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**Official Report
of Debates
(Hansard)**

HE-14

**Journal
des débats
(Hansard)**

HE-14

**Standing Committee
on Heritage, Infrastructure
and Cultural Policy**

Better Municipal Governance Act,
2022

1st Session
43rd Parliament

Wednesday 30 November 2022

**Comité permanent du
patrimoine, de l'infrastructure
et de la culture**

Loi de 2022 visant à améliorer la
gouvernance municipale

1^{re} session
43^e législature

Mercredi 30 novembre 2022

Chair: Laurie Scott
Clerk: Isaiah Thorning

Présidente : Laurie Scott
Greffier : Isaiah Thorning

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LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY OF ONTARIO

ASSEMBLÉE LÉGISLATIVE DE L'ONTARIO

**STANDING COMMITTEE ON HERITAGE,
INFRASTRUCTURE
AND CULTURAL POLICY**

**COMITÉ PERMANENT DU PATRIMOINE,
DE L'INFRASTRUCTURE
ET DE LA CULTURE**

Wednesday 30 November 2022

Mercredi 30 novembre 2022

The committee met at 0901 in committee room 1.

**BETTER MUNICIPAL
GOVERNANCE ACT, 2022**

**LOI DE 2022 VISANT À AMÉLIORER
LA GOUVERNANCE MUNICIPALE**

Consideration of the following bill:

Bill 39, An Act to amend the City of Toronto Act, 2006 and the Municipal Act, 2001 and to enact the Duffins Rouge Agricultural Preserve Repeal Act, 2022 / Projet de loi 39, Loi visant à modifier la Loi de 2006 sur la cité de Toronto et la Loi de 2001 sur les municipalités et à édicter la Loi de 2022 abrogeant la Loi sur la Réserve agricole de Duffins-Rouge.

The Chair (Ms. Laurie Scott): Good morning, everyone. I call this meeting of the Standing Committee on Heritage, Infrastructure and Cultural Policy to order. We are meeting today to begin public hearings on Bill 39, An Act to amend the City of Toronto Act, 2006 and the Municipal Act, 2001 and to enact the Duffins Rouge Agricultural Preserve Repeal Act, 2022. Are there any questions before we begin?

**STATEMENT BY THE MINISTER
AND RESPONSES**

The Chair (Ms. Laurie Scott): I will now call on the Honourable Steve Clark, Minister of Municipal Affairs and Housing, as the first witness. Minister, you will have up to 20 minutes for your presentation, followed by 40 minutes of questions from the members of the committee. The questions will be divided into two rounds of seven and a half minutes for the government members, two rounds of seven and a half minutes for the official opposition members and two rounds of five minutes for the independent members of the committee as a group.

Minister, welcome. The floor is all yours. You can please begin.

Hon. Steve Clark: Thanks, Chair. Good morning to you. Good morning to members of the Standing Committee on Heritage, Infrastructure and Cultural Policy. I'm pleased to be here this morning to talk more about our government's proposed Better Municipal Governance Act. The proposed act that we're talking about this morning is another step toward fulfilling our government's commitment to get 1.5 million homes built by 2031.

I want to remind members of the committee that our government was re-elected with a strong mandate to help more Ontarians find a home that meets their needs and their budget. We know that municipal governments play an essential role in fulfilling that goal. As Ontario's Minister of Municipal Affairs and Housing, it's my job to make sure municipalities have the tools they need to get more homes built, and built quickly.

We are a prosperous province in Ontario, but we're growing as well. That prosperity has increased the demand for homes, and unfortunately we're not building enough homes to meet that demand. Too many Ontarians are struggling to find a place to live that truly meets their needs and their budget. Whether it's young people, newcomers to our province or seniors looking to downsize, our government recognizes the scale and the seriousness of the problem, and the need to act without delay.

That's why we've introduced, as a government, three housing supply action plans: More Homes, More Choice, in 2019; More Homes for Everyone, in March 2022; and our most recent plan, More Homes Built Faster, which received royal assent on November 28. In total, over the last four years the government has introduced more than 90 initiatives to build more housing, including the Strong Mayors, Building Homes Act, the precursor to this bill that we're discussing today, which I'll address shortly.

I'm proud to say that there has been proof that our first housing supply action plan and related initiatives are working well. I'm sure you all remember that the last time I was here, I talked about 2021, our best year for housing starts: over 100,000, the best year we've had since the early 1980s. Also, the stat that I think is really important is that it's far greater than the 30-year average of 67,500 homes that we've seen, as I said, over the last 30 years. This year, despite economic headwinds, record inflation and events that are beyond our government's control, we're still expecting to see nearly 100,000 housing starts. So yes, we've come a long way, but we know as a government that more needs to be done if we're going to reach that 1.5 million homes by 2031.

Projections show that Ontario is expected to grow by about two million people by 2031. Approximately 1.5 million of those residents are expected to settle in the greater Golden Horseshoe. On top of that, we have the federal government's recent enhanced immigration target of a half a million new residents per year, which is going to put even more pressure on the housing market.

I want to be clear with the members of the committee today: We're counting on these newcomers. We want to welcome them to our province. We know how important immigration is in Ontario for our province's future. But that means we're going to need to make sure that those newcomers to our province are able to find a home that meets their needs. At the same time, that's true for long-term residents of our province. That's why the government is continuing to take decisive action to bring the housing supply crisis to an end.

I'd like to take members of the committee back, first of all, to March, when we introduced More Homes for Everyone, which was our government's plan. As you all recall, it outlined a concrete set of actions that the province would take to address the housing supply crisis. The actions ranged from protecting homebuyers from unethical building practices to addressing non-resident speculation.

More Homes for Everyone was based on a wide-ranging consultation with industry stakeholders, with municipalities and with the public. We were seeking ways to increase housing supply and affordability. We met with big-city mayors. We met with regional chairs and representatives from rural, remote and northern municipalities. The goal was to discuss how we can work together to build homes faster in our province. We also held a public consultation online on housing supply. We received over 2,000 responses on how we can best increase the province's housing supply.

We created, as you all know, the Housing Affordability Task Force, which developed a report with additional measures the government could take to increase the supply of market housing and address the housing crisis. To support the plan, we passed legislation that is delivering both—I want to stress “both”—near-term and long-term solutions that will put more housing options on the table for Ontario families.

I also want to remind the committee that our government made a commitment to deliver housing supply action plans every single year of our mandate. These action plans will contain policies. They will contain tools to support multi-generational homes, gentle density and missing middle housing, and they will give us the ability, by having a yearly plan, to fine-tune and evolve our approach to ending the housing supply crisis while circumstances change.

The More Homes for Everyone plan included measures to reduce the red tape and inefficiencies that are plaguing the development process and to help municipalities move priority projects forward. These measures include a new community infrastructure and housing accelerator. It's a tool that will help municipalities expedite approvals for housing and community infrastructure such as hospitals and community centres. Our plan will also make changes to streamline site plan requirements and approval processes, so there is consistency across the province, while effectively taking the politics of the planning process.

Again, on October 25 of this year, we took further action by tabling the More Homes Built Faster Act. It was

the next phase of our long-term plan to address the crisis. It represents our boldest and most transformative plan yet. It cuts through red tape. It eliminates unnecessary costs. It addresses bottlenecks that slow the process down in Ontario and really block the type of housing that Ontarians need today. It promotes the building of more homes near transit. It promotes more gentle-density housing. It uses provincial lands to create more attainable housing. It protects new home buyers, and it includes consultations on how we can help renters become homeowners, plus many, many other initiatives. More Homes Built Faster lays a strong foundation for our government to build 1.5 million homes over the next 10 years, which, I think we can all acknowledge, Ontarians desperately need.

We know that if we address the barriers that cause housing delays, we can get the cost of building down. These barriers include a very complex set of land use policies that make it difficult to access land in urban areas. There's a lengthy process for planning to get new homes and shovels in the ground.

0910

I also want to point out that the gentle density that we're proposing works in some cases, and there are cases, like near major transit hubs, where you can bring more housing, more jobs, more retail, more public amenities, which I think are beneficial to the community. That's where the province's Transit-Oriented Communities Program came from. The program is really part of our province's new complete and mixed-use community plan that will be near and around public transit. We're also working to unlock new municipal funding tools so that municipalities can collect the fees and charges needed to create transit-oriented communities. With more housing being built close to transit, more people can get to and from school and work much faster, and faster commutes save money. They enable people to spend more time with their family. They make Ontarians' lives easier.

Our government is proud to be working with municipalities to deliver transit-oriented communities. Creating housing near transit stations delivers many other benefits as well. They increase transit ridership. They reduce traffic congestion, emissions. They stimulate economic growth. These projects create much-needed services, increase job opportunities, improve residents' quality of life. It means housing closer to where people work, to where they play and where they shop. It means less time in traffic, less time commuting, more time with their loved ones.

I'm going to move from transit-oriented communities. I'm going to talk specifically about Bill 39 today because it's the latest piece of our housing supply legislation. The legislation builds upon the Strong Mayors, Building Homes Act, which recently came into force, on November 23. The act, along with the associated regulations, gives the mayors of Toronto and Ottawa the ability to drive policy changes. It enables them to select certain municipal department heads, and it empowers them to put forward budgets. Those changes will help our municipal partners deliver on our shared priorities, and we have made it clear that increasing housing supply is one of those priorities.

Our new proposed legislation, Bill 39, will build upon the tools in the Strong Mayors, Building Homes Act. It will further make changes to the Municipal Act and the City of Toronto Act, and, if passed, the mayors of Toronto and the city of Ottawa will have a new tool to move forward on shared provincial-municipal priorities—and I'll say it again: priorities like building 1.5 million homes over the next 10 years.

Building the supporting infrastructure for these new homes would enable mayors in Toronto and Ottawa to support another shared priority, which is to expand the footprint of transit-oriented communities. We're doing this so that people can live, work and play near the convenience of public transit.

Once these mayors propose municipal bylaws that could further provincial priorities, council could then pass the bylaw if more than one third of members vote in favour. Yes, these proposals are bold, but yet they reflect the severity of the housing crisis that's facing Ontarians today. They need to cut through this "not in my backyard" attitude that is holding back the construction of much-needed housing in way too many municipalities.

Over one third of the growth that our province is expecting in the next decade is going to come from the cities of Toronto and Ottawa. That's why we've empowered these mayors, who have strong, democratic and city-wide mandates. We want them to work effectively with the province to increase the supply of housing. We have every confidence that they will use the power judiciously, and we, of course, will be closely observing how the powers are used.

While we've begun our strong-mayor framework with the single-tier municipalities of Toronto and Ottawa, we want to consider how to expand these tools to help more of Ontario's rapidly growing communities. We plan to appoint provincial facilitators who will assess the two-tier regional government structures of Durham, Halton, Niagara, Peel, Waterloo and York.

These six regions are large. Each of them has close to or more than half a million people, and they are some of Ontario's fastest-growing communities. They desperately need more housing supply. So the assessments by the facilitators are going to help the government determine the best mix of roles and responsibilities between the upper-tier and the lower-tier municipalities in these regions, particularly in the context of the strong-mayor system. The goal is to enable those municipalities to get shovels in the ground faster, to help them get housing built more quickly to support those growing communities.

To help facilitate the regional assessment, our proposed legislation would provide me, as minister, with the authority to appoint regional chairs of three regions: Niagara, Peel and York. In these three regions, out of the six, the chair isn't elected by the community; they didn't have an election for chair on October 24. I've already announced my intention to reappoint the existing chairs of the current term of council if this bill is passed, and I do this because the government could then draw on the chairs' experience and knowledge as they work with the provincially appointed facilitators.

We need to make sure that we have continuity in the three municipalities that typically appoint their chair. I want to ensure that, when we have the facilitators in place, we have a process that works for all six regions so that we can have the best possible framework to expand strong-mayor powers.

Everyone in the committee knows that Premier Ford has already indicated that the government is looking to expand strong-mayor powers to other municipalities: municipalities that are shovel-ready, committed to growth and committed to cutting red tape. We want to ensure that these enhanced mayoral powers are rolled out in a manner that reflects local priorities and concerns. Our plan is for those municipalities to hit the ground running and get housing built without any more delays.

Chair, I'm not sure how much time I've got left.

The Chair (Ms. Laurie Scott): Four minutes.

Hon. Steve Clark: I'll conclude my deputation. Just to go back to what I said at the beginning of my remarks, Ontario is expected to grow by about two million people over the next 10 years. It's critical that we have a plan in place that builds upon the success of some of our housing supply action plans.

We know that most of the growth will take place in the greater Golden Horseshoe. Our estimates show that it will be about 1.5 million people that will move to the greater Golden Horseshoe in the next decade. We don't have enough housing for the people who are living here. We're in a crisis, and it's going to get much worse if we don't make some bold actions as a government.

We need both near- and long-term solutions, and the proposed changes in the Better Municipal Governance Act complement More Homes Built Faster as part of our housing supply action plan. It will help us address the housing supply that we need. It will help us address those 1.5 million homes that we need to build over the next 10 years. But we're committed to working with our municipal partners to make sure that we've got the mix right, to make sure that we've got the housing supply policies right. To be successful, we need to make sure that municipalities have the tools to get shovels in the ground faster. That's something that they told us in January that they needed, and that's exactly what we're doing today.

At this point, Chair, I think I'll just turn it back over to you and we can start the question phase of the committee's deliberations.

The Chair (Ms. Laurie Scott): Thank you very much, Minister.

We are going to start with the official opposition. Just to remind you, you have seven and a half minutes. MPP Burch is first up. Please go ahead.

Mr. Jeff Burch: Good morning, Minister. I'd like to focus the first round of questions on the changes to the greenbelt in the legislation. You mentioned in your presentation the Housing Affordability Task Force. That's interesting, because that task force report, under "Making Land Available to Build," stated very, very clearly that "a shortage of land isn't the cause of the problem. Land is available, both inside the existing built-up areas and on

undeveloped land outside greenbelts.” Those are your own experts saying that land is available. I’m going to give a couple of other what I consider to be facts, and then certainly you can have a chance to dispute them.

We do know—and I don’t think this is in dispute—that the province of Ontario is losing a shocking 319 acres of prime farmland per day, endangering our long-term food security. We also know that this government, and this Premier and yourself, promised not to touch the greenbelt multiple times. There was an interesting tweet last night from the leader of the Green Party, who counted up, I believe, 19 promises by yourself and the Premier over the last four years not to touch the greenbelt. But despite this fact, this government is proposing to remove 2,995 hectares of land across 10 municipalities from the greenbelt, including repealing the Duffins Rouge Agricultural Preserve Act, and it appears that a number of developers—and we’ll get to this later—are going to benefit greatly from this.

0920

I’m going to go back to a question: Do you accept, from your own experts from the Housing Affordability Task Force, that land is not the problem, that you do not have to remove land from the greenbelt in order to address the housing shortage?

Hon. Steve Clark: I acknowledge that it takes way too long to build housing. The Housing Affordability Task Force acknowledged that. I also acknowledge that the recent decision by the federal government, which we welcome, to enhance our immigration targets is new information, and we have to course-correct as a government based on new information.

As well, there are things out of my control in terms of interest rates and some of the other challenges regarding inflation that need to be considered—

Mr. Jeff Burch: With all respect, Minister, that has nothing to do with the availability of land.

The Chair (Ms. Laurie Scott): Can you just let the minister answer the question? Thank you.

Hon. Steve Clark: I’ll talk about some numbers that you don’t dispute: the fact that we need 1.5 million homes over the next 10 years. The numbers prove that the best year we’ve had in 30 years, which was the 100,000 starts, isn’t enough. It’s going to make us half a million homes short over the next 10 years. We need to take drastic action, so the reason we’re putting this forward—

Mr. Jeff Burch: With all respect, Chair, the minister isn’t answering my question, so I’m going to move to the next question—

Hon. Steve Clark: —is because the housing supply crisis is severe, and we need to get shovels in the ground faster. That’s why we acknowledged during the election—

Mr. Jeff Burch: Chair?

Hon. Steve Clark: —that we were going to put a housing supply action plan each and every year in our mandate. You may not think it’s severe, but I think it’s severe—

Mr. Joel Harden: Point of order. Point of order.

The Chair (Ms. Laurie Scott): MPP Burch can speak. Just—you asked a lot of stuff outside the scope of the bill, and I let it all go.

The minister has answered. MPP Burch, you can have the floor again.

Mr. Jeff Burch: My question was very specific, so I’m going to get more specific with my questions because I don’t want our time to be wasted.

I’d like to know, Minister, when did the government first begin considering the removal of land from the greenbelt, including the Duffins Rouge Agricultural Preserve—

Hon. Steve Clark: Chair, if I might, the members opposite know that this matter has been referred to—

Mr. Joel Harden: Point of order.

The Chair (Ms. Laurie Scott): Could we let—

Hon. Steve Clark: Can you let me finish? Are we going to have this argument all morning? The matter—

Interjections.

The Chair (Ms. Laurie Scott): Okay. Minister, MPP Harden has a point of order.

Mr. Joel Harden: I’m just wondering, Chair, respectfully, when the member has the floor, if he could talk uninterrupted by the person who, respectfully, is here to present to us this morning.

The Chair (Ms. Laurie Scott): And I would ask that that can go both ways, too. I think we can all be reasonable.

MPP Burch? Yes, you’re up.

Mr. Jeff Burch: When did the government first begin considering the removal of land from the greenbelt, including the Duffins Rouge Agricultural Preserve? Was it before the provincial election? Was it earlier this year?

Hon. Steve Clark: Chair, I’ve answered the question. This matter has been referred to the Integrity Commissioner by a member of the Legislative Assembly.

The Chair (Ms. Laurie Scott): Okay. MPP Burch, you have the floor to continue.

Hon. Steve Clark: I will continue to co-operate with the Integrity Commissioner—

The Chair (Ms. Laurie Scott): Thank you. MPP Burch?

Mr. Jeff Burch: Minister, did you or any other government official share with any landowner or private party information about removing land from the greenbelt prior to the November 4 announcement?

Hon. Steve Clark: If the member opposite wants to talk about the Duffins Rouge Agricultural Preserve Act, which is part of this bill, I’d be pleased to do it. I’d be pleased to read the letter from Mayor Ashe regarding this matter. But in terms of the question that the member has asked, which is out of the scope of this bill, the matter has been referred by a member of the Legislative Assembly to Ontario’s Integrity Commissioner. I will co-operate with the Integrity Commissioner fully in his investigation.

Mr. Jeff Burch: Okay. With respect to the Duffins Rouge Agricultural Preserve, did you or any other government official discuss the repeal of the Duffins Rouge Agricultural Preserve Act, which is part of this bill, or the removal of farmland easements with any landowner or private party prior to November 4?

Hon. Steve Clark: In regard to the DRAP, I have a letter here from Mayor Kevin Ashe from the city of

Pickering, dated November 16, which, I think, will address the member's question. It says:

"Subject: City of Pickering, Duffins Rouge Agricultural Preserve Act, 2005, file A-1000-100

"Dear Minister Clark,

"You recently received a letter from Mayor Ryan requesting the repeal of the Duffins Rouge Agricultural Preserve Act, 2005, in the city of Pickering. As the newly elected mayor of the city, I would like to support this request.

"As noted by Mayor Ryan, these lands were part of the regional"—

Mr. Jeff Burch: Chair, I don't need to hear the entire letter read out.

Hon. Steve Clark:—"and municipal growth plans for a settlement area expansion prior to the greenbelt 20 years ago"—

Mr. Jeff Burch: The minister is not answering my questions.

The Chair (Ms. Laurie Scott): Okay, MPP Burch. Go ahead.

Mr. Jeff Burch: My next question is, did the proposal to remove the land from the greenbelt originate with the ministry or the Premier's office?

The Chair (Ms. Laurie Scott): Final minute coming up.

Hon. Steve Clark: I'll go on and keep reading the mayor's letter, to make sure it in the record.

Mr. Jeff Burch: That's not acceptable.

Hon. Steve Clark: "I would also like to support and thank you and your government for your efforts in proposing the removal of the Cherrywood area lands"—

Mr. Jeff Burch: Chair, he's not answering the question.

The Chair (Ms. Laurie Scott): Okay. Do you have another question?

Mr. Jeff Burch: I have lots of questions, but the minister is not answering any of them.

Hon. Steve Clark: I am answering them; you just don't like the answers.

Mr. Jeff Burch: Do you accept, Minister, that we are losing 320 acres of prime farmland in Ontario per day and that much of that is in the greenbelt?

Mr. Kevin Holland: Point of order. This is out of the scope.

The Chair (Ms. Laurie Scott): A point of order for MPP Holland.

Mr. Jeff Burch: It's not.

The Chair (Ms. Laurie Scott): Okay. I let you guys have a point of order. He has a point of order.

MPP Holland.

Mr. Kevin Holland: This is out of scope. What does the fact with regard to the farmland being used up in development have to do with this bill specifically? It doesn't have anything to do with what this bill represents on new governance.

Interjections.

The Chair (Ms. Laurie Scott): There are 30 seconds. MPP Burch, do you have another question, please?

Mr. Jeff Burch: Well, my point is that we are losing a shocking amount of farmland, and the minister and his government are removing farmland from the greenbelt, and part of that is in the Duffins Rouge Agricultural Preserve. A shocking amount of that farmland is going to friends of the PC Party who have banked that land. I guess my question would be, is the minister aware of that? And when did he become aware of that?

Hon. Steve Clark: Chair, in response—

The Chair (Ms. Laurie Scott): I'm afraid there's no time for that response, but you can loop back again.

MPP McMahon, you have five minutes.

Ms. Mary-Margaret McMahon: Thank you for coming in and speaking to us today, Minister Clark. As you know, I am a new MPP, so I'm getting up to snuff on a lot of this information. The Duffins Rouge Agricultural Preserve: I'm learning all about that, fast and furiously. I'm just wondering how these lands came into developers' hands. It was my understanding that they were agricultural lands and they were to be that way in perpetuity.

Hon. Steve Clark: Chair, part of the matter that the member is asking about is part of an investigation by the Integrity Commissioner. I can talk about the request from the city of Pickering to have the DRAP lands removed. I tried to read a letter from Mayor Ashe indicating his thanks for the government tabling this concept in Bill 39. It has been pretty clear from both Mayor Ashe and Mayor Ryan, their desire to have this land, the DRAP lands, removed from that settlement area, as listed in the letter that I tried to read from November 16.

Ms. Mary-Margaret McMahon: Right, but how did they go from farmlands and designated in perpetuity to developers' hands? How did that transition occur?

Hon. Steve Clark: The plan that we're tabling today, what we're debating today, is in response to requests from the city of Pickering. That's why we are here today, with the—

Ms. Mary-Margaret McMahon: Okay, and if you insist on building on prime farmland when all of us need to eat—and I believe everyone ate this morning; I can see member Holland eating right now, which came from a farmer.

What percentage of the Duffins Rouge Agricultural Preserve will be affordable housing?

Hon. Steve Clark: Well, the particular property that Mayor Ryan is speaking about in his—

Ms. Mary-Margaret McMahon: Sorry; Mayor Ryan is not here. I'm asking Minister Clark—

Hon. Steve Clark: Well, I'm trying to answer you.

Ms. Mary-Margaret McMahon:—and since it's your goal to build housing, I just wonder how much of the housing that you plan to build in Duffins Rouge Agricultural Preserve will be affordable.

0930

Hon. Steve Clark: Are you talking about the Cherrywood area lands?

Ms. Mary-Margaret McMahon: Whatever lands you want to talk about; just how much of those will be—

Hon. Steve Clark: Well, I'm asking you a question. You asked me—

Ms. Mary-Margaret McMahon: Yes. I want to know how much will be affordable and how much will be rental.

Hon. Steve Clark: Well, we've made it very clear that we want to ensure that there is attainable housing as part of that discussion. Again, right now the sites are part of a consultation with the government. I'm not going to presuppose what's going to happen at the end of the consultation, but the member needs to know that this decision by the government is now part of an Integrity Commissioner investigation. As well, I'm going to collaborate with the Integrity Commissioner on that investigation.

Ms. Mary-Margaret McMahon: Okay. You mentioned the transit-oriented communities many, many times today, which I am completely with you on.

Hon. Steve Clark: Good, good.

Ms. Mary-Margaret McMahon: I lived in Japan over 30 years ago, and I saw it done masterfully first-hand 30 years ago. We're way behind on building transit-oriented communities, so I'm with you on that.

Do you feel the greenbelt is a transit-oriented community?

Hon. Steve Clark: Again, Chair, the matter of the posting that the government has put forward on the greenbelt is now a matter of investigation by the Integrity Commissioner. I respect the member's right to refer the matter to the Integrity Commissioner, and I will co-operate with the Integrity Commissioner fully on this matter.

Ms. Mary-Margaret McMahon: And what modes of transit are currently going to Duffins Rouge Agricultural Preserve?

Hon. Steve Clark: Again, Chair, the area that the member is talking about has been referred to the Integrity Commissioner for comment. It's part of a public posting that the government has put forward on 15 properties and a significant amount of properties that would go back into the greenbelt. I'm going to co-operate with the Integrity Commissioner.

Ms. Mary-Margaret McMahon: And will you undertake environmental assessments of those lands that are vitally needed?

Hon. Steve Clark: Again—through you to the member, Chair—the matter is referred to the Integrity Commissioner. I'm going to co-operate with him fully.

The Chair (Ms. Laurie Scott): You have 20 seconds left.

Ms. Mary-Margaret McMahon: Sorry?

The Chair (Ms. Laurie Scott): Twenty seconds.

Ms. Mary-Margaret McMahon: Twenty seconds? Nice dodging the question. That's all I'll say.

Hon. Steve Clark: A member of the Legislature has referred the matter to the Integrity Commissioner. I respect that process.

The Chair (Ms. Laurie Scott): Okay. Thank you very much.

We'll move over to the government side. MPP Grewal.

Mr. Hardeep Singh Grewal: Good morning, Minister. Welcome.

In regard to the bill, where it speaks about enhancing strong-mayor powers: Way back when, many, many years

ago, when you were the mayor of Brockville—I've heard you mention in the past how even back in the 1980s people were talking about a strong-mayor system. And I heard you mention, when we were looking at Bill 3, the importance of the budget process and giving the mayor the tools to put forward priorities.

Now, I know we are not talking about expanding these powers to smaller municipalities, but I would like to know: With your experience being a past mayor, with the new focus shifting to strong-mayor powers for Toronto and Ottawa, with the potential to add to other big cities, can you discuss with us a little bit in the context of your experience being a former mayor and how you feel these changes further support mayors?

Hon. Steve Clark: That's a great question. When we discussed the precursor to this bill, we talked about the creation of strong-mayor powers. This is something that isn't new. The Premier has written about it in a book and talked about his desire to expand it across Ontario.

When I was elected as a mayor 40 years ago, the city that I was mayor in, Brockville, had a sister-city relationship with Ontario, California. After my election, I received a call from that municipality asking who was going to change in the administration. The fact that we didn't have those powers was a surprise to me. I didn't know at the time, 40 years ago when I was in my twenties, about the strong-mayor situation and the differences that some jurisdictions around the world have in terms of powers.

Part of the initiative of the precursor for this bill was to ensure that the mayors in our two largest cities had the powers to get shovels in the ground faster, whether it be to appoint certain department heads, whether it be to present the budget. I think the budget is a very important opportunity for a mayor in Toronto or Ottawa to be able to put forward a vision as to how they can get shovels in the ground faster. We're only talking about those provincial priorities, so it's a very narrow scope of the strong-mayor powers, certainly not to the degree of what would have been experienced in Ontario, California, 40 years ago, when they called me.

It is not a new concept, but what we are trying to do is provide not just Toronto and Ottawa with the amendment that we are providing in Bill 39, but now the Premier has been quite clear that we want to extend these powers to other mayors. I feel the six regions are perfectly positioned, because you've got some pretty big communities, like the city that you live in, MPP Grewal, being in Brampton. It's a big city. Peel has two significantly big cities in it. We want to make sure that we get it right, that there is discussion around how the regions would work with the lower tier, moving forward, on just the strong-mayor powers. Our facilitator will work with the existing chair and regional government on how we can accomplish that.

But you're right. It's not a concept that is new; it's been around for a long time. There are differences between what we are proposing and what operates in some of the other jurisdictions in other countries, but let's make no mistake: The Premier was very clear long ago that this was

something that he felt was a priority. He's indicated after Bill 3 that we want to move it forward into other jurisdictions.

These next set of municipalities within those six regions are ideal because, looking at the housing pledge that we gave them, they're going to pledge to build, over the next 10 years, probably about 600,000 houses—probably more like 625,000—of our total, so we need to give them the tools and we need to make sure that the facilitator has that opportunity to see how it connects with a very narrow scope of strong-mayor powers.

Mr. Hardeep Singh Grewal: Thank you, Minister.

How are we doing on time, Chair?

The Chair (Ms. Laurie Scott): You have three minutes, basically.

Mr. Hardeep Singh Grewal: Okay. I'd like to switch my time over to MPP Laura Smith.

Ms. Laura Smith: Thank you, Minister, for being here this morning. I'll try and make this very quick. You talked a little bit about priorities. How long were you a mayor, by the way?

Hon. Steve Clark: Nine years.

Ms. Laura Smith: Nine years, okay, in the 1980s. If passed, this would support efficient and local decision-making processes and allow our municipal partners to take bold action because of this issue. We need to build 1.5 million homes in a very short period of time. When you talk about from the beginning to the end of a project, I've heard it quoted as being sometimes up to 10 years from conception to the end. Can the minister elaborate on the priorities, especially when it comes to transportation and transit-oriented communities, and how this fits in to your perspective as a former mayor?

Hon. Steve Clark: The powers that we're proposing in this bill, and also in the previous bill, are very narrowly scoped for provincial priorities, things like our housing pledge to build 1.5 million homes over 10 years and the commitment we've made as a government to leverage the billions of dollars we're spending on transit in Toronto and York region. We need to ensure that mayors at that level have the tools they need.

It's something that they said to us when we met with them in January. The Premier and I had a meeting with big-city mayors and regional chairs. We followed up with a meeting with the northern mayors, rural mayors. This is all something that was discussed at the time, the fact that we can't just make changes at the municipal level; we've also got to provide some provincial leadership. Whether that is providing the priority to build homes and to gear strong-mayor powers around those provincial priorities, at the end of the day we're going to be judged by shovels in the ground, just as we were being judged last year with the 100,000 starts. Over the next decade, people are going to be watching. They're going to want to make sure that we hit the right targets. I think that's part of the beauty of having a bill tabled every year. It allows us to course-correct based on market conditions, so it gives us that chance to read and react to what is happening in our local communities.

Ms. Laura Smith: Do I have time?

The Chair (Ms. Laurie Scott): You have 30 seconds.

Ms. Laura Smith: Actually, you've just touched on something that I was thinking about earlier, about modifying. When things need to be tweaked, they can go in and make these modifications because it's a work in—

Hon. Steve Clark: Yes, absolutely. Part of this bill is making a modification to the bill we passed earlier this year for strong mayors, no question. This allows us to do that.

0940

Ms. Laura Smith: Okay. Thank you.

The Chair (Ms. Laurie Scott): Thank you very much. We only have 10 seconds.

I'll go to MPP Burch for seven and a half minutes.

Mr. Jeff Burch: I'm going to be sharing my time with MPP Bell, and I'd like to switch gears to the municipal changes.

Minister, I'm sure you've seen the recent letter from a group of former Toronto mayors from all political stripes. They wrote the current mayor of Toronto and said:

"Recently, you declared your support for the Ontario government's Bill 39—indeed, acknowledging your participation in its evolution.

"This bill would allow you as mayor to pass bylaws with support from just over one third of council members in any matters somehow defined as 'within a provincial interest.'

"We are appalled at this attack on one of the essential tenets of our local democracy and a fundamental democratic mechanism: majority rule.

"We are fearful of the real substantive risks this change would pose for our city. The principle of majority rule has always been and must continue to be how council conducts the public's business."

Indeed, this bill causes a situation where the mayor and eight councillors can overrule 17 elected councillors, and it's described as "alarming in the extreme" by these former mayors that include Art Eggleton, David Crombie, Barbara Hall, David Miller and John Sewell—a pretty damning indictment of this change. I'd like to ask you very specifically: When did the mayor of Toronto first approach this government to discuss the so-called strong-mayor proposals in Bill 39 specifically?

Hon. Steve Clark: We tabled Bill 3, and Bill 3 was passed, which dealt solely with Toronto and Ottawa. This was identified as part of the implementation; obviously, we had to deal with some regulations regarding Bill 3. Mayor Tory felt that this amendment was needed in Bill 39 to be able to deal with those provincial priorities for the city to meet their obligations under our pledges.

Mr. Jeff Burch: And when did he feel that way and approach the government?

Hon. Steve Clark: This bill is as a result of his request to add this amendment forward. Again, I just want to make sure—

Mr. Jeff Burch: And when was that request?

Hon. Steve Clark: We passed Bill 3. After Bill 3 was passed, we had to work on the regulations to deal with implementation—

Mr. Jeff Burch: We're aware of all that, but when did the mayor of Toronto approach the government?

Hon. Steve Clark: Sometime after we tabled Bill 3.

Mr. Jeff Burch: "Sometime" is—can you be more specific than that? Did he approach yourself or the Premier?

Hon. Steve Clark: Again, the most important decision today is not when; the most important decision today is the fact that Mayor Tory asked for this. We're responding to Mayor Tory's request. He felt that on those provincial priorities, very narrowly scoped on the strong-mayor powers, he needed this, so this is—

Mr. Jeff Burch: But what's important, with all respect—

Hon. Steve Clark: No. With all respect, we're being open and transparent. We're having a discussion today about suggestions that he'd asked for.

Mr. Jeff Burch: What's important to the people of Toronto—where I'm trying to go with my question, Minister, is that there was obviously a closed-door meeting between the mayor and either yourself or the Premier or the government, because it's already out there in the public that the mayor of Toronto approached your government for these powers. It's important to the people of Toronto because these are closed-door meetings that resulted in their democracy being taken away locally.

Hon. Steve Clark: But MPP Burch, you were a municipal councillor—

Mr. Jeff Burch: I'll move on to my other question, because I heard from a lot of councillors in Ottawa as well—

Interjections.

The Chair (Ms. Laurie Scott): I'll just let MPP Burch finish.

Interjections.

The Chair (Ms. Laurie Scott): Minister, MPP Burch has the floor, please.

Mr. Jeff Burch: With respect to Ottawa councillors who I've heard from recently, they would like to know who, from Ottawa, asked for this authority, because we can't find anyone in Ottawa who has any interest whatsoever in strong-mayor powers. They would like to know, first of all, who requested it, and if there are any examples where this has ever been needed in the past in Ottawa. People in Ottawa are completely perplexed by this.

Hon. Steve Clark: Strong-mayor powers, the strong-mayor system, is not a new concept in the world. There are many jurisdictions that have strong-mayor powers. At our meeting in January, we heard very clearly from the mayors of—

Mr. Jeff Burch: With respect, Chair, I'm actually going to pass it over to MPP Bell before all the time has been used up.

The Chair (Ms. Laurie Scott): MPP Bell.

Ms. Jessica Bell: Thank you, MPP Burch.

Minister Clark, it is very concerning to hear you talk about democracy as red tape.

Hon. Steve Clark: I never said that.

Ms. Jessica Bell: Democracy is something that we have fought for—

Hon. Steve Clark: I never said that, MPP Bell.

Ms. Jessica Bell: —that we have worked for, that we have organized for, and this government is just claiming it's red tape.

Hon. Steve Clark: I never said that.

Ms. Jessica Bell: My question is this: When I look at the Duffins Rouge area and I look at what properties the De Gasperis family owns—big PC Party donors—I see a shocking link between what is being carved off so that development can happen on this land and the properties that the De Gasperis family owns. It's really quite shocking. My question to you is, is this a remarkable coincidence or is this collusion?

Hon. Steve Clark: MPP Bell, you know better than anybody the process with the Integrity Commissioner. You were found guilty of breaking the Members' Integrity Act, so you know what the process is when a member submits a document to the Integrity Commissioner.

I've made myself extremely clear today, Chair, that because a member of the Legislative Assembly has forwarded this issue to the Integrity Commissioner, I will meet with the Integrity Commissioner and co-operate with him fully.

Ms. Jessica Bell: Minister Clark—

Hon. Steve Clark: But this member, who has broken the Members' Integrity Act herself—

Ms. Jessica Bell: No. Minister Clark—

Hon. Steve Clark: —and was convicted, should know the process.

Ms. Jessica Bell: It was a fundraiser for fire victims, okay? That's what had the Integrity Commissioner—

The Chair (Ms. Laurie Scott): You've got a final minute.

Ms. Jessica Bell: —ask me some questions. What you are going to be asked questions about is, did you collude with developers, PC Party donors, and give them access to land so they could make untold profit? That's what the Integrity Commissioner could be looking at you for. And I've got a question for you: Do you think you're going to be found guilty or not?

Mr. Billy Pang: Point of order, Madam Chair.

The Chair (Ms. Laurie Scott): Point of order: MPP Pang.

Mr. Billy Pang: Are we talking about the judgment of the Integrity Commissioner or talking about the bill today?

Interjection.

The Chair (Ms. Laurie Scott): I hear you. That's not a point of order.

MPP Bell, you've got 40 seconds left.

Ms. Jessica Bell: Minister Clark, I'm asking you to repeal Bill 39. It harms democracy, it brings in minority rule, and it seems like—it looks like—you are personally benefiting and your PC Party donors are personally benefiting—

The Chair (Ms. Laurie Scott): That's a warning, MPP Bell. You've used language that has been borderline, that I want to rule out of order. I've let you do that, but that's a warning. We're going to move to MPP McMahon.

Ms. Mary-Margaret McMahon: Thank you very much. Hopefully I'll get answers this time to my questions. We'll now turn over to the mayoral powers, that section of the bill. You were mentioning earlier to another member, discussing the time you were mayor of Brockville at a young age—congratulations on that—and for nine years, I think it was. I'm just wondering how you worked with council to make decisions.

Hon. Steve Clark: I worked with council to make a lot of decisions. I—

Ms. Mary-Margaret McMahon: What was your approach to working with them?

Hon. Steve Clark: We made decisions in the best interest of Brockvillians. We didn't always agree, but we had very robust discussions moving forward, and the system that we had, for a small community—we had 60% change on our council when I was first elected, so there was a feeling by the group that we needed to work together. We didn't always agree, which I think is reflective of most municipal councils.

But, over the decades, it has become obvious that we need to give our local mayors and councils tools to get shovels in the ground faster. These very narrowly scoped powers in the strong-mayor system will give the mayors—your mayor in Toronto—an opportunity to meet provincial priorities, and I think—

Ms. Mary-Margaret McMahon: But when you were mayor, it wasn't a dictatorship. It wasn't divisiveness. You worked collaboratively with your council.

Hon. Steve Clark: I don't think the strong-mayor powers, which are very narrowly scoped on provincial priorities, create the climate that you just characterized. I think it will not stop the mayor and council from working together in Toronto or Ottawa. But we need to make sure we have a plan in place to get shovels in the ground and build 1.5 million homes over the next 10 years.

0950

Ms. Mary-Margaret McMahon: Right. And you have all these new councillors—I'm thinking of Toronto, and I think of when I was a new councillor in 2010, there were 15 of us coming in: fresh ideas, fresh energy and fresh voices. And these new councillors in Toronto—seven new councillors—now, all of a sudden, they're going to have this new power slapped onto the council, to the mayor. Do you not feel that their voices, their power as a leader and a champion in their wards, and their rights are being diminished by the mayor having these extra powers?

Hon. Steve Clark: I'm encouraged by what the mayor has put forward in your city. I've looked at the website for mayoral decisions this morning and really think that that's a very transparent way of talking about decisions. I want to remind you that Mayor Tory received a strong, democratic and city-wide mandate. As I said in the House, Mayor Tory received 36,000 more votes than every other councillor combined—

Ms. Mary-Margaret McMahon: Yes, I'm well aware of the election. What about the Ottawa mayor?

Hon. Steve Clark: We are encouraged by him.

Ms. Mary-Margaret McMahon: He's choosing not to use these powers. How do you feel about that?

Hon. Steve Clark: I had a great meeting last week with Mayor Sutcliffe. I look forward to working with him. We obviously want the mayors of Toronto and Ottawa to be successful. We want them to meet their housing targets. We want them to get shovels in the ground faster.

Now that we've provided this amendment on the strong mayors in Toronto and Ottawa, we want to move to an expansion of the strong-mayor powers in regions. That's why—

The Chair (Ms. Laurie Scott): Final minute.

Ms. Mary-Margaret McMahon: Okay. Now I'm going to switch back to our precious farmland. Do you feel, Minister Clark, that we have a food security issue?

Hon. Steve Clark: I think Minister Thompson has done a great job. She has made some amazing announcements this week to support our food processing industries. I think some of her announcements with the innovation that the government is looking at—the funding and the support that's—

Ms. Mary-Margaret McMahon: So you're not worried about us losing 300 acres a day of precious farmland?

Hon. Steve Clark: Minister Thompson is an amazing minister.

Ms. Mary-Margaret McMahon: I wish she were here.

Hon. Steve Clark: She does a great job in her work. She's got fantastic parliamentary assistants, including MPP Jones, who's here—

Ms. Mary-Margaret McMahon: Last question: Who will bear the costs of the new roads and infrastructure with these Duffins Rouge Agricultural Preserve proposals? Who's going to bear the costs of the roads, the infrastructure needed there? Taxpayers?

Hon. Steve Clark: Well, again, the—

The Chair (Ms. Laurie Scott): I'm sorry, Minister. We've run out of time on this round.

Over to the government side for seven and a half minutes and the final round of questions. MPP Pang.

Mr. Billy Pang: During this standing committee, I keep reminding myself that our government is dealing with a housing crisis, and 1.5 million is not a number out of nowhere to deal with the crisis. The question for the minister is, how does this proposed legislation get past it, and help incentivize our private sector and our not-for-profit partners to continue to invest in affordable and attainable housing across Ontario, helping us meet 1.5 million homes in the next 10 years?

Hon. Steve Clark: That's a great question. You and I have talked about that in Markham–Unionville. We've seen some of the investments that the government has made on affordable housing. You and I were at announcements in that regard, and at the end of the day, we're taking decisive action in the middle of a housing crisis by introducing legislation that's going to support a number of things.

It's going to support efficient local decision-making. Your region that you live in is one of the fastest-growing regions in our province. We need to make sure that at the region of York—obviously, we've got a great regional chair who we want to work on. I've indicated that if this bill passes, I'll be ensuring that he's reappointed. I know he was already appointed by the regional government, but it's very important that we work with him and members of regional government to ensure that the housing targets that we've given and the expansion of strong-mayor powers are integrated. We need to ensure that both the lower tier and the upper tier work together and that that provincial facilitator focuses on the priority of the strong-mayor system.

The work that we've done with Toronto and Ottawa—obviously, I've made my comments known to all of you members, that in the next decade we're probably going to see a third of Ontario's growth from Toronto and Ottawa. Now we need to move to those six regions either close to or over 500,000 people in every one of them. It's critical that we take time, appoint someone at the facilitator level to ensure that we've got it right.

But most of our legislation—the one actually that just got royal assent this week—provides a real incentive for things that mayors talked about during the election: affordable housing, attainable housing, inclusionary zoning, family-sized rentals. Those are things that mayors and councillors campaigned on leading up to the October 24 municipal election in Ontario. We want to make sure that all of our associated legislative and regulatory changes work in concert with the previous legislation that we've done.

Obviously, I talked about the success of More Homes, More Choice, the fact that we had that many shovels in the ground last year. But there are many, many market forces out there. So you're right: We need to incentivize, but we also need to make sure that they're set up for success.

The last stat that I'll give you is this BILD report that I've talked about in the House so many times, about timelines. Timelines in the GTA take between 10 and 34 months, depending on the municipality. It's an average of 40% longer than two years ago. So we need to look at the process. We need to make sure that the process is incentivizing the type of housing we need, and we need to ensure, as we expand strong-mayor powers as part of Bill 39, that we're very, very focused and scoped on the housing priorities.

I know you're very passionate about the transit side, and we need to leverage the investment the government is making in York region. Again, this bill will provide an opportunity for the mayors in those communities to be able to integrate the strong-mayor powers we've done for Toronto and Ottawa, very narrowly scoped on those provincial priorities.

I think your question is bang-on. That's something the government has got to keep front of mind throughout this whole term of office.

Mr. Billy Pang: Thank you, Minister.

I want to share my time with MPP Holland.

The Chair (Ms. Laurie Scott): MPP Holland.

Mr. Kevin Holland: Thank you, Minister, for your time here today. We've heard a lot of comments today with regard to what this bill is going to result in. As a mayor myself, I recognize that times today are vastly different than they were when I started 31 years ago. As a mayor, the expectation from the public is much different. You have to adapt; you have to change. The processes, responsibilities and expectations are far greater now than when I started 31 years ago. If we don't change with the times and the realities of what we're facing, we're going to see what's happened in Ontario already, after 15 years of not planning, adapting and changing, where we're falling behind. And we simply can't fall behind.

I've heard a lot of talk with regard to the impact on farmland and green land and what we're losing. I'd just like to point out we're talking about 0.3 of 1% of the green space that we're talking about.

We've heard comments in the Legislature and from our Minister of Agriculture, Food and Rural Affairs with regard to how our agricultural sector is growing, adapting and changing to address the realities of what we're facing today and the needs of Ontarians. We export much more food than what we produce. We are a vast province with untapped resources for farming. We know that farming agriculture is going to be a major industry in the north, and there's a lot of land up there. I'm not concerned about the loss of food production abilities in this province. I think we've proven that we can do that and that we're capable of doing that.

So I guess my question to you is that, keeping that in mind—and we've talked about how even the farming community has said that they're having a hard time finding workers, and this goes back to the ability to house our workers that we need. So I guess my question to you would be, can you talk about the urgent and pressing need that we have to get more homes built faster?

The Chair (Ms. Laurie Scott): One minute remaining.

Hon. Steve Clark: Yes, and the need is great. Right beside you, MPP Jones is one of the parliamentary assistants to the Minister of Agriculture, Food and Rural Affairs. There are lots of producers out there that need workers, that need labour. Increased labour means increased pressure on finding a home that meets people's needs and their budget. We've got some major employers coming to this province who are now choosing Ontario as a location whereas they left under the previous government, who was supported by the official opposition 99% of the time.

We are in recovery mode but we need to get shovels in the ground. We know with the increased immigration targets, it's going to be an even bigger pressure. We want to welcome those new Canadians to Ontario. It is literally the best place to live, work and play in our country, so we want to make sure we have a plan in place. All of the things that we've done, whether it be Bill 39 or whether it be any of the other initiatives, the bill that was passed, Bill 23—

The Chair (Ms. Laurie Scott): Thank you, Minister. Thank you for your time, Minister. This concludes our business for today.

As a reminder, the deadline for written submissions is 7 p.m. on Thursday, December 1, 2022.

Are there any questions before we adjourn? MPP Burch has a question.

Mr. Jeff Burch: I'd like to ask if we could have unanimous consent to have an extra day of committee hearings, given the fact that the committees are over-subscribed and, for some strange reason, the committee is not sitting today, so there is only one day of hearings.

There are an awful lot of people who want to speak to this very contentious legislation, so we would like to ask for another day of committee hearings so that citizens can be heard.

The Chair (Ms. Laurie Scott): MPP Burch has asked for unanimous consent for one more day of committee hearings. Do I have unanimous consent? I believe not. I'm sorry. There is not unanimous consent.

Thank you. The committee is now adjourned until 9 a.m. tomorrow, Thursday, December 1, 2020, when we will resume public hearings on Bill 39.

The committee adjourned at 1002.

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