

COUNCIL

REGION WANTS PROVINCIAL PLANNING TRIBUNALS ELIMINATED

TESS KALINOWSKI
tkalinowski@thestar.ca

It's a local resolution that politicians in Halton Region are hoping will spark a provincial movement to push the province to eliminate what many municipal officials call an antiquated system of provincial oversight on local planning and development decisions.

Halton Regional Council voted unanimously July 10 to demand Premier Doug Ford's Progressive Conservative government immediately cease imposing the old Ontario Municipal Board (OMB) rules on the Local Planning Appeal Tribunal (LPAT) - the body that the previous Liberal government created to replace the OMB.

Ultimately, the region wants the tribunals eliminated entirely, saying they delay the construction of new housing and drive up the costs.

"Barring (the province) doing the right thing, this will be the election issue in 2022," said Burlington Mayor Marianne Meed Ward, who is calling on other cities to join the fight individually and through organizations such as the Association of Municipalities of Ontario (AMO).

"If they want to be more than a one-term government they're going to have to start listening to the community on all of their policies," she said. "This is just the latest. Their cuts to essential services, downloading costs to municipalities are exceedingly unpopular. They are aware of that."

Municipal councils can make decisions on everything from taxes to traffic. Planning is the only front on which locally elected politicians are subject to provincial oversight, she said.

She accused the Ford government of gratifying the development industry by turning back the clock on the LPAT through its omnibus housing Bill 108, More Homes, More Choices Act.

The old OMB rules favour developers because they are permitted to start their cases from scratch, as if the municipality's planning decisions and rules didn't apply, Meed Ward said. Under the Liberals' LPAT rules, developers could only appeal on the grounds that the municipality had failed to comply with provincial policies.

Municipal Affairs and Housing Minister Steve Clark's office said the province is taking the best of the OMB and LPAT "to create a system that can make final decisions in a timely manner."

It said there are 100,000 housing units, three years' worth of construction, tied up in a backlog that has occurred since the LPAT was formed. At that time, the then Liberal government allowed applications already in process to be grandfathered under the old OMB rules.

"The LPAT decision-making process is slow and there is a substantial backlog of former OMB legacy cases, preventing housing from being built," said an emailed statement from Clark's office.

"We want to ensure that barriers are removed for those seeking to launch an appeal and move toward a cost-recovery model so that homebuilders pay more for the system, not the people of Ontario," it said.

But Halton Hills Mayor Rick Bonnette said eliminating the tribunals is the quickest way for municipalities to find the savings that the province is push-

ing.

He denied that Halton is trying to shun highrise development.

"We have supported growth. Our track record and population stats show we're one of the fastest growing regions in Canada," Bonnette said.

Halton has spent \$5 million for three years of OMB/LPAT appeals, he said. When the latest amendments to the Ontario growth plan were approved in 2017, Halton budgeted \$6 million for appeals, including \$1.1 million from Halton Hills, which has a population of about 62,000, he said.

"We didn't spend it all but we still have to budget it and we still have to have it ready. At the end of the day we spent two-thirds," Bonnette said.

"We're slaves to the consultants and the lawyers and the cash box," he said.

An OMB fight against a condo at Lakeshore Rd. and Martha St. in Burlington cost hundreds of thousands of dollars on both sides, Meed Ward said.

Adi Development Group applied to build a 28-storey condo on a site that was municipally approved for four to eight storeys. Four years later, the OMB approved 26 storeys.

Meed Ward also accused the OMB rules of fuelling land speculation.

"When people look at a piece of land that is zoned for four storeys, maybe eight and an approval for 26 comes in, the next person who has a similarly zoned parcel is pricing it at 26 storeys," she said.

"We have seen the rapid land escalation of values because of decisions that are wildly out of line with existing official plan and zoning policies. Those plans are all approved by the province so the province is overruling itself."

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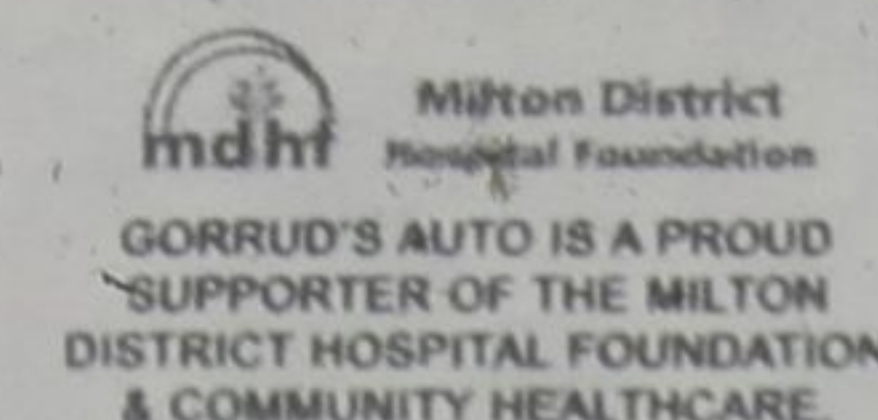
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