

OPINION
& EDITORIALS



The CENTRAL NEWSPAPER

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Federal Liberal inaction means less homebuilding...

After a decade of rising housing costs that have literally pushed homeownership out of reach for an entire generation of Canadians, Prime Minister Mark Carney said we needed to build “at a pace not seen since the Second World War” and he promised to double housing construction to 500,000 homes per year. However, the government’s own housing agency showed that last year, Canada started building just over 259,000 homes – half the number that the Liberals had promised. In nearby Toronto, starts were down 31 per cent compared to 2024, while in other major Ontario cities, starts fell 13 per cent. The Canada Mortgage and Housing Corporation says housing starts need to reach between 430,000 to 480,000 units per year over the next decade to meet projected demand, yet Canada-wide, we haven’t seen anywhere near enough building permits to meet that target. Instead of sticking to his promises, Mark Carney backed down to bureaucratic gatekeepers who have blocked the housing we need. The Canadian Homebuilders Association noted that “the budget unfortunately retreats from the Liberal platform’s commitment to work with municipalities to reduce development taxes by 50 percent.” Over the past two decades, those taxes have soared by 700%, pricing countless Canadians out of the market. It’s no surprise that Scotiabank reports that more than half of first-time buyers who hope to purchase in the next five years feel that buying a home is still way out of reach. The situation is no better for those who are renting, as the average rent for two-bedroom units rose 5.1 per cent last year. A person earning the average income in the GTA will need to spend 42 per cent of their after-tax income just to afford a one-bedroom, while two-thirds of a minimum wage paycheque would be required to pay for a studio apartment. The Liberals’ solution is another multi-billion-dollar bureaucracy that the Parliamentary Budget Office (PBO) found will build just 5,000 homes per year – just one per cent of what was promised. Far from lowering costs, the PBO found that, under the Liberals’ affordability formula, a two bedroom apartment in the GTA would cost nearly double the national median for market rents. These same Liberals who created the housing crisis – including the Minister of Housing who hiked development charges by 141 per cent and increased housing costs by 149 per cent while mayor of Vancouver – will never fix it. We need new leadership in Ottawa that will do what it takes to restore the dream of home ownership by seriously reducing taxes on homebuilding and requiring municipalities to get on with the job of issuing more permits. Builders need to put shovels in the ground right now, to build the homes we so desperately need.

Food price inflation keeps getting worse...

People throughout this country are suffering, with a record 2.2 million Canadians having been forced to visit a food bank within a single month. Food inflation has jumped by 6.2 per cent from December 2024 to December 2025 as year-over-year inflation was at 4.2 per cent. Whether at the grocery store or at a restaurant, Canadians are not spared from inflation or taxes brought about by failed Liberal policies. Food purchased in stores rose 5 per cent in the last year while restaurant bills have increased by 8.5 per cent. 7,000 restaurants shut down in 2025 and a forecast from Dalhousie University’s Agri-Food Analytics Lab predicts that Canada will lose 4,000 restaurants in 2026, especially because of rising costs. The prices for healthy foods such as fresh or frozen beef and nuts & seeds have skyrocketed in the double digits – 16.8 per cent and 11.2 per cent respectively. Fresh or frozen chicken prices have increased by 6.5 per cent while fish, seafood, and other marine products are up 5.7 per cent. Fruits and vegetables weren’t spared from the Liberal inflation crisis either. Oranges cost 15.1 per cent more than they did a year ago and apple prices have soared by 10.4 per cent. Lettuce and carrots are up by an astounding 12.8 and 10.4 per cent. It has even reached the point where making or buying a cup of coffee is a luxury for many Canadians. Roasted or ground coffee prices have surged by 41.2 per cent year-over-year, and tea prices have also sharply increased by 26.5 per cent. Meanwhile, young parents are feeling the pinch from the ever-increasing cost of infant formula, which has risen by 6.2% in the last year. Added to all of this is the fact many Canadians can barely afford to pay for shelter, much less purchase a home. The federal government’s response to the higher cost of living was to tell us that we need to “sacrifice” to try to escape these ridiculous price hikes, but we’ve already sacrificed enough. We need lower prices right now, and this is possible only by ending inflationary government spending and by cutting the taxes that drive up the cost of food and housing. Imagine a government in Ottawa that would actually work to restore the promise of Canada: that if you work hard, you get a good life in a home you own, with healthy food on the table. Imagine.

A ‘Verified Travellers Program’ for Canadians?

Here’s an interesting and worthwhile concept for our readers to consider. A motion was tabled in the Senate chamber last autumn that called on the federal government to investigate the creation of a sovereign, domestic ‘Verified Travellers Program’ for Canadians. The proposed program would allow pre-screened, low-risk Canadian air passengers to use express security lanes at Canadian airports and would be fully administered by the federal government and its agencies. Just think how such a program could enhance the experience of domestic travel in this country. The analysis for the motion that was presented assumed that it would begin on April 1, 2026. The Parliamentary Budget Office estimates a gross cost of \$47 million between 2026 and 2031. Assuming a \$50 fee per application, the net cost was estimated to be \$7 million over that same period. Historical data on membership and cost for the NEXUS program were obtained from Canada Border Services Agency and was used to compare the travel patterns of domestic, trans-border, and international travelers. It was assumed that it would take around five years for the new program’s membership to catch up to demand. Although there is some degree of uncertainty as to the take-up rate, membership would undoubtedly grow over time. This is a worthwhile scheme that deserves to be implemented, and it marks a refreshing change from most of what comes out of Ottawa these days.

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Letters To The Editor:

WHAT IS ON YOUR MIND? Send letters to newspaper@ocentral.com

Dear Editor:

Yesterday, under the direction of Administrator and Acting CEO Jean Lépine, the Real Estate Council of Ontario (RECO) announced eight key initiatives designed to create significant and meaningful changes for the organization. The Ontario Real Estate Association (OREA) and our nearly 100,000 REALTOR® Members commend Mr. Lépine for his decisive actions and we support the new action plan put forward by RECO, which will go a long way towards restoring trust in the regulator and helping them get back to the basics. OREA and Ontario REALTORS® are particularly encouraged to see the efforts and strategies to improve engagement with stakeholders, aiming to reconnect RECO with consumers and the real estate sector on important topics such as trust account oversight and education, issues that OREA has called on decision-makers to address and reform. The regulatory modernization plan put forward by RECO in this list of initiatives is another great opportunity to drive even further real changes in the real estate industry, particularly with the next phase of regulations in the Trust in Real Estate Services Act (TRESA). By creating a new, more consumer-focused regulatory framework, we can ensure that Ontario REALTORS® are North American leaders in consumer protection, professionalism, and education. But there is more work to be done. In order to build back businesses and livelihoods, OREA is calling on RECO and the Government of Ontario to fully compensate real estate professionals who were adversely impacted by the iPro Realty matter. OREA remains committed to advocating for reforms that strengthen transparency, accountability, and public confidence in Ontario real estate.” - **Cathy Polan, OREA President**

Dear Editor:

Scugog Council recently deferred decisions to designate the Fairgrounds park a heritage site for its historic value, to fulfill a councillor’s request to plant trees on the site, and to renew the 10-year lease to the Port Perry Agricultural Society (PPAS). Instead, Council proceeded to hold a closed meeting. When news broke about the release of an RFP, without public input, to hire a consultant for a visioning exercise for possible future uses of the Fairgrounds park, residents were rightly concerned that Council may try to sell the Fairgrounds or part of it, and two petitions to Keep the Fairgrounds Public were launched. Soon after, the Mayor spoke to Durham Radio News. When asked about the petitions, the Mayor said, “...they’re just saying ‘save the Fairgrounds,’... they’re not giving us any ideas of what they envision for the Fairgrounds.” In fact, younger Fair Board members were instrumental in the conceptual Agri Park design unique to Port Perry, which was professionally presented and distributed to Council and the community. Council offered no public recognition of their efforts, and their vision for the Fairgrounds was dismissed. It should be noted, the recent Mayor’s gala theme was about “Empowering the Next Generation: Dream Big, Start Young, Lead Boldly.” Unfortunately, these soundbites do not align with the Mayor’s reality. The Mayor claimed the Fairgrounds is only used three days a year and is “underutilized.” A recent letter published in this newspaper disputed the Mayor’s claim, and listed other events that occur throughout the year, as well as community stakeholders who use their Fairgrounds park everyday. There is no official benchmark to measure parkland utilization that I have found. The provincial government promotes large parks and open green space, easily accessible within the urban setting, to support the health and wellbeing of the community, especially in the Golden Horseshoe where population growth is expected. Reports also suggest that large open spaces in the urban setting help mitigate the effects of climate change. Why did the Mayor choose to speak to radio media about the Fairgrounds park instead of engaging with her constituents through an in house open public meeting? Was it to demonstrate her authority over her constituents? Was it to prime the Durham-wide audience that the fairgrounds or part of it could be sold? The Mayor’s less-than-candid statements through radio and social media do not fit well with her claim that other parties are circulating misinformation on social media. At the special council meeting held last September, delegates who presented before council, and constituents’ letters included in the meeting agenda, were all in favour of keeping the Fairgrounds park in public hands. The opportunity was open to all residents’ to express their opinions. Later, the Mayor invited the CAO to speak to his report, “The Fairground Visioning Exercise RFP - Award and Budget Approval” and he stated clearly, “...the property [Fairgrounds park] is not for sale.” Neither the Mayor nor any Council member challenged the CAO’s statement, which is on the public record. In a recent email exchange, the Mayor suggested the Fairgrounds could be sold or developed and a long term care home could be put on it, depending on what they hear from the community. The Mayor was clearly at odds with the CAO’s report, yet he subsequently claimed, “the Mayor’s reply was clearly a hypothetical possibility.” An extraordinary response concerning a highly contentious issue. Why muddy the waters? Hypothetical statements create confusion and division. The Mayor has spoken openly about the need for more housing even though several local housing projects remain pending. The desolate Kings Landing site, approved for mixed use housing and retail development, and land specifically zoned for a long term care home on Simcoe Street, have sat stalled and empty for many years. The Mayor endorsed these projects when she was a ward councillor. Surprisingly, when asked, the Mayor claimed not to know the status of either of these developments. Surely, it would be prudent to have staff proactively engage with the owners of these lands to move these projects forward, rather than upset the community with a threat to sell off public parkland for more housing. Why does the mayor lean towards housing on the Fairgrounds park? Does the Housing committee have her ear? Is a favour owed? Is it for short term monetary gain, or other reasons? A Blackstock resident recently wrote about their desire for more housing to grow their community, as well. The Mayor and the majority of her Council quashed all ideas from the community to enhance the Fairgrounds park, shut the public out from discussions about the RFP, dismissed the petitions and ignored overwhelming public objection to hiring a costly outside consultant. The underhanded way in which Council forced their position without public engagement, under the guise of ‘capturing all voices,’ was not an act of bold leadership but of autocratic control, in Machiavellian style. The suggestion from staff that the township lacks the resources and expertise to do a visioning exercise sounded like a convenient excuse. Interestingly, staff were very much engaged with the recent Palmer Park revitalization project. What changed in the meantime? Community stakeholders familiar with the Fairgrounds have the expertise, and have already shown what can be done to improve the Fairgrounds park without the need for outside consultants. To be clear, the Fairgrounds park belongs to the people of the Township of Scugog. Neither the township administrators nor the council of the day have exclusive ownership of the Fairgrounds. Before the end of February, when a decision must be made whether or not to continue with the consultant-led visioning exercise, I challenge the Mayor to hold an in house open public meeting. The Mayor must acknowledge the Fairgrounds as a public park, clear the contradiction between herself and the CAO, get back on track with his report and make an attempt to repair the distrust between council and the community. **Sincerely, Sharon Dodgson-Smith**

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