

March 1, 2022

The Honourable Doug Ford, M.L.A.

Premier of the Province of Ontario

premier@ontario.ca

**Re: Formation of new GTA Ratepayer Alliance focused on overdevelopment
and the lack of a sensible growth vision for the GTA**

Dear Premier,

We are writing to you on behalf of **A Better GTA**, an alliance of non-partisan, non-profit resident and ratepayer groups in the Greater Toronto Area united in opposition to what we see as overdevelopment and the lack of a sensible growth vision for the GTA.

In recent years, growth in the GTA has caused many problems. It is destroying some neighbourhoods and building uncomfortably dense centres creating traffic gridlock and unliveable communities with few if any public amenities. Canada is also in the grip of a housing affordability crisis that has seen house prices triple in the past 10 years.

The province has responded with ideas such as Transit-Oriented Communities (TOC), which seek to put density along subway lines, and the Housing Affordability Task Force, which attempts to provide a solution for the housing affordability crisis. On the surface, both sound sensible.

The challenge with the province's implementation of transit-oriented communities is that they will achieve the opposite of your government's stated goals. As Matti Seimiatycki, professor of urban planning at U of T, points out "the language is transit-oriented communities, but what they (the province) are really focused on is development and density" The result will be unliveable communities.

The Housing Affordability Task Force was formed to generate ideas to address the housing crisis. Again, while the sentiment was right, the province started with the wrong premise and has generated solutions that will produce the opposite of what is needed. The report was designed by a group of bankers and developers, and predictably makes recommendations that meet the needs of the development industry over public interests.

The province is creating giveaway programs for developers who are interested in maximizing returns on their own specific projects but not interested in paying for the broader societal damage that their projects leave in communities. Residents and ratepayers, who our alliance represents, will be left to pay for the damage.

Our alliance is not a bunch of NIMBYs. We are not against development. We just want sensible, balanced, affordable, liveable developments and a broader regional city that can prosper for all. Growth must be accompanied by infrastructure, jobs, transit, parks, cultural institutions and other features which will allow communities to thrive. We want to see a return to respecting the Ontario

Planning Act and a reversal of the province's policies which would transfer power over land use decisions from municipalities and citizens to developers. We want to see a holistic vision created for the GTA, and a return to an evidence and policy-based approach to planning - not one based on access, connections and ministerial whim. It is not too late to get community buy-in in trying to solve the housing affordability crisis – but a comprehensive, win-win and durable solution must involve ALL stakeholders, not just the development industry. **We urge you to hold a Summit to bring all affected stakeholders to the table and work out reasonable compromises. Do not rush to introduce legislation prior to the Election that will only benefit the development industry. Residents are voters too.**

In this letter, we draw your attention to two specific problems:

- 1) The findings in the Ontario Housing Affordability Task Force report.
- 2) The two TOCs at Yonge and Hwy 407.

1) The findings of the Ontario Housing Affordability Task Force.

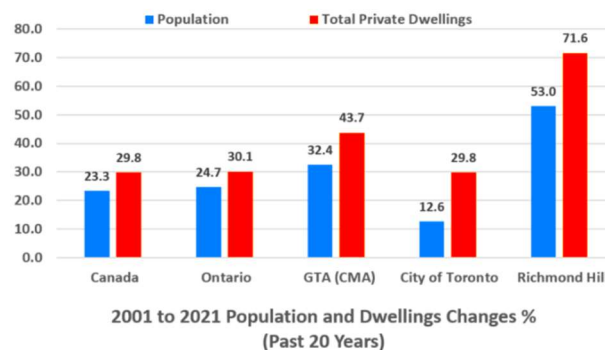
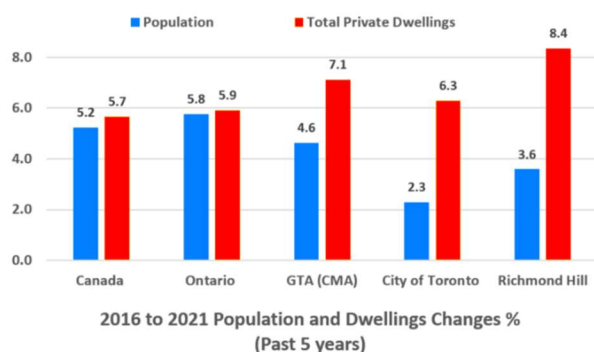
The Province of Ontario, indeed much of Canada, has a housing affordability crisis. Over the past 10 years, house prices have tripled. Some people have become fabulously rich off the housing market while many others are barely scraping by.

But a housing affordability crisis is not the same as a housing shortage. The report begins: ***“For many years, the province has not built enough housing to meet the needs of our growing population. While the affordability crisis began in our large cities, it has now spread to smaller towns and rural communities”.***

The trouble is that Statistics Canada census population and dwellings data from 2001 to 2021 shows this statement is simply not true. Our analysis is spelled out on our website <https://abettergta.com/affordability>.

Here are the facts:

- **Compared historically, Canada does not have a housing shortage. We are building houses today at the same rate or faster than population growth**, especially in the GTA housing supply is growing much faster than population growth; at issue is that we are not building the right kind of housing – particularly rental and low-income housing.



- According to Toronto and York Region records, **there is already enough proposed housing (approved and under review) to meet population projections for the next 20 years**; at issue is that developers are sitting on their approved projects but are not building and this can be fixed by legislation.

Table 2: Proposed Residential Units in City of Toronto by Status

	Built	Active	Under Review	Total in Pipeline	% of Total	% of Growth Areas
City of Toronto	93,836	162,757	246,769	503,362	100.00	
Growth Areas	83,582	145,717	204,787	434,086	86.2	100.0
Downtown and Central Waterfront	41,685	61,922	55,395	159,002	31.6	36.6
Centres	9,799	17,612	24,702	52,113	10.4	12.0
Avenues	20,216	32,600	68,063	120,879	24.0	27.8
Other Mixed Use Areas	11,882	33,583	56,627	102,092	20.3	23.5
All Other Areas	10,254	17,040	41,982	69,276	13.8	

Source: City of Toronto, City Planning: Land Use Information System II

Proposed residential units in development projects with activity between January 1, 2016 and December 31, 2020. Built projects are those which became ready for occupancy and/or were completed. Active projects are those which have been approved, for which Building Permits have been applied or have been issued, and/or those which are under construction. Projects Under Review are those which have not yet been approved or refused and those which are under appeal.

- Housing vacancies in the GTA are at a 20 year high; many are either being left empty or are being used for short-term rentals such as Airbnb.
- The cost of financing a mortgage has kept even with incomes and has not risen.

The primary reasons we are having a housing crisis are as follows:

- Interest rates are at a historic low; money is cheap, inflating housing sale prices.
- We are experiencing a period of supercharged demand by investors (25% of buyers in Toronto now are multi-property owners); if you can finance at 1.5% and get a return of 20%, everyone will want to be in on it.
- We have failed to build houses for renters and low-income households.

The current housing task force report is built on a false premise and its recommendations would not solve the problem, but would mainly result in weakening the power of municipalities and citizens to help determine the nature of the communities that they live in. **The Yonge/407 TOCs are a good example to show the consequences of following the path planned by your government – chasing unlimited height and unlimited density rather than planning for livable communities.**

2) The Two TOCs at Yonge St and Hwy 407

The stated aim of the TOC Act is to “*build vibrant connected communities, bringing jobs and housing closer to transit.*” We like the sound of this. Unfortunately, what is being proposed is the opposite. The pair of TOCs at Highway 407 and Yonge St. provides an example. The TOCs will create the following:

- **The 2nd densest place on earth**, just behind the Dharavi slums of Mumbai – made famous by the film Slumdog Millionaire. The centres will be 3 x as dense as St. James Town, 4 x as dense as Yonge-Eglinton, 5 x as dense as North York Centre, and 6 x as dense as the Toronto Central Waterfront and the island of Manhattan. In this small area (half the size of Exhibition Place), the province's plan is to install 67 condo towers, 40 @ 60 storeys or more, 11 @ 80 storeys. (For reference, First Canadian Place is 72 storeys).
- **A centre that will be unliveable.** The province's plan attempts to squeeze the equivalent of the population of Newmarket (88,000) into 45 hectares. It will have only 1 school, no community or cultural centres, and less than 10 hectares of parkland; by contrast, Newmarket has 29 schools and 320 hectares of parkland. How is this a vibrant community?
- **A centre that will do nothing for jobs and will exacerbate traffic for the whole GTA.** The plan doubles housing from the original secondary plans proposed by Richmond Hill and Markham, but halves employment. The result will be that residents will have to commute longer and farther to work. This will further clog our already overcrowded road network and Yonge Subway; people in midtown Toronto should expect to never get a subway seat again.

We agree with the TOC concept. However, in its current implementation, the Yonge-407 TOC is a highly questionable agreement with developers. The Yonge-407 TOC centre has the potential to be a cornerstone for the Ontario economy and a centre for all of York Region. It can address jobs, help Canada meet its climate targets and, best of all, be a model for smart city building. We believe that the current plan will not achieve this, and so we urge the province to scrap the current TOC proposals and do a Blue Sky for the lands on both sides of 407 from Yonge St to Bayview and beyond along the 407 and hydro corridor. We are confident that a better vision for the lands in question is possible.

Yong-407 TOC is not an isolated case. Overdevelopment has become one of the main concerns for GTA residents. Another example of massive overdevelopment is the proposed 105 high-rise towers on either side of Steeles Ave from Dufferin to Bayview. If all are approved, 63,000 NEW residents or the entire population of Aurora (62,000 in 2021) would be squeezed into this already crowded area.

The solutions to the GTA's issues with housing, transportation, climate management, and more are not out of our reach. We can build a great city that provides for all of this and addresses our affordability problems. However, first, we ask that your government defer any further action on implementing any legislation which would enact the current TOC policies or the Task Force report. This concern is clearly echoed by many municipal councils and Mayoral associations throughout the GTA. There is no rush. Give residents the opportunity to make our case.

All we want is **A Better GTA**.

Yours Sincerely,

A Better GTA

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Co-signers

Alena Gotz, Aileen-Willowbrook Residents Association (AWRA)
Alex Wong, BayMills Ratepayers Association
Mario G. Racco, Brownridge Ratepayers Association
Tony Zuccaro, Carrying Place Rate Payers Association (CPRA)
Rhonda Duma, Corie Bonnaffon, Grandview Area Residents Association (GARA)
Leo Li, Jefferson Community Association (JFC)
Robert Kenedy, MacKenzie Ridge Ratepayers Association (MRRA)
Pat Pollock, Mayvern Area Residents Association (MARA)
Elisabeth Tan, Milne Dam Conservation Park Retepayers Association (MDCPRA)
Petra Scheller, Charlene Haupt, Trevor Isaac, Athina Tagidou, Sue Shanly, Mississauga Residents' Association Network (MIRANET)
Sue Shanly, Meadow Wood Rattray Ratepayers Association (MWRRA)
Gary Zikovitz, North Richvale Community Group
Allan Glube, Ridgeway Ratepayers Association (RRA)
Mia Poscente, Royal Orchard Ratepayers' Association (RORA)
Jordan Max, Springfarm Ratepayers Association (SFRA)
Michael Gannon, Unionville Residents Association
Tony Faccia, Village Core Residents Association
Evelin Ellison, Ward One (South) Thornhill Residents Inc (WOSTRI)
John Li, Yonge-Bernard Residents Association (YRA)
Joseph Brunaccioni, York Regional Standard Condominium Corporation (YRSCC) No 1109

cc

- CBC, Globe & Mail, Toronto Star, City News, The Liberal, North York Mirror, ...
- Minister, Ministry of Infrastructure
- Minister, Ministry of Municipal Affairs and Housing
- Minister, Ministry of Transportation
- President and CEO, Infrastructure Ontario
- President and CEO, Metrolinx
- Regional Councils in the GTA
- Municipal Councils in the GTA
- Local MPs/MPPs
- Leaders of the New Democratic Party of Ontario and the Liberal Party of Ontario