

VIEW FROM QUEEN'S PARK: Affordable housing, climate change, electoral reform, and more ?

By Chris Ballard, MPP

Newmarket-Aurora

With houses in the area averaging close to \$1 million and York Region homes jumping more than 13 per cent in value in the past year, many homeowners are excited at their good fortune.

But anyone looking to buy or rent in the area knows the dark side of the surging housing market.

Not too long ago, it seemed affordable housing wasn't on the minds of many in Aurora, but that has changed. I now hear from many residents who, while enjoying rapidly escalating house value, are concerned at the lack of quality rental or entry-level accommodation for their children. 'It's too bad my children can't afford to live in the town they were born and raised in,' is a common phrase.

As a Town Councillor, I was acutely aware of the pending affordable housing crisis. There are a number of contributing factors, a significant one being that the Greater Toronto and Hamilton Area (GTHA), must absorb almost 100,000 new people each year.

These are people moving here from other countries, other provinces, and from within Ontario.

That's about the same number of people who live in Kingston. Imagine the planning, work and expense of building amenities in the GTHA equivalent to Kingston. And it has to be done each year ? roads, transit, schools, hospitals, recreation, business, and more?

In a significant step to address the affordable housing crisis, the province recently introduced the Promoting Affordable Housing Act, 2016 that, if passed, will amend four provincial acts to help increase the supply of affordable housing across the province and modernize existing social housing.

The proposed act will allow municipalities to implement inclusionary zoning, which mandates affordable units be included in new residential projects in willing municipalities; make secondary suites in new homes less costly to build by exempting them from development charges. (Secondary suites are a potential source of affordable rental housing and allow homeowners to earn some extra income from their property); and give York Region government more flexibility administering and delivering social housing, which will help reduce wait lists and make it easier for local residents to access a range of housing options.

I've always believed in allowing secondary suites in established neighbourhoods across the Region. We know they are being built in almost every neighbourhood ? and I fear too many are being built without proper municipal inspection to ensure they meet both building and fire codes.

Making secondary suites legal would not only increase the amount of rental accommodation we have in the area, it would make it safer. And, it would generate additional tax revenue for things like municipal services, schools and transit.

Greenhouse Gas Emissions

Ontario has finalized the rules for its new cap and trade program to limit greenhouse gas pollution, reward innovative companies, generate opportunities for investment in Ontario and create jobs while moving to a low-carbon economy.

A cap and trade program is a proven way to reduce greenhouse gas emissions and fight climate change by giving polluters an incentive to cut emissions. It creates a price on carbon emissions by limiting the amount of greenhouse gas pollution that can come from the economy (the cap) and then allowing those covered by the cap to trade among themselves (the trade) in a flexible and cost-effective way.

The final regulation reflects feedback from extensive consultations with industry, the public, environmental organizations, indigenous communities and others.

Protecting children and students

Ontario is re-introducing legislation to protect children and students by making the disciplinary process for the province's educators more clear and transparent.

If passed, the Protecting Students Act and subsequent regulations would improve the Ontario College of Teachers' investigation and disciplinary processes, reduce the potential of conflict of interest and help protect children, students and teachers by: ensuring a teacher's certificate is automatically revoked if he or she has been found guilty of sexual abuse or acts relating to child pornography; requiring employers, including school boards, to inform the college when they have restricted a teacher's duties or dismissed him or her for misconduct; allowing the college to share information with the school board or employer if the subject of a complaint poses

an immediate risk to a student or child; requiring the college to publish all decisions from its discipline committee; and improving timelines for the investigation and consideration of complaints.

Ban child care wait list fees

Ontario is proposing a regulation that would ban licensed child care centres and home child care agencies from charging fees to join a waiting list for child care programs as of September 1, 2016.

Around town

I was pleased to meet two fine young people this week from the area who have been selected to sit on the Minister of Education's Student Advisory Council. Thank you Jack Dukart of Terry Fox Public School and Matthew Abas of St. Maximilian Kolbe for your interest and commitment.

Sixty students in grades 7 to 12 from across Ontario sit on the Council and will provide advice to the Minister on the issues and topics that matter to them and their peers.

I invite you to contact me on any issue. Please call my community office at 905-750-0019, or visit my website at www.ChrisBallardMPP.ca. My email is: cballard.mpp.co@liberal.ola.org. I look forward to hearing from you.