



In search of a champion

It's getting a lot harder to remain optimistic. Homeless men and women, young and old, have a hand out for help across the city, from the urban core to suburban mall. Through another winter, the prospects for homeless people are very bleak.

Toronto City Council, a year after sweeping out the old guard, three years after the Mayor's Report on Homelessness, and six years after the Golden Report, have established yet another committee on homelessness.

The Ontario Government, also a year in office, is embroiled in endless negotiations on an Affordable Housing Agreement with the Feds, while hundreds of millions of dollars earmarked for affordable housing in Ontario remain unspent.

Why isn't money for affordable housing flowing? The answer is simple: affordable housing gives politicians enormous grief, and very few are willing to risk their job supporting it. Although most support the concept in principle, very few will take the heat when a 'project' is proposed in their own back yard.

We've had all the studies. We've had enough reports. What we need now is a champion, someone willing to say: 'Yes in my back yard'. And, where one steps forward, others will be inspired to follow to stand up for affordable housing.

These champions will recognize that the basic raw material for affordable housing is available, right here, right now. It starts with a piece of land, and there is plenty available.

The Feds own considerable land suitable for housing, as does the Province, including the West Don Lands (formerly Ataritiri) expropriated for just that purpose a decade ago.

Brampton, Mississauga, Vaughan, Markham, Toronto – every municipal and regional government owns land that can be designated for affordable housing today – land on main streets, land on subway lines, land with infrastructure already in place.

Solving the crisis of homelessness in our communities is really not that complicated. It starts with a place to live, a home. But it will take a few champions to lead the way, to cut through the red tape, to make land available, and to get the money flowing to the housing advocates that are standing by, ready, willing and able to 'make housing happen'.

These advocacy groups are one good reason to remain optimistic. The Women's Religious Project (WRP), Senior Link, Children's Enrichment Centre, Eva's Initiatives, YMCA, Kehilla Residential Programme, At Home East York – these groups, and many more like them, are fully mobilized to build stable, affordable communities for young people and old, singles and families, and people with a host of special needs. They are also committed to providing the support services that will ensure each new community will be healthy and vibrant.

For the first time in years the stars are aligned, with governments at all levels positioned to do the right thing. It's time to stop talking and get the land and money flowing.

It's time for a champion.



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