

Housing Needs in Rural and Northern Municipalities

What are the key barriers impacting your municipality in meeting its housing needs that may be unique to northern and rural communities?

The cost of construction is higher, both with respect to labour costs and the cost of materials. This can be attributed to both the scarcity of product and limited availability of trades. Costs escalate from the time the job gets quoted to the actual time that a contract is signed and built. These factors make it challenging to construct and sell dwellings at an affordable level. Between cost escalations, labour shortages as well as supply chain issues, it is very difficult to take a capital project from inception to completion and remain on time and on budget.

It is also challenging to maintain a workforce to provide labour to construct affordable housing when there is a lack of affordable housing for the skilled trade workers themselves.

It would be very worthwhile for the senior levels of government to consider operational funding to encourage affordable housing development by funding a Project Manager to oversee the project development (RFP) and all the technical work required (zoning, record of site condition, geotechnical work, etc.) in order for the site to be ready for construction, in advance of senior levels of government funding being announced, so that municipalities would truly have shovel ready projects prepared.

What potential tools or policies could the government consider to address housing needs in your municipality while balancing other provincial priorities?

Theme 1: Agricultural

The nature of farming is changing. Traditionally, smaller landholdings were not seen as productive farmland. With changing practices, a small plot intensive farming can now produce six figure incomes on as little as 2 acres. The term “farming” needs to be broadened to ensure that those deriving a farm income from small land holdings are on equal footing from a tax assessment perspective which may require coordination with MPAC. This will contribute to the affordability of operating these high-yielding, non-traditional farms.

Theme 2: Wetlands, Species At Risk

Northern Ontario is different from Southern Ontario. In many cases, such as the City of Greater Sudbury, the land area within the municipal boundary is vast and contains a number of wetlands. Even within the Settlement Boundary and Built Boundary which are the focus of growth, there are a large number properties that contain wetlands and that may contain Species At Risk (SAR). A strict application of the PPS as it relates to wetlands can have significant implications on the developability of many parcels of land, even in infilling situations.

Additional flexibility in the application of the PPS would allow for more timely, and potentially more development to occur. For example, more flexibility is developing adjacent to wetlands provided that there is not impact on hydrologic function or flexibility in requiring SAR studies for development within the Built Boundary.

It is recognized that such changes would necessitate changes associated legislation and/or implementing regulations such as the Conservation Authorities Act and the Species at Risk Act.

Theme 3: Funding and programming

Funding for developing programs to provide training in the skilled trades would assist in balancing the labour supply shortage.

Do you have other suggestions for ways to improve housing supply and needs in rural and northern municipalities?

Funding to support tenancy is key to addressing the issues. MMAH traditionally provides funding for capital builds, but the additional operating costs of a community housing building often fall onto the municipal taxpayers shoulders as these expenses are absorbed by the municipal tax levy. Operational dollars to offset the costs of running the building as well as to cover the costs of support services that are often required in order for vulnerable tenants to maintain a successful tenancy.