

Where does the industry stand on Ontario's highly publicized cabinet 'shakeup'?

Angela Gismondi September 11, 2023

Construction stakeholders are reacting to an Ontario cabinet shuffle last week amid housing minister Steve Clark's resignation, saying despite all the buzz and controversy, the focus needs to remain on getting more homes built quickly.

"The need for greater stability right now is huge because we've got a massive challenge," said Richard Lyall, president of the Residential Construction Council of Ontario.

"We've got changes in leadership at three levels of government... These are new people that have to not only manage their various portfolios but also hopefully co-ordinate and collaborate with each other, because no one level of government can solve this."

He added, "It's a fairly considerable shakeup because when you have a new minister, there is new staff... It takes time and that's one thing we don't have a lot of right now."

In addition to new Housing Minister Paul Calandra at the provincial level and Rob Flack becoming associate minister of housing with a specific mandate on attainable housing and modular homes, Lyall pointed out at the municipal level there is a new mayor in Toronto and a new chair of the planning and housing committee. At the end of July, the federal government also announced a new minister of housing, infrastructure and communities.

"I'm very concerned," said Lyall. "I think there are some tremendous opportunities here but it's just the capacity of the various levels of government to make the right moves."

"There's the (housing) task force report and quite a few recommendations there that haven't been addressed yet. I'm still hearing reports from builders that are still having trouble with ongoing approvals."

Lyall said he was not surprised by Clark stepping down.

"At a time when we arguably should be at least doubling the amount of housing we're producing, we're sort of going in the other direction," said Lyall. "The immigration numbers aren't changing... This needs to get organized yesterday."

“We need strong, co-ordinated, determined leadership with specific targets and milestones as to how we’re going to turn this around. There is an enormous amount of work that has to be done.”

Executive director of the Residential and Civil Construction Alliance of Ontario (RCCAO) Nadia Todorova said the housing crisis threatens to undermine Ontario’s long-term economic competitiveness and prosperity.

“RCCAO will continue to advocate for the accelerated adoption of the reforms recommended by the Housing Affordability Task Force,” said Todorova in an email to the Daily Commercial News.

“RCCAO looks forward to working with minister Calandra to see smart reforms enacted that modernize and simplify the approvals process that are vital to ending the housing crisis.”

On the cabinet shuffle, Todorova said RCCAO thanks former Transportation Minister Caroline Mulroney for her leadership on projects such as Highway 413, the Bradford Bypass and the Ontario Line.

“Our members congratulate Minister (Prabmeet) Sarkaria on stepping into this new role and will have the support of RCCAO members to ensure that Ontario continues building transportation infrastructure for a prosperous and economically competitive future,” said Todorova.

Ian Cunningham, president of the Council of Ontario Construction Associations, said he was surprised Clark didn’t provide better oversight over his chief of staff in the decision to remove certain lands from the Greenbelt for development.

“In the wake of both the auditor general’s and the integrity commissioner’s damning reports, and with the barrage of demands from the Opposition parties for Clark’s removal, he had little choice. His resignation was inevitable and predictable,” said Cunningham. “Despite Clark’s resignation and the premier’s announced total review of the Greenbelt, this issue is likely to linger for months to come.”

He is optimistic about Calandra taking over the housing file.

“Minister Calandra is smart, capable and approachable,” he said. “The construction industry should have no problem working with him on projects that make sense for Ontarians.”

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