

Sarah Climenhaga

Candidate for Mayor of the City of Toronto
City of Toronto

The following answers were provided by the candidate in response to [a letter sent by the Toronto Society of Architects on September 20, 2022](#) outlining three questions related to issues of the built environment. Answers have been copied and pasted into this page for clarity and ease of access, but all answers are verbatim and no changes or edits have been made.

Q1: Housing is a fundamental human right, and yet an increasing number of residents across the Greater Toronto Area are struggling to pay rent or find an affordable place to live. What policies and actions do you believe need to be implemented to address this crisis?

A: There is no single solution or magic formula to address the housing crunch in Toronto. Time is of the essence in taking action since everything from addiction to encampments to labour shortages to the loss of green space has roots in the lack of housing in this city. Yet the more I learn, the more I appreciate the tremendous potential in this city to create more affordable housing. Just a few potential areas to address include:

- Zoning reform to allow increased density in areas dominated by single family homes.
- Better cooperation between city staff and those who wish to build housing so that heritage and urban design guidelines support affordable housing rather than prevent it.
- Do more to ensure a state of good repair in city housing
- Price vacancy taxes appropriately to return empty units to use as housing
- Prioritize high density on main streets and transit corridors and stations

These are only a few options that we can explore when it comes to increasing housing supply in Toronto. From tiny homes or towers, nothing should be ruled out when it comes to housing. And we must encourage meaningful public consultation in new ways that allows residents to have constructive input to help move projects forward. There are already many expert recommendations, staff reports, and great ideas about what to do to increase housing in this city. The only thing missing is political will and the collaborative approach to secure resident support. That's what I offer - the will to act, which I've demonstrated from my past advocacy on city issues (see my website for more background). My commitment to action on housing was noted in an [article featuring my approach by Alex Bozickovic in the Globe and Mail](#) when I ran for mayor in 2018. And I have demonstrated my collaborative approach over the course of my campaign everywhere from how I interact on Twitter, to my continued engagement with fellow mayoral and council candidates (my upcoming self organized mayoral debate is Tuesday October 4) to my campaign podcasts which feature a variety of urban leaders including [housing experts](#).

Q2: The design, construction and operation of our built environment accounts for nearly 40% of energy related carbon emissions, contributing to the ongoing climate crisis affecting us today. What do you believe needs to be prioritised to reduce carbon emissions within the built environment?

A: We ensure design excellence in many ways. I suggest at least the following three:

1. Ensure we know the needs of the residents who are meant to be served by our parks, our libraries, our streets and public spaces. We will know this if we engage residents in meaningful public discussion - not pro forma consultation of the past - so that residents themselves offer design inputs and guidelines at the onset.
2. Involving those with design expertise in the earliest stages of new projects.
3. Work to maximize community engagement through removing barriers like onerous paperwork or fees for community activities so we encourage neighbours to become deeply invested in these spaces. An engaged community will work in concert with staff and politicians to ensure community spaces are not neglected.

Q3: In towns and cities, so much of life happens in the shared public spaces—in our parks, libraries and streets. How can we ensure these civic spaces achieve design excellence in their initial conception and construction, and that they are properly maintained so they may continue to serve future generations?

A: Priority needs to go towards making do with what we already have as much as possible. Rather than demolishing old buildings, sending the materials to landfill, and importing new materials for new builds, find ways of repurposing what we have or using onsite or local materials as much as possible. The city can work with contractors and developers to incentivize projects that are innovative in their materials and processes. I would encourage as much as possible the incorporation of natural and even living materials in our urban environment. There are many exciting possibilities - like buildings made from mycelium or street furniture made out of soil and grass - if we open our minds and try new approaches. As with everything, there won't be one solution, but with political will, I am confident we can take a regenerative instead of an exploitative approach that integrates our environment with city life.