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FRIDAY,
MARCH 15, 2019

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TRANSIT-ORIENTED DEVELOPMENT DEBATED

UNLOCKING GROWTH

Rachael Williams

The City of Toronto is pushing back against a Ryerson University report that contends as-of-right zoning in transit nodes would unlock greater development than is currently permitted under existing planning rules.

The report, released on March 7 by Ryerson University's Centre for Urban Research and Land Development (CUR), looked at residential development around major transit corridors throughout Ontario. It concluded an additional 20,000 more units of housing per year could be built along transit corridors if municipalities were more pro-active in up-zoning areas around transit nodes.

The report identified many of Toronto's subway stations as having the greatest opportunity and space for development, including subway stations between Downsview Park and the Vaughan Metropolitan Centre. Some of the land around older subway stations was also considered to be underutilized,

including Kipling, York Mills, Islington and Royal York, where the density was under 1,000 units per square kilometre, one-third of what could be supported by increased development, according to the report.

"Toronto currently has over 160 of these transit stations, where almost half of these stations already meet [Growth Plan] targets," Toronto city planning staff stated in an email to NRU.

The *Growth Plan for the Greater Golden Horseshoe 2017* requires municipalities to put in place planning frameworks to achieve density targets of 200 residents and jobs per hectare for subway stations, 160 residents and jobs per hectare for light rail transit stations and 150 residents and jobs per hectare for GO train stations.

At Yonge and Eglinton, development far exceeds the provincial density targets, so much so that commuter

volume in the subway station exceeds the 28,000 per hour capacity during the morning rush hour. City planning staff has also raised concerns previously about water and wastewater capacity, inefficient park space and a lack of schools in the area to support the population boom in the midtown precinct.

At transit nodes that do not meet the provincial density targets, land use restrictions, environmental considerations and legalities are among issues seen as holding up future development. In a November interview with NRU, Toronto's chief planner **Gregg Lintern** said not every transit station is going to be able to meet the province's density targets. For example, density around the Guildwood GO station is limited because of its proximity to Lake Ontario, surrounding parks, golf courses and ravines.

CUR senior researcher



Rendering of the 11-storey mixed-use building that would front on a new west-end community. See story on page 5.

SOURCE: CITY OF TORONTO
ARCHITECT: GIANNONE PETRICONE ASSOCIATES

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UNLOCKING GROWTH

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Diana Petramala states “but a large part of these areas remain low-density because the lands around them are fairly protected from development. They are in stable neighbourhoods and are not open to more intensification.”

Stations along the western portion of the Line 1 Bloor-Danforth line, including Royal York and Islington, are surrounded by detached and semi-detached homes with restrictive zoning that does not support high-rise development. The report recommends easing the zoning restrictions in these areas to allow for more duplexes and triplexes to be built in residential neighbourhoods.

“But so far, the city has shown a lack of will to zone appropriately along transit lines, and you see it broadly across Ontario. Of the 1,500 kilometres of [land] we found around transit nodes, only 154 kilometres of it has been rezoned,” said Petramala.

In their email, city planning staff cited numerous attempts to increase urban density through the adoption of planning studies, area specific plans and secondary plans. Recent examples include Downtown East Planning, Lower Yonge Precinct Area Specific Plan,

Lower Yonge Precinct Area Specific Plan, Bathurst-Bloor Four Corners Study, Danforth Avenue Planning Study, Mimico-Judson Secondary Plan, Dufferin Street Avenue Study and ConsumersNext Secondary Plan. These recently completed studies are all currently under appeal at the Local Planning Appeal Tribunal, making it impossible for the city to implement as-of-right zoning.

Two additional studies intended to accommodate

intensification near transit are currently before the municipal affairs and housing minister for approval, including Midtown In Focus (Yonge-Eglinton Secondary Plan) and TO Core Secondary plan (Downtown Secondary Plan).

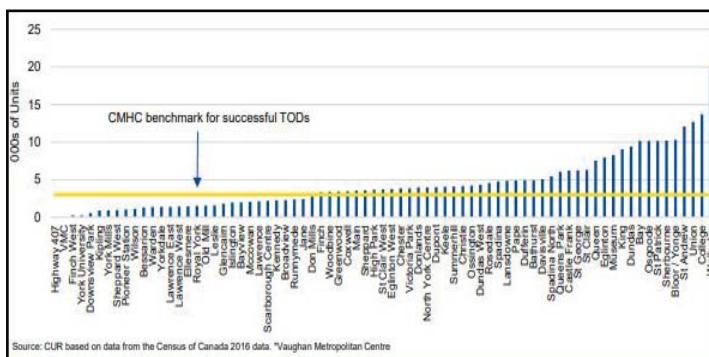
“These appeals are coming from both the industry and local ratepayers, making them local political battles,” said **Ontario Home Builders’ Association** chief executive officer **Joe Vaccaro**. “The province has indicated they are going to show leadership on this file. The adoption of a provincial as-of-right zoning around transit nodes is one of our recommendations.”

Vaccaro told *NRU* provincial intervention

would be the most effective way to ensure municipalities are not caught in political quagmires over building height allowances. He said the province should determine what should be allowed.

“It would reset the expectation of the community, and reset the planning framework discussion. Does that walk away some of the appeals? It may, but it will certainly reset the conversation.”

The province has concluded its consultations on increasing the housing supply in Ontario and is developing the “Housing Supply Action Plan” to increase the supply of new ownership and rental housing. The province is also expected to move forward with amendments to the *Growth Plan, Provincial Policy Statement and Planning Act*. 



	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018	3-year average (2016 to 2018)
No zoning change	8	9	15	10	9	13	12	10	14	12
Subway Lines/Stations	39	47	85	49	39	63	66	54	70	63
GO Train Stations	5	5	8	4	5	8	5	5	7	6
Vaughan BRT	6	3	16	11	19	13	12	9	14	12
Ottawa LRT/BRTs	0	1	3	4	3	2	1	1	1	1
Hamilton LRT	0	0	1	0	3	0	0	4	1	2
Eglinton LRT	5	17	8	9	15	13	4	2	11	6
Finch West LRT	0	0	0	0	19	0	0	1	0	1
Kitchener-Cambridge-Waterloo LRT	4	8	10	3	12	8	13	13	4	10
Transit nodes with a recent zoning change	5	18	9	21	10	19	12	21	42	25
Toronto Subway Lines	4	36	13	57	12	30	36	31	90	60
Scarborough LRT	1	42	12	25	4	38	1	25	69	32
Hamilton LRT/GO Train Stations (2016)	0	0	1	0	13	1	6	4	6	5
Ottawa Zoning By-Law Changes in 2014 that Captured Land around Transit Nodes	9	5	8	9	11	11	10	20	21	17

Source: CUR based on CMHC and data from the 2016 Census of Canada. *An 800 radius is estimated by the surrounding census tracts. Large census tracts were removed from analysis.

Graph shows density levels around a number of Toronto's subway stations that fall below the Canadian Mortgage and Housing Corporation benchmark of 3,000 units per square kilometre.

SOURCE: RYERSON UNIVERSITY CENTRE FOR URBAN RESEARCH AND LAND DEVELOPMENT

Chart separates the amount of construction activity that has occurred around transit nodes in areas that have been pre-zoned, and not, for higher density. In the last three years, the volume of construction activity near transit nodes is twice that as those not pre-zoned.

SOURCE: RYERSON CENTRE FOR URBAN RESEARCH AND LAND DEVELOPMENT