

Density targets would bring skyscrapers, summit says

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There is overwhelming concern among municipal leaders in the Greater Toronto and Hamilton Area with the provincial government's proposed aggressive population density targets, according to a summit of municipal leaders, led by former Mississauga mayor Hazel McCallion, in York Region on Friday.

"It was absolutely amazing the consistency of the positions taken by the municipalities. It was really consistent," McCallion, an adviser to Premier Kathleen Wynne on issues facing the GTHA, said at a media conference following the closed door summit.

"They are concerned about the density. They are concerned about lack of sound planning rather than planning by numbers. They are concerned about the lack of economic plans to back up the growth plan. They are concerned about no financial plan. They are concerned about the jump from one density to a much higher density. And they clearly indicated one plan does not fit all."

But environmental groups are urging the province not to back down.

"It's not surprising that Hazel McCallion is the one calling for a stop to a more progressive idea about growth in the province. She is the architect for urban sprawl, which (Markham Mayor) Frank Scarpitta has taken an example of," said Sony Rai, director of Sustainable Vaughan, adding municipalities don't want to give up development charge fees that come with new housing developments.

Higher density projects are needed to support investments in public transit and are a planning approach supported by younger generations as opposed to the old guard of municipal leaders, he said.

Another four million people will be added to the Greater Golden Horseshoe over the next quarter century.

The province is looking to accommodate the additional people as it updates the Growth Plan for the Greater Golden Horseshoe, the Greenbelt Plan, the Oak Ridges Moraine Conservation Plan and the Niagara Escarpment Plan.

But the province's approach could fill communities with skyscrapers and other high-density housing as residents are crammed into relatively small parcels of land,



Susie Kockerscheidt/Metroland

Markham Mayor Frank Scarpitti (left), former Mississauga mayor Hazel McCallion and York regional chairperson Wayne Emmerson hold a media conference following a summit at York Region's headquarters in Newmarket, where municipal leaders discussed concerns with provincial growth plans for the Greater Toronto and Hamilton Area.

in some cases in communities without the necessary transit and other services to support them, McCal-

lion, Scarpitti and York regional chairperson Wayne Emmerson said at the media conference.

"We have very serious concerns," Scarpitti said, adding that while municipal leaders endorse the idea of increased densities and protecting greenspace, the province is pushing too much intensification too fast and not always in the right areas.

"We need to press the reset button."

Emerson agreed municipal leaders have serious concerns.

"I wouldn't say they are freaking out, but they are worried. There is a consequence to these (intensification) numbers. It's going to cost us a lot of money and where is that number coming from? In the plan, there is no funding," he said.

While the province has indicated it wants to pass legislation on the growth plans next spring, McCallion called on Queen's Park to stop ramming through the plans.

This should not be rushed because this is an opportunity for Wynne to get it right, to get the growth plan right for the GTHA, McCallion said. If it's going to take extra time, then take it. It's got to be done right.

"You don't rush a policy that has such major impact on municipalities and then on the lives of residents within the municipalities."

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