lehman**, who is chair of Ontario's Big City Mayors' Caucus, spoke about the respective roles of government in addressing housing.

Clark indicated that Ontario needs to build on the More Homes, More Choice Act, as housing development is being choked by red tape.

He noted the government wants to develop a digital data standard to help speed-up and improve decision-making so shovels can go in the ground faster.

During consultations for a recent Housing Affordability Task Force report, there were a lot of bold ideas put forward, he said.

Minister Hussen said the federal government is doing everything it can to remove barriers and bring more housing supply to market.

He stressed the importance of the government partnering with private-sector developers and municipalities to eliminate hurdles for middle-class Canadians to become homeowners.

Mayor Lehman emphasized that governments must respect each other's roles and the feds and province must resist the temptation to embrace short-term solutions.



**Jeff Lehman**

A much broader conversation is also needed about the labour supply and ways to bring more youth into the industry in greater numbers as they will be needed to build homes, he pointed out.

"If we're going to double the supply of housing, we're going to have to double the supply of construction

labour."

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At a Pecha Kucha session, panelists provided viewers with some terrific insights and thoughts on trends and specific actions.

**Mary Ellen Bench**, counsel and senior advisor at Dentons, spoke about the need for affordable housing and government funding.

"Affordability is not new," she said.



**Mary Ellen Bench**



**Ahmed Hussen**

"It is a worldwide problem and it's a critical concern in today's world."

**Kris Hornburg**, director, development process and performance at the Concept 2 Keys office in Toronto, explained that the city is developing a user-friendly digital process to serve customers and collaborating with the industry to test new online tools.



**Kris Hornburg**

He also shared what's ahead for the C2K office.

**Paul Smetanin**, president at CANCEA, provided an overview of key systemic issues

facing the residential housing market, specifically the number of bedrooms and size of homes being constructed.

In his presentation, he noted that the average number of bedrooms per dwelling in the province has generally fallen since the early 2000s and 18 per cent of the GTHA, and 13 per cent of Ontario, are considered to be underhoused.



**Paul Smetanin**

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**Andrea Horwath**

Ontario Opposition party leaders **Andrea Horwath** (NDP), **Steven Del Duca** (Liberal) and **Mike Schreiner** (Greens) all agreed that housing supply has become worse – and that immediate action is needed.

Horwath said more homes must be built but the province must do it in a thoughtful way, for example, by encouraging missing-middle housing instead of paving over farmland.

The idea of people being able to buy a home is getting further away for many and, as a result, young people are not able to leave the family home and strike out on their own or have children, she said.

"These are decisions nobody should have to make in Ontario."

Del Duca said Ontario has a "significant affordability crisis" which needs to be addressed, and governments at all levels must break down impediments to get all forms of housing to market.

"It's something that needs to be moved on right away. It's a top priority. Many forms of shelter are out of reach."



**Steven Del Duca**

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**Mike Schreiner**

Schreiner said, "There's no beating around the bush. We need to create and build more homes."

The province needs to engage both the private and public sectors and increase housing through gentle density, building the missing middle and along transit corridors, he stated in his presentation.

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Four panelists weighed in during a session called Learning from Other Jurisdictions: An International Perspective.

Panelists were **David Amborski**, professor at Ryerson University's School of Urban and Regional Planning and founding director of the Centre for Urban Research and Land Development; Toronto Deputy Mayor



**David Amborski**

**Ana Bailao**; **Catherine Stone**, director of spatial planning at the Western Cape Government in South Africa; and **Anette Scheibe Lorentzi**, head of city planning in Stockholm, Sweden.

A lot of people who work in the skilled trades are getting close to retirement and there needs to be more outreach and education to let youth know construction is a good career,

Amborski said.

He noted that one of the problems is that when policies are put into effect it can take years to get results.

Bailao called for more collaboration between the construction industry and municipalities and indicated there is an opportunity to do better on the approvals process by bringing in more innovation.

She also told the session that tools need to be aligned and various approval partners can't work in their own individual silos.

Stone explained how the Western Cape Government's inclusionary housing policy works and explained the difficulties around getting municipalities to release land so private developers can build.

"We in South African cities have land parcels owned by different spheres of government and real challenges around trying to unlock that land."



**Catherine Stone**

She said the Western Cape has an inclusionary housing policy which is incentive-driven – one of the incentives being a much quicker approvals process.



**Anette Scheibe**

However, there's a lot of cynicism around that because currently it is difficult to get quick planning approval and it adds significantly to costs.

Scheibe Lorentzi spoke about how to make housing supply accessible and said Stockholm's strongest tools are its land-use policy and guidelines for providing housing.

The City of Stockholm owns 70 per cent of the land within its boundaries "so we can use the land-use policy to reach the city's goal to enable the construction of 140,000 new homes between 2010 and 2030."

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A session called Innovative Approaches to Deliver More Housing featured four panelists that addressed ways to boost housing stock in Ontario.

**Paige Agnew**, commissioner of community services at the City of Kingston, highlighted the city's forward-looking plan and readiness to embrace innovation and lead change.



**Paige Agnew**

She also stressed Kingston's commitment to partnering with the residential construction industry to make building easier.

**Craig Ruttan**, policy director, energy, housing and economic enablers at the Toronto Region Board of Trade, spoke about efforts made by the City of Toronto to develop plans and types of housing to create affordable ownership opportunities, including allowing people to buy one floor of a triplex rather than the whole house.

**Leith Moore**, co-founder and principal at R-Hauz who has embarked on an exciting venture regarding mass timber, carbon capture and addressing climate change, addressed how he tried to build in the missing middle but "discovered that it was economically more than challenged."

He explained how R-Hauz now works with municipalities and uses all-wood to build faster and be in and out of a site quickly using panelized construction.

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**Leith Moore**



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**Arash Shahi**

AECO Innovation Lab CEO **Arash Shahi** explained the One Ontario initiative which has brought more than 50 academics and government and industry representatives together to provide a collaborative platform for industry to work together and break down digital silos.

"Unfortunately, our industry has been siloed for some time," he said. "One Ontario, our flagship research project, is basically looking at breaking down those silos."

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At a panel discussion called Overcoming Restrictive Zoning: Solutions for Ownership and Rental Housing, **Tony Irwin**, president of the Federation of Rental-Housing Providers of Ontario, stressed that Ontario needs rental housing and it needs it now.

He also highlighted the importance of cutting red tape from the system to allow projects to be completed quicker.



**Tony Irwin**

**Naama Blonder**, an architect and urban designer with Smart Density, said the recent Housing Affordability Task force report was a step in the right direction and covers problems affecting the industry.



**Naama Blonder**

**Eric Lombardi**, founder of More Neighbours Toronto, said "we absolutely need to end the housing crisis here in Ontario," and

noted the organization is advocating for policies and solutions at the provincial level and also specifically in Toronto.

**Louis Mirante**, legislative director of California YIMBY, explained that the organization shifted its focus from the local government level to state-wide advocacy because the U.S. has



**Louis Mirante**

a "very robust" federalism structure whereby state governments can pre-empt local governments on almost every issue.

He said the YIMBY quickly realized that most of the problems in California were caused by the suburbs where the big problem was low-density zoning laws and processes that restricted housing.



**Eric Lombardi**

"We really had to focus on the state legislature and get them to realize the collective benefit to getting California in arresting some of the things that local governments were doing here and that's been a very successful model."

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**Bill Ferreira**

Four panelists presented at a session called The Elephant not in the Room: Labour Supply Shortages.

BuildForce executive director **Bill Ferreira** said there was a significant dip in employment in construction during the pandemic, but there's been a rebound and employment is now up nine per cent from 2020 levels.

**Andrew Brethour**, executive chairman of PMA Brethour Realty Group, said population growth in the GTA has been remarkable and the price of housing has risen because housing supply has lagged.

Toronto is now the most expensive city in Canada, with an average house price of \$1.2 million, he said, noting it is now ranked as the second most unaffordable city in the world. The reason for that is the slow approvals process, he said. In Toronto, it takes on average 10 years from purchasing the land to building.



**Andrew Brethour**



**Andrew Pariser**

RESCON VP **Andrew Pariser** pointed out that construction is an excellent industry to work in, and a study by RESCON showed that construction workers, on average, are happier than the average Canadian worker. However, he noted the industry is also owning up to where there are shortfalls.

"We are trying to invest more in DEI, onboarding, orientation, mentorship, but this is probably something that we should have started investing in 25-30 years ago. So, we have a bit of catch-up to do."

**Raly Chakarova**, executive director of BOLT, explained that the industry needs more workers so it can honour pledges made by the province to boost the housing stock.

Immigration is one way to build up the stock of workers, and the other is to build up the local supply, she said.

"We need people to actually build those houses."



**Raly Chakarova**