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Ontario passes housing bill amid criticism from cities, conservation authorities

Ontario passed a housing bill Monday intended to spur development. Critics, however, say it will lead to higher property taxes, weaken conservation authority powers and not actually make homes more affordable.

The new law is just one move among many in a flurry of recent housing changes from the Progressive Conservative government, including plans to open some areas of the protected Greenbelt land to development and allowing the mayors of Toronto and Ottawa to pass by-laws with just one-third of council support.

Premier Doug Ford's housing push comes as the government attempts to get 1.5 million homes built in 10 years, while high inflation and interest rates have already forced the province to revise projections for housing starts downward. Ontario expects to build fewer than 80,000 new homes a year in the next couple of years.

Municipal Affairs and Housing Minister Steve Clark said Ontario is facing a "severe" housing crisis and it requires bold solutions.

"If we are truly going to build affordable housing in this province, if all the mayors and councillors who said during their municipal election they want to [incentivize] more housing opportunity in their communities, this is a way that the government has very clearly said we wanted to investigate," Clark said Monday after the bill's passage.

One of the most controversial aspects of the bill is freezing, reducing



and exempting fees developers pay to build affordable housing, non-profit housing and inclusionary zoning units - meaning affordable housing in new developments - as well as some rental units.

Those fees go to municipalities and are then used to pay for services to support new homes, such as road and sewer infrastructure and community centres.

The Association of Municipalities of Ontario says the changes could leave municipalities short \$5 billion and see taxpayers footing the bill - either in the form of higher property taxes or service cuts - and there is nothing in the bill that would guarantee improved housing affordability.

The bill also limits the areas conservation authorities can consider

in development permissions, removing factors such as pollution and conservation of the land.

Bill passes as proposed changes to Greenbelt loom

Meanwhile, the government is still accepting public feedback on its proposed amendments to the Greenbelt Act that, if approved, would remove 7,400 acres from the protected land but also add 9,400 acres to the Greenbelt elsewhere, in a bid to build at least 50,000 homes in the GTA.

The Greenbelt Act was created in 2005 to permanently protect agricultural and environmentally sensitive lands in the Greater Golden Horseshoe area from development.

Clark had previously said he would not cut the protected area or do a land swap.

Trudeau government unveils long-awaited plan to confront an 'increasingly disruptive' China



Canada's long-awaited Indo-Pacific strategy describes China as "an increasingly disruptive global power" on the world stage - a social and economic force that's too big to ignore but is also increasingly focused on bending international rules to suit its own interests.

Using some surprisingly blunt language, the strategy says the Canadian government needs to be "clear-eyed" about China's objectives in the Far East and elsewhere. It promises to spend almost half a billion dollars over five years on improving military and intelligence co-operation with allies in the region.

"China's rise, enabled by the same international rules and norms that it now increasingly disregards, has had an enormous impact on the Indo-Pacific, and it has ambitions to become the leading power in the region," says the 26-page document, which was provided to the media in advance of its formal release in Vancouver on Sunday.

"China is making large-scale investments to establish its economic influence, diplomatic impact, offensive military capabilities and advanced technologies. China is looking to shape the international order into a more permissive environment for interests and values that increasingly depart from ours."

The strategy document also says that "China's sheer size and influence makes co-operation necessary to address some of the world's existential pressures, such as climate change and biodiversity loss, global health and nuclear proliferation."

In that respect, Canada's foreign policy blueprint mirrors the approaches taken by its closest allies, including the United States, which last February released its own vision for engagement in the region.

Where the American and Canadian strategies differ is in how Canada's document spells out that it will "at

all times unapologetically defend our national interest" and that its views will be "shaped by a realistic and clear-eyed assessment of today's China."

Many observers - including some prominent Liberals - have urged the government over the past few years to maintain the pro-business and investment relationship with Beijing that has built up over the last two decades.

The new strategy document, however, appears to reflect the lessons of the bruising international clashes that have driven relations between Canada and China into the deep freeze: the arrest and extradition fight involving Chinese telecom executive Meng Wanzhou; China's retaliatory detention of Canadians Michael Spavor and Michael Kovrig; and even the lecture Chinese President Xi Jinping recently delivered to Prime Minister Justin Trudeau - an event caught on camera.

"In a era of profound disagreement,

we will challenge China, including when it engages in coercive behaviour - economic or otherwise - ignores human rights obligations or undermines our national security interests and those of partners in the region," the strategy document says.

In an interview airing Sunday on CBC's Rosemary Barton Live, Foreign Affairs Minister Mélanie Joly described the overall plan as "pragmatic" and "principled."

"Our approach is clear, you know, and we have a clear framework which is essentially about protecting our national interests without compromising our values and principles," Joly said.

"So what I've said many times at this point is we will challenge when we ought to and we will co-operate when we must."

Foreign investment, foreign interference

Overall, the strategy envisions about \$2 billion in investments to, among other things, strengthen

maintaining sovereignty in the region, in light of increased interest from countries like China.

"More Canadian men and women will be in the region to ensure peace and also uphold the rule of law," she said.

The strategy document has been years in the making and was eagerly anticipated by Canada's allies in the region, including Japan and South Korea, which have been lobbying for deeper co-operation. It also contains a section on India, which includes a commitment to work toward a new trade agreement.

The Liberal government promised when first elected in 2015 to develop a new approach to China after the former Conservative administration.

But Canada has struggled to figure out how to engage with an increasingly assertive - sometimes belligerent - China and its supreme leader Xi, who has openly rejected elements of Western-style governance, such as the separation of powers.

The Liberals signalled a plan to increase Canada's military commitment to the region during the prime minister's recent overseas trip to the G20 Summit.

That commitment is outlined in broad strokes in the strategy document through promises to boost engagement in international military exercises and to increase the number of Canadian warships deployed in the region.

There's also a pledge to help smaller countries in the region build up their security forces, presumably with the help of Canadian training. That pledge is similar to the promise the Liberal government made in 2017 to help increase the training and quality of United Nations peacekeepers - a promise that has gone unfulfilled.

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Don't fall for the head fake, recession still in the cards for Canada

Tomorrow we learn how the Canadian economy is holding up when Statistics Canada releases data on real gross domestic product for the third quarter. Will it be good or bad news?

That question has become more complicated of late. Recession calls have been common for Canada - and most advanced economies for that matter. But recent unexpectedly strong data here at home have thrown observers for a loop.

Earlier this month economists had expected Canada to gain 10,000 jobs in October, but actually gained more than 100,000.

Early estimates for retail, wholesale and factory sales last week also came in stronger than expected, casting doubt over forecasts for a slowdown in the fourth quarter.

Randall Bartlett, senior director of Canadian Economics at Desjardins, said these surprise signs of growth in the second half of 2022 will likely result in economists hiking their



estimates for the year.

But that doesn't mean they are more optimistic on the outlook.

"We suspect this data has largely been a head fake and that the economy is on a downward trajectory," said Bartlett in a note.

Desjardins doesn't expect 2023 growth to be stronger than earlier forecasts, in fact it could be even weaker, he said.

They still expect the economy will contract in the first two quarters of 2023 and it is now more likely that it will shrink in the third quarter as well.

"This is because very aggressive monetary tightening in 2022 will hit the economy with a lag, with the slowdown broadening beyond housing and into other segments of the economy," Bartlett wrote.

Oxford Economics is confident Canada is heading for recession, and while no one is alike, this one will be particularly unique because of the lingering impacts of the pandemic, changes in consumer and corporate behaviour, supply chain disruption and the Ukraine war.

"Canada's elevated household debt burden and still stretched housing

valuations also make the economy more vulnerable to higher interest rates and a looming global recession," wrote Tony Sillio, Oxford's director of Canada economics, in a note.

Oxford expects the Bank of Canada to hike its interest rate another 50 basis points next month to 4.25 per cent. This will likely be the peak, but unlike most downturns in the past, the Bank will hold its rate here until early 2024, said Sillio.

Interest-rate-sensitive housing will lead the way into recession, he said. Residential investment has already fallen by about 10 per cent from the first quarter, and Oxford expects another 8 per cent drop during the recession year.

Meanwhile, higher borrowing costs and falling real incomes because of high inflation will squeeze household budgets, bringing on a 1.8 per cent drop peak to trough in consumer spending, Sillio said.

That's less than the average 2.9 per cent decline in past recessions, because there is still unsatisfied demand for goods that were in short supply during the pandemic, like cars, and services, like travel, he said.

Overall, Oxford expects Canada's GDP will fall 2 per cent peak to trough from the fourth quarter of 2022 to the third quarter of 2023, which is longer, but less deep, than the average recession over the past 50 years.

Canada's top five federal contaminated sites to cost taxpayers billions to clean up

With a cost estimate of \$4.38 billion, remediation of the Giant Mine, one of the most contaminated sites in Canada, is also expected to be the most expensive federal environmental cleanup in the country's history.

The figure, recently approved by the Treasury Board of Canada, spans costs from 2005 until 2038, when active remediation at the former Yellowknife gold mine is anticipated to end. That includes \$710 million the federal government said has already been spent, but does not include costs for long-term care and maintenance.

"It doesn't bother me to much that it's going to cost \$4 billion to clean up Giant Mine. What really bothers me is that the taxpayer is covering that cost," said David Livingston, chair of the Giant Mine Oversight Board.

It indicates the federal government failed to ensure private developers provided financial security to remediate sites. He said while that has improved over time, there will likely be more issues in the future.

"We as a society need to get a better handle on what it costs us to support mining industry and oil and gas industry," he said. "If the numbers suggest that it's going to cost more to clean up a site than that site generated in revenue to the Crown, we've got a problem."

There are more than 20,000 locations listed in the federal contaminated sites inventory, from dumps and abandoned mines to military operations on federal land.

Environment and Climate Change Canada says that the Giant Mine, the four most expensive cleanups are the Faro Mine in Yukon, the Port Hope Area Initiative in Ontario, Esquimault Harbour in British Columbia and Yukon's United Keno Hill Mine.

More than \$2 billion has been spent on the five sites so far, and it's anticipated they will cost taxpayers billions more in the coming years. Their final price tags are not yet known.

The most recent numbers from the Treasury Board of Canada indicate more than \$707 million has been spent on remediation, care and maintenance at Faro Mine, a former open pit lead-zinc mine. Its remediation project is expected to



Parsons Inc. was awarded a \$108-million contract in February for construction, care and maintenance at Faro Mine until March 2026, with the option to extend the contract for the duration of active remediation. The company said the contract could ultimately span 20 years and exceed \$2 billion.

In 2012, Ottawa committed \$1.28 billion in funding over 10 years for the cleanup of historical low-level radioactive waste in the municipalities of Port Hope and Port Grandby, Ont. To date more than \$722 million has been spent on assessment and remediation.

The Port Grandby Project was completed earlier this year and has moved into long-term monitoring for hundreds of years. The Port Hope cleanup, which started in 2018, will continue into 2030.

The cleanup in the Esquimault Harbour suburb in Victoria currently has a budget of \$162.5 million. Roughly \$214 million has already been spent on remediation and assessment. The Department of National Defence said that may include costs before 2015, when the remediation project began.

Cleanup of United Keno Hill Mine, a historical silver, lead and zinc mining property near Yukon's Keno City, is estimated to cost \$125 million, including \$79 million during its active reclamation phase.

Millions of children's Tylenol and Advil arrive in Canada amid shortage

More children's pain and flu medication have arrived in Canada and people are slowly beginning to see stocked shelves.

Minister of Health Jean-Yves Duclos announced last Friday that over one million units of children's pain relief medicine have arrived in the country, and an additional 500,000 is expected to land in the next few weeks.

Duclos added that 100,000 products of acetaminophen like Tylenol will arrive from Australia in the next few days.

He says 1.1 million children's Advil products have been made available to pharmacies and retailers across the country thanks to an increase in domestic production.

"As a dad, I understand all too well the concern that many parents are experiencing lately," tweeted Duclos on Friday.

Empty shelves of children's pain and fever medicine have plagued drugstores for the past few months, leaving parents stressed as an influx of kids deal with respiratory illnesses like the flu, bacterial pneumonia, and asthma.

"As a mom of a kid who has an incredibly high fever, I am 'stressed' because we are almost out of the child's Advil. I was lucky enough to have in the cupboard," tweeted one worried mother.

"What do I do when I run out of it and there isn't any ****ing kids' medication anywhere???"

Health Canada announced that it secured more supply of children's medication on November 18, but did not specify when these would hit pharmacy shelves.

The health agency and the federal health minister have yet to reply to Daily Hive's request for comment on when these supplies will be distributed, and how many each province will get.

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Name: Nancy Sylvestre
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