

EDITORIAL

Housing needs a range of solutions. Ontario's Greens propose a way forward



By **Star Editorial Board**

Mon., June 28, 2021 | ⌚ 3 min. read



Ontario has a housing and housing affordability crisis. It's decades in the making and, for all the talk about it, it's only getting worse.

It's visible in the overflowing homeless shelters and encampments that pop up in city parks. It's evident in the desperate searches for decent and affordable rental apartments. And also in the fear-of-missing-out mentality that drives up purchase prices, well beyond incomes, and absurd bidding wars.

It's all connected and it should be tackled that way.

The solutions — yes, they do exist — take political guts and a willingness to tell people things they don't want to hear.

What politicians normally do is pick the lane that annoys their voters the least. The left focuses on rent controls and higher taxes to provide more subsidized housing for those who need it, while the right focuses on letting the market take care of things by building more houses.

Practically no one, of any political persuasion at any level of government, does more than dip a toe into changing the regulatory measures that prevent much-needed higher density housing from being build in the vast swaths of predominately single-family neighbourhoods.

So how refreshing it is to have a party leader step up and propose to connect all the dots.

Ontario Green Party Leader Mike Schreiner released his party's housing strategy last week, and it's an ambitious document that proposes tackling the housing crisis from all vantage points.

Schreiner is currently his party's only elected MPP so he's a fair ways from being able to put this plan into action. But it's a strong policy document and a great starting point for the debate we should all be having on how to build livable and affordable communities.

It proposes stronger rent-control rules and much greater provincial investment in affordable and supportive housing. It includes measures to help more people move into home ownership and also to make better use of homes by simplifying co-housing rules. It would increase housing supply, while at the same time protecting farmland and green space, by making it easier to build housing within existing boundaries.

It's a master class in housing policy when compared to Premier Doug Ford's simplistic view that handing developers land through ministerial zoning orders (MZOs) creates affordable housing.

And it also challenges the Liberals and NDP to do better on housing issues and municipal politicians.

That's especially true when it comes to addressing the "missing middle" challenge that cities face. Schreiner proposes to make duplexes and triplexes legal "as of right" everywhere in the province.

And to "work collaboratively with municipalities on a province-wide 'Yes in My Backyard' initiative to address NIMBYism and change public attitudes against infill missing middle, midrise and community housing developments in neighbourhoods."

That's certainly needed. The Star has argued before that multi-unit homes and small walk-up apartments should be welcomed in residential neighbourhoods. They should not be the automatic trigger for unfounded fears over people, parking and property values.

We said: "Toronto's politicians and its residents need to look to the outcomes we want — more rental apartments, more affordable homes and a greater range of housing options — and start tossing out the rules that prevent that from happening."

The housing and housing affordability crisis is so bad in Toronto that it risks impeding the city's economic growth. With stakes as high as they are now, city council has shown great interest in building more affordable and supportive housing (with federal funding) but there's still very little interest in making the substantial regulatory changes that would allow gentle density in single-family neighbourhoods.

Schreiner's strategy should help to advance a constructive debate on what should be done to address Ontario's housing and housing affordability crisis. And not, we hope, by pitting one measure against the other but by embracing, as he does, the need for action on many fronts.

The question is whether the other parties will meet that challenge.