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URA Members Meeting Minutes

Monday, January 13, 2025

Video Conference

URA Directors:

Jóska Zérczi, Michael Gannon, Roland Hosein, Peter Miasek, Stella Yu, Sandra Tam, Mary Caporusso, Adam Poon, and Gene Genin

Elected Officials:

Reid McAlpine, Councillor Ward 3

Guests:

Franz Hartmann, Director, The Alliance for a Liveable Ontario

Attendance: Approximately twenty-two members and guests.

1. Call to Order & President's Introduction (Jóska Zérczi)

URA President, Jóska Zérczi, called the meeting to order at 7:05pm. Jóska welcomed members and guests.

2. Five Ways To Make Homes Affordable In Ontario - Franz Hartmann, Director, The Alliance for a Liveable Ontario

The Alliance for a Liveable Ontario is an advocacy group that works to make Provincial Government development policies more pragmatic, effective and less harmful to communities, farmland, natural areas and democratic institutions.

Frans Hartmann served as the Executive Director of the Toronto Environmental Alliance (TEA) for 11 years. He also chaired the Ontario Greenbelt Alliance for four years, playing a key role in building broad community support for the Greenbelt. Before his tenure at TEA, Frans was an environmental advisor to city councillor Jack Layton, overseeing Layton's civil society engagement initiatives in Ottawa.

Recognizing that governments, the private sector, and non-profit housing providers must collaborate to address the housing crisis, the Alliance for a Liveable Ontario advocates for five key action areas. The organization urges the provincial government to implement laws and tax policies that incentivize developers and other housing providers to build the necessary housing.

The five action areas are:

1. Build in the right places

- a. Reform planning laws and regulations to prioritize new housing development within existing towns and cities.
- b. Strengthen protections for farmland, natural areas, and water resources by updating planning laws.
- c. Allocate new municipal infrastructure funding exclusively to support housing development within existing towns and cities.
- d. Implement targeted taxes, incentives, and disincentives to encourage developers to build within existing urban boundaries rather than expanding into undeveloped areas.
- e. Revise planning and tax laws to simplify the process for homeowners to convert their properties into multi-unit residences.

2. Build a wide variety of housing types

- a. Identify and plan for the mix of unit sizes and types needed and in what quantity, based on demographic and immigration projections.
- b. Develop a comprehensive seniors housing program that identifies their future housing needs.
- c. Develop a student housing program that identifies their future housing needs.
- d. Change planning laws to require construction of the unit sizes needed within a mix of different building types.
- e. Use appropriate financial tools to ensure construction of needed housing types and sizes.
- f. Change planning laws to ensure various building types can be built along main streets, transit stations and public lands.
- g. Keep existing buildings that provide a needed range of units from being demolished by helping non-profit housing providers buy the buildings.
- h. Provide long-term leases of public land to non-profit housing providers that want to build a mix of building and unit types for lower income Ontarians.
- i. Work with First Nations Peoples to enable Indigenous led housing development projects.

3. Build smarter and faster

- a. Modernize building codes and land use planning laws to support labour-efficient, cost-effective construction methods.
- b. Revise building codes and planning regulations to encourage the use of affordable, labour-efficient, and sustainable building materials.
- c. Mandate municipalities to approve developments that utilize pre-approved building designs, streamlining the approval process and reducing delays.
- d. Remove parking requirements for new developments to lower construction costs and promote more space-efficient, transit-friendly communities.
- e. Leverage financial tools, tax incentives, and funding programs to accelerate the adoption of faster, lower-cost, and labour-efficient construction methods.

4. Invest Heavily in Non-market, Affordable Housing

- a. Fund a multi-year program to preserve existing non-market housing and construct at least 60,000 new non-market affordable housing units annually.
- b. Collaborate with municipalities and community housing developers to enhance their capacity to fast-track construction.
- c. Lease surplus federal and provincial lands to municipal and community developers to enable the construction and long-term operation of non-market housing.
- d. Partner with Indigenous housing organizations to create and fully fund culturally appropriate housing projects.
- e. Provide the necessary resources and support identified by housing experts and homeless advocates to rapidly transition Ontarians experiencing homelessness into stable housing.

5. Make housing affordable and part of liveable communities

- a. Update landlord and tenant protection laws to ensure timely and fair resolution of disputes, affordable rents, and no abuse by unscrupulous parties.
- b. Update planning laws and infrastructure programs so that municipalities can provide adequate schools, green spaces, and community services.

3. Councillor Update (Reid McAlpine)

Councillor Reid McAlpine provided the following updates:

- No Frills Plaza Redevelopment - Highway 7 and Warden
 - Amendments to the Official Plan are underway to permit the construction of 12 to 35 story condominiums on the property.
- The Bed, Bath and Beyond Retail Site Redevelopment
 - Two Condominium towers are scheduled to build on this site.
- Official Plan Review
 - Markham's Official Plan review is underway. The current plan was prepared 10 years ago. The new plan will include items that were be managed by York Region, now that the region's planning function has been devolved to lower-tier municipalities

4. New Business

The agenda item was deferred.

5. Meeting Adjournment

President, Jóska Zérczi adjourned the meeting at 9:00pm.