

OPINION

Toronto needs missing middle housing options to address housing affordability

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This week, Toronto City Council will consider an important motion presented by Mayor John Tory expanding housing options and types in our city by reviewing planning permissions in low density areas.

We have made tremendous progress on our city's housing needs in recent years, including our Housing Now Plan, the Housing TO Action Plan, the Laneway Suites initiative and the renewal of our social housing stock to name a few transformative actions.

Council now has the opportunity to modernize planning regulations, zoning and land use to help build what is commonly referred to as the “missing middle housing” — housing that's a medium scale and density, in the middle of the affordability continuum; homes that aren't in highrise condominiums or houses priced out of the reach of the average Toronto residents.

The yellowbelt is a place to start if we want to build the missing middle. These are the areas coloured yellow on the city's Official Plan map and have policies that prevent densification, making up around 70 per cent of the city. These restrictions have been in place since the 1960s and 1970s. While they may have seemed practical when they were introduced, the Toronto we live in today is different.

By being too restrictive toward new housing forms in some areas, we have unintentionally reduced housing options and created inequity for large numbers of people who live here or would like to call this city their home. Whether you are looking to downsize and want to stay in your neighbourhood, or would like a starter home outside a high-density community, opening the yellowbelt will give us more housing options.

More housing options will help our city realize its potential in terms of more flexible housing forms and address our current reality where literally hundreds of thousands of bedrooms and housing opportunities sit empty in neighbourhoods across the city or simply don't get built because they are not allowed.

With current trends, our population will at least double in the next 50 years. This economic and population growth brings enormous opportunities for our city, but it also creates and sustains significant challenges. None is more pressing for many people than the most basic of human needs; a place to live.

The mayor's motion at council this week will start the conversation that we need to have as a city to get this housing built.

Over the coming months, our city's chief planner will consult with residents and interested stakeholders, review the changes that are being proposed and then report back to city council with his recommendations before the end of this year.

We strongly believe it is time to have this conversation about these potential changes and we encourage all residents and stakeholders to get involved as we review current planning and zoning regulations so that they are more practical, appropriate and equitable.

This is essential in ensuring our city meets its housing challenges today and in years to come.

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