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Toronto's tower renewal project could result in improved permits and approvals processes

VINCE VERSACE

staff writer

Toronto's tower renewal pilot project is an excellent opportunity to streamline approval processes and introduce innovative financing and environmental solutions, says one construction official.

"Retrofitting what exists fully and intensification around those towers in the pilot is important," says Andy Manahan, executive director of the Residential and Civil Construction Alliance.

"An issue identified is expediting permit and approval process and we recommend the use of RCAs (Registered Code Agencies)."

The tower renewal initiative aims to rehabilitate Toronto older concrete high-rise building stock. The RCCAO says the project will enhance livability for thousands of Toronto residents as well as provide for a range of environmental and economic benefits.

A comprehensive planning and implementation approach will be taken by Toronto, indicates a city report on the project. RCAs could help move permits along and avoid seasonal permit bottlenecks, says the RCCAO.

"The use of RCAs would be extremely helpful to streamline the building permit processes," explains Manahan.

"Where there might be potential bottlenecks in the review process, because of limited staff, strategic use of outside expertise could help fast-track approvals."

Infill opportunities for new residential, commercial and institutional developments will also require innovative solutions, maximizing existing infrastructure to accommodate growth and creating more compact development.

The RCCAO hopes Toronto council will be supportive of development proposals that increase transit-supportive densities. "NIMBY-type objections" from around tower locations will likely be generated,

says Manahan.

“To implement a lot of these changes councillors will need to have a stronger backbone.”

Fairer application of development charges using a site-specific approach would be preferable to uniform charges, Manahan says.

Tax increment financing, to help fund future infrastructure improvements, might be an option to consider for development around existing towers in the pilot project.

The renewal project is also a great opportunity to introduce significant measures to conserve water resources, says Manahan. Installation of smart meters and variable water pricing could be implemented to reflect time of day or seasonal water demand pressures.

Metering is “admittedly more complex” to introduce into a multi-unit apartment compared to a single-family home but it would help make an older building “greener,” says Manahan.