The Residential Construction Council of Ontario is urging the province and municipalities to take a hard look at the regulatory system that it says is impeding the development of new housing across the GTA.

“If you look at housing as a product and you look at the process through which you produce housing as the supply chain, we’ve got huge problems in our supply chain, with huge uncertainty, delays and massive costs,” said RESCON president Richard Lyall.

Routine planning approvals are too slow, official plans and zoning by-laws are chronically outdated and there is a lack of transparency and accountability with respect to regulatory agencies that are required to green-light development projects, Lyall argued.

In an effort to address the challenges in the housing supply chain, RESCON has released a report entitled “Streamlining the Development and Building Approvals Process in Ontario,” RESCON regulatory reform and technical standards director Michael de Lint was the lead author on the report, working in consultation with a steering group led by BILD’s former president and CEO Bryan Tuckey and project consultant, architect and former Markham and Pickering building official Tim Moore.

The report proposes several recommendations to speed up the building approval process on Ontario, which include reducing timeframes for updating official plans in order to comply with the 2017 Growth Plan from five years to two years. Also recommended is a reduction in the time permitted to update zoning by-laws from three to one year and site plan controls from 1 month to two days.

“We’ve kind of got two worlds—we’ve got the world of the developer that’s very disciplined in terms of timeframes...and municipalities are part of a different world, not a disciplined world, where timeframes don’t matter,” said de Lint.

The report also recommends web-based information sharing among municipal divisions and external regulatory agencies to expedite the approval process.

The City of Mississauga implemented an electronic plan solution, called ePlans, in January 2016 to accelerate the approval of development applications. Over 90 per cent of all building permit applications and 100 per cent of all site plan applications are submitted online and processed electronically.

“Since implementation, we have seen a 30 per cent reduction in first review cycle...”
times compared to paper submissions,” said the city’s chief building officer Ezio Savini. “We have seen an average 10 per cent reduction in overall time to issue building permits.”

But not all municipalities have followed suit, with many cities across the GTA, including Oshawa, Aurora and Newmarket, failing to provide electronic file sharing among their municipal departments and external agencies.

“Our reproduction costs are just insane. In a large high-rise project you could spend half a million to a million dollars on just printing,” noted de Lint.

The report also recommends the use of a coordinating professional who can ensure that applicants’ submissions are complete and contain all relevant documentation.

Alberta and British Columbia rely on a similar procedure, with “letters of assurance” required from design coordinators as part of the development submission.

RESCON also recommends mandatory and comprehensive pre-consultations between developers and city staff on new projects, greater use of 3D modelling to enhance site plan reviews and the use of community planning permits. These permits combine zoning, minor variance and site plan control into one application. Community planning permits is implemented through official plan policies and CPP by-laws. Where a CPP by-law is in effect in a specific geographic area, it replaces the zoning by-law.

The Town of Ajax is undertaking a study of the CPP system to examine whether it would be a suitable replacement to the current planning regime.

RESCON will consult with the incoming provincial government on the implementation of these recommendations in the coming months.

“Our industry has been buried in additional red tape and costs...so we really, really...need to take a hard look at the business of government and the business of the regulatory system,” said Lyall.

The Residential Construction Council of Ontario is calling for faster planning updates and community planning permits as a way to facilitate more timely planning approvals in accordance local performance standards, such as Toronto’s avenues and midrise standards, pictured here.

The Residential Construction Council of Ontario is recommending 3D building information modelling be submitted as part of an e-permitting system to help improve efficiency of the development review process and compliance with municipal planning performance standards.

The Town of Ajax is undertaking a study of the CPP system to examine whether it would be a suitable replacement to the current planning regime.

RESCON will consult with the incoming provincial government on the implementation of these recommendations in the coming months.

“Our industry has been buried in additional red tape and costs...so we really, really...need to take a hard look at the business of government and the business of the regulatory system,” said Lyall. •