

**October 2020 Speaker**  
**Ana Bailão**  
**Toronto's Housing Challenges**

“Covid-19 is illuminating the urgent intertwined issues of housing shortages and homelessness that have too long escaped attention,” Ana Bailão, Toronto Deputy Mayor since 2017 and chair of the city’s Planning and Housing Committee, started off in her passionate talk on the vital importance of meeting the city’s many housing challenges. “Home life has at no time been more important than during this crisis. The advice is to ‘Stay home’ but not everyone has stable housing. Even before, this was one of the most challenging and important issues facing Toronto and cities across the world. Safe, secure, affordable, comfortable housing is a human right.”

This is a “new reality,” she stressed, and it requires “new solutions and collaboration between all levels of government and non-profit and profit sectors, There should be equality, fairness, inclusiveness, progress and opportunity – all the components that make a city great.” As examples of good collaboration she cited the city forming “study partnerships” with universities “to tap into their talent;” non-profits turning to private developers for construction advice; shelter agreements with hotels; use of the Better Living Centre at Exhibition Place for temporary shelter. When asked how UWCNY can help, she said, “Advocacy to get federal and provincial support, to make them understand that this is an issue that impacts everyone.” The federal government is providing substantial financial support, the Ontario government not much. A UWCNY member suggested we focus on it.

A major “new solution” is the decision not to have a one answer fits all approach but rather a targeted strategy of a variety of accommodation: laneway, gentle density and modular. However, she conceded that laneway housing is not affordable for many; rather it is largely being done by people for other family members to be nearby such as aging parents or 20-somethings unable to afford the cost of a home. “Gentle density” is the term for duplexes, triplexes and low-rise, 4-5 story apartment buildings. But for this solution to occur, zoning changes are necessary since duplexes and triplexes are not now allowed in much of the city. Modular construction has the advantage of being quick. It is being used for the creation of a “complete community of 50,000 new residents” in Scarborough’s Golden Mile.

Another “new solution” is to group people by need; for example, dedicated housing for women and girls; seniors; people with mental health issues. The provincial government is calling for transit-oriented development for “more contained, more welcoming community growth.”

Ana did not endorse a member’s query whether empty office towers should be rezoned into residential although she did say reviews are underway about what percentage of downtown land should be dedicated for employment. “We’re looking at the impact of teleworking but we don’t want a ghost downtown. We need a healthy balance between business and residential use.”

Her planning and housing committee is working with the city’s Toronto Atmospheric Fund to retrofit Toronto Community Housing buildings for lower greenhouse gas emission.

*Susan Goldenberg*