

Hamilton's housing crisis is a looming disaster

MIKE COLLINS-WILLIAMS

In an increasingly turbulent world, it is time to get our house in order in Hamilton.

The housing crisis in Hamilton is no longer just a crisis — it is an economic catastrophe in the making. The latest Canadian Home Builders' Association (CHBA) Municipal Benchmarking Study confirms what those in the industry have long known: Hamilton is failing to build enough housing, and the consequences will be dire for homeowners, renters and the thousands of workers in the construction sector who depend on new builds for their livelihood.

Hamilton ranks dead last among 23 peer Canadian cities in approval timelines for new housing developments. This is not a new phenomenon — CHBA has conducted this study twice before, with Hamilton ranking 15th in 2020, 18th in 2022 and now in last place. Red tape, excessive municipal charges and an uncompetitive investment climate have made building in Hamilton a bureaucratic nightmare.

This is not just a housing issue — it is an economic crisis. With the launch of the trade war with the United States, Hamilton's inability to build housing efficiently will only further weaken its already fragile economic foundation.

Hamilton needs a wholesale review of our planning and development review policy framework if we are going to address its shortcomings. As a whole — despite Hamilton endorsing no urban expansion — intensification project after project has been delayed or sent to the Ontario Land Tribunal. We are mired in inconsequential details that add months to project timelines, such as fences, brick colour and the proper types of native species of plants. It's compounded by the need to critique the 93 studies that must be submitted just to build housing — something everyone agrees we need.

The construction industry, a key pillar of Hamilton's economy, is already feeling the pain. With fewer housing starts, skilled tradespeople and construction workers are seeing their job prospects diminish. If this trend continues, Hamilton could face a significant wave of job losses in a sector that has traditionally provided stable, middle-class employment.

Hamilton should be a prime destination for housing investment, given its proximity to the GTA and its rich industrial history. Instead, investors are choosing to put their money elsewhere. By contrast, cities like Edmonton and Calgary are attracting investment because they have streamlined their processes and cut unnecessary costs. This failure to attract development to Hamilton is not just an inconvenience — it is a direct threat to the city's economic viability. Without significant changes, Hamilton will continue to fall behind, losing jobs and investment to cities that are more business-friendly.

Canada is in the midst of a trade war with the United States, a conflict that could have serious implications for Hamilton's manufacturing sector. Hamilton needs to be doing everything possible to strengthen its economy. Housing construction should be a major driver of economic stability in uncertain times. But without a fundamental shift in how Hamilton manages development approvals and fees, the city risks exacerbating the downturn. The construction sector cannot withstand both a trade war and a hostile investment climate at home. Hamilton needs to wake up to this reality before it is too late.

Bottom line: the status quo is failing Hamilton. We need bold change at Hamilton City Hall. Political and bureaucratic leadership must be willing to cut through the administrative inertia and put policies in place that will actually increase the housing supply. The time for half-measures and political lip service is over. We need real action through a new Housing and Development Task Force that should be tasked with reducing approval timelines; reviewing the entire structure of taxes, charges, and fees with an objective to reduce the overall tax burden; and to eliminate unnecessary red tape by focusing on process efficiencies and best practices in other jurisdictions.

If Hamilton's leadership does not act decisively, the city risks stagnation, job losses and continued housing unaffordability. The choice is clear: reform or decline. The people of Hamilton deserve better, and the time for action is now.

MIKE COLLINS-WILLIAMS IS THE CEO OF THE WEST END HOMEBUILDERS' ASSOCIATION.



City leaders must be willing to cut through administrative inertia and put policies in place that will increase the housing supply, Mike Collins-Williams writes.

THE HAMILTON SPECTATOR FILE PHOTO



ROCKY W. WIDNER GETTY IMAGES FILE PHOTO

Exactly 26 years ago, on March 29, 1999, Wayne Gretzky scored his last regular season goal. He carried Canada's game into places where people otherwise just wanted to surf, Thomas Froese writes.

Don't let geopolitics eat your inner world



THOMAS FROESE
OPINION

Today's fun fact is that 39-year-old Alexander Ovechkin can still fire a puck about 100 miles per hour.

No wonder he's about to amass more goals in a career than anyone in NHL history, even Wayne Gretzky, the Brantford son who played hockey with uncommon skill and grace.

Today's other fun fact is that exactly 26 years ago, on March 29, 1999, Gretzky scored his last regular season career goal, 894. That's the tally Ovechkin is closing in on. The goals chase goes beyond a sports story. More on this in a minute.

First, here's something on March Kindness. March was an especially kind month for Gretzky while he rewrote NHL record books over his 20-year career.

On March 28, 1982, he scored goal 92 of that season, a ridiculous 43-year-old record that might never

fall. On March 17, 1990, he reached 10 straight seasons of at least 100 assists. On March 28, 1996, he reached 100 points for the 15th time.

It was March 23, 1994, when Gretzky scored career goal 802, beating the old NHL goal record of his boyhood idol, Gordie Howe. For that, on March 30, Gretzky received a Rolls-Royce from L.A. Kings owner Bruce McNall. Gretzky's wife, Janet, and their three children were there watching Dad in his long golden hair waving to the cheering crowd.

So American, this moment of extravagance. Even so, Gretzky, then 33, looked genuinely happy and at peace with his life. He'd just wanted to play hockey — and in doing so, he'd carried and branded Canada's game into places where people otherwise just wanted to surf.

It's worth remembering in March 2025, a month of anger, a March Madness directed at Gretzky. Why is he with Donald Trump? Where's Gretzky's Team Canada jersey? Ovechkin also knows political entanglement for engaging with Vladimir Putin, possibly from fear, but

leading people to wonder about the hockey player.

They're fair questions. But my own view — and I don't have a statue-topping, street-name-changing temperament — is that sport can occupy a more soulful space. It's closer to art than politics, closer to our human essence, a place that's nourishing.

So be wise about our times, but don't let today's geopolitics or the ravaging outside world eat your private inner world. Have guardrails for inner peace. It's what I tell myself.

People, including celebrities, are more layered and complex — and vulnerable — than we often imagine. Depending on the day of the week, any one of us can be a mystery, even to ourselves. True, we make bad decisions, which has consequences, and we all know how this works in life. That's fair. Even so, people are more important than politics.

Put another way, we (hopefully) live by various principles, including political principles. But life is experienced more deeply in relationship with real people of flesh and blood, even messy, connected in community, appreciating our different life stories. That's what's really interesting.

Gretzky's story has deep Canadian and Hamilton roots. Nothing will change this.

An interesting chapter in Ovechkin's story involves his brother, Sergei, who died after a car crash when Ovechkin was 10. It's why Sergei's name is stitched in Cyrillic lettering on Ovechkin's glove; why, after scoring, he often points heavenward; why he brought the Stanley Cup to Sergei's gravesite.

The day after Sergei's death, young Alex was on the ice, crying. "That moment I realized that life is that. When it's gone, it's gone. You can't get it back." That crying Russian boy never imagined this 2025 record moment.

Likewise, when Wayne's father, Walter, watched his boy on his backyard Brantford rink, he never imagined Wayne, now a grandfather, sitting in some NHL arena watching, even cheering, a Russian — a Russian! — in the NHL about to break some golden record of Wayne's.

I mean, come on. Remember 1972 Canada vs. Russia? But times, and people, change.

Now, there's this unique moment in our hockey culture. Stormy politics aside, we can appreciate it. Maybe even glean something from it.

FIND THOMAS FROESE AT THOMASFROESE.COM AND THOMASFROESE.SUBSTACK.COM.

It's time to reconsider what a local author is

CATHY BURRELL

"Reading your memoir, I found myself thinking about moments in my own childhood that I hadn't thought of in years. Brownies, Barbie, small-town cafés. Long ago freedom to wander without fear, beloved childhood pets ... but most of all, my parents."

That's what Brenda, a reader, originally from Alberta, emailed to me one day.

Like many Canadians, I wrote a book last year. Not a novel with a tricky plot twist, or a treatise on the state of Canadian-U.S. relations (which would have been timely) — I wrote a memoir.

This is my first published book, and so I'm not known in literary circles — no one knows me, except for a handful of hearty souls in the Okanagan Valley who may have read a piece I have published in the local paper.

My book is set in various locations across the country: Calgary, Yellowknife, Winnipeg and Grand Beach.

Something strange happened in my family in 1973, when I was 10 years old.

My dad went bankrupt, and we had to move to another town where he got a job, and that place was about 1,750 kilometres due north in the Northwest Territories.

This event changed the course of my life, and I wrote 240 pages about it.

I understand how to sell things — my career was in retail, and I owned a couple of stores for nearly 20

years. However, I know next to nothing about selling books. So I have been stumbling around armed with a comprehensive "Book marketing handbook" from my publisher, Friesen Press, and I have learned a few key things.

Libraries and bookstores in Canada generally like to carry books by "local" authors. I have been turned down from bookstores only a two-hour drive away: "Kelowna authors just don't seem to sell."

On a provincial level, I received this very polite rejection from a Saskatchewan bookseller: "Due to a lack of Saskatchewan-related content, it is not something we are interested in carrying."

I read "Anne of Green Gables" and "Lost in the Barrens" when I arrived in Yellowknife, a month before school started in September 1973. I had walked to the library, dirty and tired and a little disoriented from the two-day drive and the 24-hour daylight. The librarian was kind enough to show me around and help me check out the books.

I had never been to P.E.I., but I loved reading all about Anne Shirley and the descriptions of the farm where she lived on the island. I had an aunt who reminded me of Marilla, and I wiped away more than one tear when Matthew died.

When I moved on to "Lost in the Barrens," I will never forget Farley Mowat's description of the clouds of blackflies that surround every person and animal when you go much further north than I was in

Yellowknife.

The whole "local" author issue is super puzzling. I thought I was Canadian.

I was born in Winnipeg, and have lived in North Vancouver, Calgary, Yellowknife, Abbotsford, White Rock, Calgary again, and I am currently in Kelowna. I think that makes me a super-duper Canadian. A Western-Canadian Canadian, if you like. But does that mean my email to the library system in P.E.I. will be immediately binned for my non-localness?

Right now, trade barriers between Canadian provinces and territories are making headlines as Canada faces a vicious trade war with our closest neighbour and ally, the United States. Our government leaders across the country are being urged to put aside their regional differences and make Canadian trade between regions our strength — a way to mitigate the economic pain sure to accompany the coming U.S. tariffs.

I never thought literature should be on the list of things Canadians should start sharing across regions, but it's clear our idea of "local author" needs to expand well beyond the next cornfield or fishing town — to the whole country.

There's so much we can learn from each other.

Let's break down those regional boundaries. Let's trade in ideas, creativity and stories, too.

I have never been a nationalist, per se. I don't fly the Canadian flag at my Kelowna condo, but I think I will start my next round of emails with a slight change to my opening: "Good day, my name is Cathy Burrell, and I am a Canadian author."

CATHY BURRELL IS A CANADIAN AUTHOR AND ENTREPRENEUR. HER NEWLY RELEASED MEMOIR, "WHY ARE YOU SO?" IS AVAILABLE THROUGH FRIESEN PRESS.