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NRU offices are closed for holidays next week, August 6-10.

The next Toronto issue will be published Friday, August 17.

TACKLING TORONTO HOUSING

BOLD IDEAS NEEDED

Rachael Williams

Building affordable market housing in the City of Toronto will be one of the most pressing issues for the new council to tackle after the October 22 municipal election.

But the way to provide a greater diversity of housing and ensure residents of varying income levels have an opportunity to live and work in Toronto has been one of the most polarizing debates in the city. The battle cry from developers is that municipal and provincial governments need to cut red tape to allow residential units to come to market faster, while other housing advocates say the problem lies in the financing model, which prioritizes investors as opposed to the end user.

“We haven’t really seen this in the past, but affordable housing has now become about housing affordability for everybody and we now have a crisis where regular middle-income people can’t afford to

live in the city,” said **Ryerson City Building Institute** executive director **Cherise Burda**. “I think this is a call to decision-makers and those running for mayor that we need really bold new ideas.”

There are 24 candidates running for mayor of Toronto, including current mayor **John Tory** and the

city’s former chief planner **Jennifer Keesmaat**.

Outspoken on the affordable housing file, Keesmaat announced her candidacy on July 27, just minutes before nominations closed.

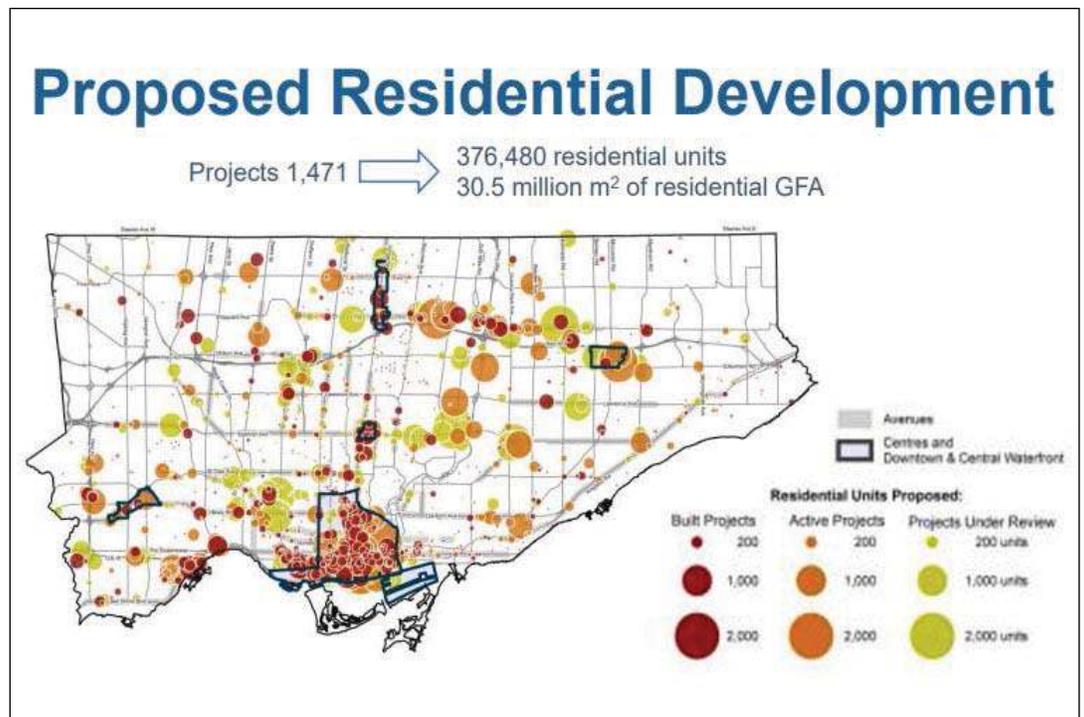
“I think that Jennifer is somebody who can stand up and champion bold ideas.

And I think at the very least she can create some pressure for John Tory to

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There are 1,471 proposed residential developments scattered across the in the City of Toronto, many of which are for projects that contain at least 2,000 units. These projects account for a total of 376,480 residential units.

SOURCE: CITY OF TORONTO



BOLD IDEAS NEEDED

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be bolder because we need someone bolder at city hall with [Ontario Premier] **Doug Ford** looming and we need somebody who can stand up for a strong Toronto,” said Burda.

Housing Matters founder **Chris Spoke** told *NRU* the boldest change at the municipal level that would drastically alter the housing landscape would be to open the yellowbelt. Coined by urban planner **Gil Meslin**, the yellowbelt describes a large swath of land designated as neighbourhoods in Toronto’s official plan.

The primary designation within the yellowbelt calls for detached single-family housing. In the city’s zoning by-law higher-density development is prevented in these areas through a 10-metre maximum height allowance. Spoke said updating the by-law to a broader residential zone would allow for gentle density in these stable, residential neighbourhoods.

“I think a proposal along those fronts from either John Tory or Jen Keesmaat would swing a lot of supporters in their direction,” said Spoke.

Others are less convinced the municipal election will

bring about any substantive change to housing affordability in Toronto.

RESCON president **Richard Lyall** told *NRU* the impediments to building affordable housing in Toronto are the result of systemic barriers including zoning by-laws, site plan approvals, lack of infrastructure and the “tyranny of NIMBYism.”

“The problem is that a lot of politicians don’t want to talk about it because they [would] have to [blame] themselves, and fixing messed up systems is hard work,” he said. “There might be some

discussion about [housing affordability], but it will be much of the same rhetoric.”

A [2017 report](#) by **RESCON** and Ryerson University on modernizing building approvals in Ontario found that site plan approvals, which should take one month, are taking more than two years for residential buildings.

BILD president and CEO **David Wilkes** added it can take up to 10 years for a low or high-rise residential development to move through the system, from time of land purchase to time of completion. He told *NRU* government charges and fees represent 21.7 per cent of the cost to build housing in Toronto and the GTA and this is also eroding the supply of housing and ultimately, the affordability.

But cutting the red tape and streamlining approvals across the city will only lead to more of the same—building tall and building sprawl, according to Burda. She recommends a targeted approach that would update zoning by-laws and streamline approvals in specific locations that can accommodate missing-middle housing, including row houses, townhouses and six to eight storey mid-rises.

“It needs to be for the end user, it needs to be missing-middle, it needs to be family-friendly,” she said. 🌱

Over the last five years, 568 residential development projects have been built in the City of Toronto, bringing 86,441 residential units to market. The majority of this growth has occurred in the downtown.

SOURCE: CITY OF TORONTO

