

Legislative
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Assemblée
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de l'Ontario

Official Report of Debates (Hansard)

HE-22

Standing Committee on Heritage, Infrastructure and Cultural Policy

Helping Homebuyers,
Protecting Tenants Act, 2023

Selection of estimates

1st Session
43rd Parliament

Thursday 11 May 2023

Journal des débats (Hansard)

HE-22

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

Loi de 2023
visant à aider les acheteurs
et à protéger les locataires

Sélection des budgets
des dépenses

1^{re} session
43^e législature

Jeudi 11 mai 2023

Chair: Laurie Scott
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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**

Thursday 11 May 2023

Jeudi 11 mai 2023

The committee met at 0900 in committee room 1.

**HELPING HOMEBUYERS,
PROTECTING TENANTS ACT, 2023
LOI DE 2023
VISANT À AIDER LES ACHETEURS
ET À PROTÉGER LES LOCATAIRES**

Consideration of the following bill:

Bill 97, An Act to amend various statutes with respect to housing and development/ Projet de loi 97, Loi modifiant diverses lois en ce qui concerne le logement et l'aménagement.

The Chair (Ms. Laurie Scott): Good morning, everyone. The Standing Committee on Heritage, Infrastructure and Cultural Policy will now come to order. We are here to resume public hearings on Bill 97, An Act to amend various statutes with respect to housing and development.

We are joined by staff from legislative research, Hansard and broadcast and recording.

Please wait until I recognize you before starting to speak. As always, all comments should go through the Chair. Are there any questions before we begin?

Today's presenters have been scheduled in groups of three for each one-hour time slot, with each presenter allotted seven minutes for an opening statement, followed by 39 minutes of questioning for all three witnesses 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 four and a half minutes for the independent member of the committee.

Are there any questions?

**FEDERATION OF URBAN
NEIGHBOURHOODS
ONTARIO REAL
ESTATE ASSOCIATION
REENA**

The Chair (Ms. Laurie Scott): Today's presenters are the Federation of Urban Neighbourhoods of Ontario, the Ontario Real Estate Association and Reena. I believe we're all virtual today, so welcome—

Interjection.

The Chair (Ms. Laurie Scott): Oh, there is one? You can come to the table if you would like. I'll just give them a minute to come to the table.

We'd like to begin with the Federation of Urban Neighbourhoods, if that's okay. When you're ready, if you would just state your name for Hansard purposes and then begin. Thank you.

Mr. Jeffrey Levitt: My name is Jeffrey Levitt. Geoff Kettel, the president of the organization, was to be doing the presentation. I'll be stepping in. He was unfortunately delayed, so I'm sorry about that.

My name is Jeffrey Levitt, and I'm a director of the Federation of Urban Neighbourhoods.

I believe that we made a written submission, which I believe has been circulated, so I'm just going to try to summarize the high points of the submission.

The Federation of Urban Neighbourhoods is a province-wide, volunteer-based umbrella organization of community and neighbourhood associations. As such, we maintain a close interest in the changes to provincial planning and landlord and tenant legislation.

Starting first with the context for Bill 97, the legislative changes relating to land use planning passed by the current government under Bills 3, 23, 108 and 109, among others, have resulted in:

- a massive overhaul of the land use planning process in heritage and environmental protection;
- a new set of directives focused on supply rather than demand for homes;
- reduced the role of duly elected municipal councils; and
- eliminated appeals by residents who devote their time and energy to contribute to their communities' development.

We now have Bill 97, another omnibus bill dealing with land use planning and landlord and tenant matters. The tenant protection measures in Bill 97 are a mixed bag—some welcome, some concerning. The land use planning measures are welcome if you're a land developer but otherwise very concerning to Ontario residents.

Briefly, looking at the tenant protection measures in Bill 97: Bill 23 provided the Minister of Municipal Affairs with sweeping authority to make regulations imposing limits in consultation on local municipalities' demolition and rental conversion bylaws. Bill 97 provides details on what may be subject to these regulations. It's concerning,

the breadth of the authority that the minister has. For instance, these regulations could supersede legislation such as the Ontario Human Rights Code and the Residential Tenancies Act itself. In the absence of provincial guidance on the contemplated content of these regulations, it's impossible to predict their potential impacts on tenants and landlords.

Bill 97 also contains some welcome tenant protection enhancements such as protections from renovations. But it's important to bear in mind looking at these enhanced protections for tenants that, both for tenants and landlords, any changes in the act are made essentially ineffective if there's not timely access to the Landlord and Tenant Board, because all of the enhancements require going through the board, which is currently a bottleneck with a huge, huge backlog of applications. In the absence of timely access to the Landlord and Tenant Board, any change in the legislation providing new rights to landlords or tenants will be largely ineffective. The increased fines proposed in Bill 97 are welcome from a tenant's perspective but may be less helpful than they appear. They're subject to enforcement at the first level. Ministry staff have to be available to lay charges and it is the discretion of the court at the second level, in terms of sentencing.

Concerning the land use planning changes, as far as we can see, the government's approach to land use planning over its mandate has been the theme of "move fast and break things." This may be appropriate for tech start-ups, but in our view, is entirely inappropriate for public policy in the land use policy sphere. The make-it-up-as-you-go nature of the recent land use planning legislation is illustrated by the walk-backs in Bill 97 to recently enacted legislation. Some of the legislation, including Bill 23, was enacted as little as a couple of months ago, in the fall of 2022. For example, Bill 97 defers the date set out in Bill 109 for the refunds of development applications. Bill 97 had to clarify restrictions set out in Bill 109 on parking for additional units, and Bill 97 qualifies the limitations set out in Bill 23 regarding the authority for municipalities to impose site plan control.

As the Toronto Star has noted, coming on the heels of sweeping changes to the land use planning system introduced last fall, Bill 97 threatens to be more disruptive than helpful for municipalities. Concerning employment lands, Bill 97 would provide a new definition of "areas of employment" that explicitly removes "institutional uses" and "commercial uses" from the definition. This change will have the effect of permitting appeals of zoning bylaw amendment applications that propose to remove lands from areas zoned to permit institutional and office uses. It would appear that this change will threaten the protection of employment lands and result in increased conversion to residential uses. I note that the city of Toronto has said that this change of the definition has the potential to remove approximately 25% of the city's employment areas—

The Chair (Ms. Laurie Scott): Sixty seconds remaining.

Mr. Jeffrey Levitt: —from the Planning Act definition.

The new arbitrary powers of the minister to have minister's zoning orders are particularly concerning. This authority is unlimited in scope and could be used to undermine any principle of environmental protection or good planning practice contained in the provincial policy statement or a municipality's official plan.

Bill 97 continues the unfortunate trend of recent legislation to override local decision-making in the land use planning area and increases discretionary powers of the minister to override both local and provincial planning policies. It's disappointing the legislation does little to encourage housing affordability or to discourage sprawl development and protection of heritage, environment and agricultural resources.

Thank you for the opportunity to address the committee.

The Chair (Ms. Laurie Scott): Thank you very much for your presentation.

We will now go to the Ontario Real Estate Association for up to seven minutes. Just state your name at the beginning and go ahead.

Mr. Wasim Jarrah: Good morning, Chair, and members of the committee. My name is Wasim Jarrah. I'm a realtor based out of Aurora and I'm also the chair of the government relations committee for the Ontario Real Estate Association, also known as OREA.

Joining me virtually is Tania Arsenosi, a broker out of the Vaughan area; she's also our 2023 president. And we have Jason Lagerquist, who is our head of government relations.

OREA is a provincial trade association that represents over 96,000 real estate professionals across this great province. It is our pleasure to be here today to support Bill 97, the Helping Homebuyers, Protecting Tenants Act. As many of you are aware, Ontario continues to face an unprecedented housing affordability crisis. Simply put, there are not enough homes available to meet existing demand and, predictably, prices have skyrocketed to the point where an entire generation of Ontarians is at risk of not being able to achieve the dream of home ownership. This past March, the average price of a home in Ontario was almost \$900,000. That's a 47% increase from April of 2020, and home prices in major markets throughout the GTA are averaging well over a million dollars right now.

0910

We all know people in our own communities who are simply unable to afford to purchase a home. Often they are young people who have done everything right, but still find themselves unable to enter the market. Think of how frustrating it is for someone who has gone to school and got a job, yet they cannot find an affordable place to call home, or someone who has got a job in the skilled trades and is unable to afford a home in the community where they want to live and work. Market analysts have long been pointing to the lack of housing supply as the main driver of inflated prices in our province, and OREA agrees.

Ontario realtors are pleased to see that the government recognizes the need to tackle the housing affordability

crisis head-on. Bill 97 aims to support prospective homeowners, renters and landlords across this province, while also adopting a targeted approach to deliver on the government's plan of building 1.5 million homes by 2031. OREA is happy to see that Bill 97 proposes to integrate the provincial growth plan for the Golden Horseshoe with the provincial policy statement, which will streamline these land use planning documents to help accelerate the approval process for housing. These changes will enable local communities to increase the supply of housing by providing them with more flexibility to reduce duplication and streamline approvals while supporting local economic priorities and continuing to protect the environment.

OREA supports the government's goal to build 1.5 million homes by 2031, and we are happy to see Bill 97 contain changes to land use planning policy that will increase the emphasis on addressing the housing supply and housing affordability crisis. OREA further applauds the government's investment of over \$6.5 million to clear the case backlog at the Landlord and Tenant Board by hiring new adjudicators and staff members. For years, we have heard from our members about losses faced by both landlords and tenants because of COVID-19. This investment will ensure decisions at the Landlord and Tenant Board are made in a timely manner, providing certainty to both landlords and tenants, while helping mom-and-pop landlords provide more options for quality rentals across Ontario. This will also ensure peace of mind and security for tenants while living in their rental properties.

Bill 97 also aims to strengthen the consumer protection for Ontario renters. OREA is encouraged by the government's proposal to double the maximum fines for violations under the Residential Tenancies Act, to put a stop to unethical and illegal behaviour: for example, bad-faith evictions. OREA supports increased protection for tenants from landlords who break the rules. In fact, this was a proposal that was emphasized in our recent *Fighting for Fair Housing* report. Such measures will be especially helpful for the BIPOC and LGBTQ2+ communities, who often face unique challenges in finding secure housing options.

Finally, OREA would like to applaud the government on the move to expand insurance coverage for first home savings accounts at credit unions. No matter how Ontarians choose to save for their first home, they shall feel confident that their investments are protected.

I'll pass on the final few minutes to our president.

Ms. Tania Arsenosi: Thank you. Good morning, Chair and members of this committee. As Wasim mentioned earlier, I'm Tania Arsenosi, the president of OREA.

The *Helping Homebuyers, Protecting Tenants Act* builds on the government's previous pro-housing bills that will significantly advance the long-term goal of increasing supply and affordability for Ontario families. However, further action can still be taken to help end the housing affordability crisis. This is why OREA is asking the government to consider amendments to Bill 97 that would allow for continued rollback of exclusionary zoning across the province, and further amendments that will allow the

conversion of underused commercial space to residential housing.

Families across Ontario strive to find a safe, affordable place to call home in their community of choice. This is what drives Ontario's 96,000 realtors in the work that we do each day. That is why Ontario realtors are pleased to see that the government remains committed to addressing the housing affordability crisis, while taking a balanced approach to increased protections for renters, landlords and communities across Ontario.

As the housing market continues to shift and change, now is the time to bring new housing policies that will stabilize Ontario's affordability for future generations of homebuyers. Through some of these changes, including Bill 97, Ontario can bring new life into existing neighbourhoods, strengthen communities and continue to encourage diversity and choice in housing supply.

On behalf of OREA, I would like to thank you, the Chair and members of the committee, for your time today, and I'm happy to answer any questions you may have.

The Chair (Ms. Laurie Scott): Thank you very much for your presentation.

We will now move on to the last one for this hour, which is Reena. If you'd just please go ahead and state your name, and begin.

Mr. Bryan Keshen: Thank you, Chair, and to the committee. I'm Bryan Keshen. I'm the CEO of Reena. Reena is in our 50th year of operations supporting people with disabilities, serving and developing housing. We have over 32 homes, three apartment buildings, multiple independent living, and I really look forward to sharing some of our thoughts on this bill.

I also sit as the chair of the provincial OASIS housing work group, 200 agencies across the province who support people with disabilities in their housing needs. I also chair the Western York Region Ontario Health Team. Those perspectives about health and housing all interrelate to this bill and the furtherance of the development of housing.

I'm speaking out of support and concern. The support is that I'm really, really excited to see new advances as a developer and builder of housing, to see ways that we can be part of that. I am very concerned that we have not made room for everyone in this planning. Some of the aspects of that mean that we need to require and extend to our municipalities, to our planning process, the provision that at least 10% of the resources and energy, space and time, monies and otherwise, be available for those who are vulnerable and who are in major need of housing.

Presently, there's no targeted expectation of any municipality, through any of the funding given through the province or federal government, to allow for supportive housing. It's not a requirement to meet the needs of people with intellectual and developmental disabilities in our communities. So to speak of expanding our housing and protecting tenants, we need to include those populations in our planning.

Furthermore, thinking about the tenancy act: Presently there are people—I can tell you the story of Kayla. Kayla is a person who is supported with a wheelchair, who has a

minor intellectual disability. The fire marshal came to review the building that they live in. They love their neighbourhood, their community. The fire marshal decided that because they're getting supports by an agency, amongst three others in that building who are getting supports, they are in a care occupancy situation. The fire marshal said the landlord had to put in a whole series of fire safety features and a fire suppression system throughout the building to meet the needs of these four people, or else they were going to have to evict them.

The million dollars-plus of work was not viable for the landlord. There was no opportunity to modify or apply separately, and when they did apply, the municipality required them to review their zoning status, and suddenly, the whole building became a care occupancy.

I say this story because Kayla is now at risk of losing their home, because the minor modifications that could have been around their unit aren't allowed presently. I'd like to see a way to include in the protections and the provision for a landlord to make minor modifications that would improve the quality of tenant life, without having to do full modifications of their buildings: anything under 20% not needing an extensive permit or anything of that nature.

Today, if you are an adult with developmental disabilities, you are likely to be on a 40-year waiting list for housing. You're likely to be living below poverty, 90% living on ODSP, with a \$522 allowance for rental housing. Anything we could do to further affordable, accessible, supportive housing would be welcomed and appreciated.

0920

The Chair (Ms. Laurie Scott): Thank you very much for your presentation. We will now go to the official opposition for their seven and a half minutes. MPP Burch, please go ahead.

Mr. Jeff Burch: Good morning. Thank you to all of the presenters. We really appreciate your time being here this morning.

I wanted to start with a couple of questions for the Federation of Urban Neighbourhoods. A few of the comments I found interesting—and right off the bat, your comments about the government's approach in terms of supply versus demand: That's something that we've been speaking about. The government, with all of its legislation, has been focused on simply one side of the equation, which is supply. They're forgetting about the demand part, which is actually what kind of homes people are demanding, especially from your perspective in urban neighbourhoods. We have a complete lack of any type of focus on affordable housing, social housing and the kind of housing that—especially in urban neighbourhoods—folks are desperate for.

Can you comment, from your perspective, on the need for the government to focus more of its efforts on meeting the demand for affordable housing?

Mr. Jeffrey Levitt: Yes, thank you for the question. What we see a lack of is anything in the government's plans for affordable housing per se, to target affordable

housing. Certainly, by opening up the greenbelt, by expanding the municipal settlement areas, as is proposed in the current revision of the provincial policy statement, there will be more sprawl development. In terms of affordability, I would point to one recent example from my own community, which is the transit station development proposed for the proposed Ontario Line at the Gerrard and Carlaw intersection. Massive towers have been approved by Metrolinx, yet there is no provision whatsoever in the Metrolinx proposal for affordable housing. That's what we see, that although the supply may increase with the sprawl development, particularly in the suburbs, if the builder has a chance to, on a particular lot, build a house that he can sell for, say, \$600,000 or \$1.5 million, there's no control by the government as to what's going to happen with the product. Although they're pushing from the supply side, we fail to see anything from the demand side.

I would just add that the inclusionary zoning which OREA had applied for—the current government actually lowered the threshold of inclusionary zoning that's allowed and limited it to major transit station areas. So, if anything, the current government seems to be working at cross purposes to affordability.

Mr. Jeff Burch: Thank you for that. The government's own Housing Affordability Task Force very clearly said that we didn't actually need more land to address the housing crisis, that even meeting the current goals of the government could be accomplished within urban boundaries. Is that something from your perspective that you would agree with, that there are plenty of opportunities within urban boundaries to develop and to meet the government's targets within urban boundaries without much more expensive development that is included with sprawl?

Mr. Jeffrey Levitt: I would absolutely agree with that and point to the recent experience in the city of Hamilton, where for their municipal conformity review they came to exactly the conclusion that you're talking about, yet it was overridden by the government. Hamilton came to that conclusion not on a whim, but on the basis of an extensive process of analysis by their staff and, I imagine, outside consultants. So, yes, I would agree completely with your statement.

Mr. Jeff Burch: One more comment you made that I found really interesting was that from your perspective and the perspective of your organization, the government's approach to housing and to passing legislation was "Move fast and break things." We've heard similar comments from the Association of Municipalities of Ontario, from Ontario planners and many others who are taken aback by the speed with which poorly thought-out legislation is being put forward and concerns that it could actually clog up the system and make things even worse in terms of wait times and backups. Can you comment on that?

Mr. Jeffrey Levitt: I would agree again with your statement. With the current demands we have, there's no doubt that the land use planning process can't be static. We need changes. As the Toronto Star editorial pointed

out, the pace of the changes and the sometimes contradictory nature, and also the uncertainty that's created by the changes—to take one example, the provincial ability to override or modify rental demolition and conversion bylaws of local municipalities, the power of the Minister of Municipal Affairs and Housing to make those regulations, is sweeping. Yet there's no indication whatsoever as to what will come in those regulations. As a result, it makes it virtually impossible, from our perspective, for municipalities to plan.

It's one thing if a coherent program is provided, but just authority that's going to be exercised in unknown time frames, unexpected ways—it works to the detriment of the entire system, from our perspective.

The Chair (Ms. Laurie Scott): Thirty seconds left, Jeff.

Mr. Jeff Burch: Thanks very much. I only have 30 seconds left, so I think I'm just going to wrap up.

The Chair (Ms. Laurie Scott): Over to MPP McMahon for four and a half minutes, please.

Ms. Mary-Margaret McMahon: Good morning, everyone. Thank you for coming in person or taking the time to speak to us on Zoom. We really appreciate you being here.

My first questions are for FUN, Federation of Urban Neighbourhoods, Geoff and Jeffrey. Just following up on my colleague's comments which Jeffrey was answering about the lack of an affordable housing mandate with provincial lands on Carlaw, can you just elaborate? What would your goal be for the province for affordability on provincial lands?

Mr. Jeffrey Levitt: I think that's a very good question. The answer would be, first of all, to have a policy on the expectations of affordability on the massively increased and possibly justified ability to build housing around these transit stations. What I guess I would say is, just have a policy. That policy can then be debated and looked at. But in the absence of a policy, we see what happened at Gerrard and Carlaw. The developer says there's no policy, so in the absence of a policy, there is no incentive whatsoever to take any action.

Ms. Mary-Margaret McMahon: The same thing happened closer to our neighbourhood, at 8 Dawes Road, as well, which is very unfortunate, but we will be working on that. I'm not sure if you saw the submissions or heard about them from the city and also from the Regional Planning Commissioners of Ontario alumni, but with regard to the planning commissioners, they're very concerned. They're unclear as to why watershed-based planning is being significantly compromised by the province, including conservation authorities. They're also worried about the loss of prime agricultural lands. I noticed that you mentioned that in your talk today, and I'm wondering if you can elaborate a bit more on that. Your thoughts?

0930

Mr. Jeffrey Levitt: Thank you for that question. That is baffling, as well, to the organizations that you mentioned. It's baffling to our organization. There never has been an explanation as to why protections that, since

Hurricane Hazel, have been part of the concern of the province and the provincial land use planning system have been jettisoned.

What we find most objectionable, though, is similar to the fact that when you asked your previous question, "What do you think the government should do in terms of a policy," it's to have a policy. What we would like to see the government do is to explicitly answer exactly the question you asked so that it can be debated on its merits. Instead, what we have, with the enhanced ability under Bill 97 of the government to make minister's zoning orders, which can override any downstream approval, is stealth development of wetlands and stealth removal of those protections. That's both, we consider, not transparent—

The Chair (Ms. Laurie Scott): Thirty seconds left.

Mr. Jeffrey Levitt: —but also extremely concerning.

Ms. Mary-Margaret McMahon: Thank you very much. I liked that; you have some colourful language with "stealth developments." Thank you for your time today.

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

We'll now move over to the government for their seven and a half minutes. MPP Smith, please.

Ms. Laura Smith: Through you, Chair, I want to extend a very hearty welcome to all here in the chamber, whether it's virtually or at the table. We always appreciate your input, and I see a lot of familiar faces, a lot of great faces, so I really appreciate you engaging with us today.

I'm going to try to keep this brief, because we've got a lot of questions. But Wasim—if it's appropriate to call you by your first name?

Mr. Wasim Jarrah: Yes.

Ms. Laura Smith: Okay. I really enjoyed your presentation. You touched something that hit home for me. I grew up in an area not too far away from my grandmother. My husband grew up about five minutes away from where we currently live, and that's all kind of within a 10-minute circle within our community, which is wonderful.

But my biggest fear, because I have kids, is that they are totally incapable of being in the market. They're teenagers, and it's very sad for me, because you talked about people living and working in the same community, and that's basically impossible now. They're being cut out of the system, and that's part of the reason why I think some of us got into politics. I know that's why I got into politics: We're letting the next generation down. I couldn't agree with you more. It's a very scary proposition, especially when you're a mother.

But I'm going to shoot to the question. You talked about different measures: the accelerated approval process, and clearing the case backlog within the L and T system, which is so important. I used to work within the L and T system, as well. What additional measures do you think would be the most important for the government to consider to improve future plans?

Mr. Wasim Jarrah: Through you, Madam Chair: I think the approach of the government is an approach that has been needed for a very long time. I think we shelved the idea of bringing supply to market at a pace that the

current government is moving, and we commend them for that.

A lot of the hiccups that happen are on the local municipal level, and I think that's where a lot of the backlog is. I think anything we can do to speed up that process, to eliminate any backlogs there, is welcomed as well.

Ms. Laura Smith: The next question is going to be to Tania—I can call you Tania? Thank you so much. You actually hit a few things that I thought were very interesting as well. You talked about underused commercial space and ultimately giving people more choice in selection. How do you think the approach to focus the protection on employment areas and uses of unique land needs like manufacturing and warehousing could make more land available for housing?

Ms. Tania Arsenosi: When I look at empty buildings, I think that there is potential there, right? The plumbing is done, the electrical is done, and it's a solid foundation. We can then go to government and municipalities and ask them to consider converting these spaces that are no longer going to be in use.

But if there's an opportunity to bring manufacturing back, obviously that's the first thing we want to do, because employment and helping the community grow starts with strong employment in their community. Once people can come there and work, they can grow the community. They can then purchase within their community, and they can build it and they can grow and have their families, like myself. I live 15 minutes from my mother. I look at my three kids and I think, where am I going to put them in 10 years? My twins are 16; I was 26 when I bought my first home. When they're 26, could they?

But if we can find a way to give them a strong employment foundation, that is obviously the primary. From there, we can work within the community to find existing land, building multi-level dwellings. You're ending the exclusionary zoning. We don't need a 5,000-square-foot house on a half-acre lot. We can put multi-units there that also work and keep the aesthetic of the community. It's really about educating the people there that these are good steps. They're not just going to put a big brown building that we see in movies. We're going to make the housing conducive to the community they live in.

Ms. Laura Smith: Sorry, can I ask the time?

The Chair (Ms. Laurie Scott): Two minutes and 40 seconds.

Ms. Laura Smith: I'm going to pass the rest of my time to Mr. Leardi.

The Chair (Ms. Laurie Scott): MPP Leardi, please.

Mr. Anthony Leardi: Mr. Jarrah, I come from Essex county. Essex county is a semi-rural area with small towns of 15,000 to 20,000 people. These towns contain commercial, industrial and other types of zoned properties which are of no use anymore, because they're situated in the centre of town and they're not large enough for modern industrial or commercial operations. We have home builders now converting those into spectacular homes. I can think of a 74-unit building being built in a particular

small town right off the top of my head. This is going to allow hundreds of people to remain in the town they grew up in. Your views, please?

Mr. Wasim Jarrah: Through you, Madam Chair: Just going back to what MPP Smith said, 50% of people who are in high schools today will not be able to own a property based on what we've seen in the past. We strongly support any measures that the government can take or local communities can take to keep people in those communities that they live and work in.

We strongly support taking those underutilized buildings and converting them to housing that people can live in and can enjoy. I think one of the things that we forget—I'm in my forties, but I still remember that communities were where you grew up, you played, you had friends. You built something around it, and that's something that we're not seeing as much of right now. So I commend what's happening in your municipality and your region to take those conversions, to keep people there. That's how you create affordable housing, or housing that is affordable: by creating more units in those municipalities.

Mr. Anthony Leardi: Following up on that, the vacancy of these buildings is now creating a situation where the vacancy entitles the property owner to a 40% discount on property taxes. In your experience, are there other areas where a 40% discount on property taxes exists for vacant commercial and industrial properties?

Mr. Wasim Jarrah: Personally, I'm not aware, but I will refer to Jason if he's got any comments on that.

Mr. Jason Lagerquist: Thank you for that. Thank you for the question. I'm also not aware off the top of my head, but definitely something that we can look into and circle back with you and get you that information.

Mr. Anthony Leardi: I'd appreciate that information, because some municipalities are now revoking those property tax discounts—

The Chair (Ms. Laurie Scott): I'm afraid we're out of time. Sorry, MPP Leardi.

We will now move to the official opposition. MPP Bell, please, for seven and a half minutes.

Ms. Jessica Bell: Thank you to all the presenters for coming in and sharing your expertise today. I really appreciate it. I've got questions for each of you.

My first question is to the Federation of Urban Neighbourhoods. Either Geoff or Jeffrey, you're welcome to answer it. I'm curious about the changes to the provincial policy statement and the growth plan, and the government's move to combine them into a new provincial planning statement.

0940

When I look at the proposed changes, it looks at fundamentally upending how we plan in Ontario. I see a move to eliminate firm density requirements in new subdivisions, eliminating firm intensification targets for municipalities, and even eliminating density requirements for municipalities within a boundary as well, and then also making it easier for municipal boundaries to be expanded by the municipality. So it really looks like, to me, that it's moving towards a very expensive model of suburban

sprawl and not really focusing on the kind of construction we need to meet our housing goals within areas already zoned for development.

If you've had a look at the new proposed changes, what are your recommendations? What kind of changes do you want to see in the new provincial planning statement? I don't know if you can see, but Geoff—

Mr. Geoff Kettel: Thank you for your question, through the Chair. To be honest with you, the deadline is June 2. There were different deadlines between Bill 97 and the merger of the growth plan, even though they were announced on the same day. We have devoted our attention, as you can understand, to Bill 97, and we haven't looked at the other, but we clearly are going to have some major concerns.

If I can defer on that, I don't think the committee is looking at it because it's simply a policy change rather than a legislative change. So I'm not sure there will be an opportunity, except through the ERO process, for the public to actually engage in the major issues that it does raise. And the transparency issue is, again, a concern.

Ms. Jessica Bell: Thank you. And then, Jeffrey, do you have any comments on that?

Mr. Jeffrey Levitt: Yes. One comment that I would add is, I would agree with you about the reduced density targets meaning discouraging intensification. The reduction on having to have municipal studies before expanding settlement area boundaries makes it easier to encroach on agricultural lands, and we know that in the middle of a field, they don't put 38-storey towers; what they do is put single-lot subdivisions.

I would just point out again that this being dumped on a—the announcement, I believe, was made on a Friday before a long weekend, the usual time to put things that you want to have under the radar. It's yet another example of creating, actually, more uncertainty. I attended a virtual seminar last week where there were many, many, many questions about how this is going to work. I notice that the minister has a transition power to smooth the rough edges, and that's going to be called upon quite a bit, I'm sure. Rather than clarifying things and making things easier, it's basically another hand grenade thrown into the mix that surely could have been done in a more orderly way.

Ms. Jessica Bell: Thank you. We are hearing from municipalities that the very rapid changes to the planning process are creating chaos within their planning departments, because they don't know what's coming next.

My second question is to OREA, and it's about the comments that you made around converting employment lands into housing, which is something that we are looking at closely as well. I noticed yesterday when the board of trade came in, they expressed some concern about moving too quickly, because we want to plan for long-term employment growth. So we don't necessarily want to get rid of employment lands in areas that are maybe transit hubs, because what happens in 10 years' time when the long-term effects of the pandemic have subsided and people are moving back into the office? Essentially, they just asked for a slower and more careful process to ensure

we get it right. I was wondering: Could you clarify a little bit, with the time that you have, any additional information or insight you have about your position on converting employment lands to housing? Either Wasim or Tania.

Mr. Wasim Jarrah: Sure. I'll defer, through you, Madam Chair, to Jason.

Mr. Jason Lagerquist: Thank you, MPP Bell. That's a great question. It's good to see you again. We really appreciate your commitment to the housing file.

I think what we've seen over the last few years, specifically throughout the pandemic, is that the nature of work and the nature of employment has changed. A lot of businesses have gone online, and there has been a pretty significant reduction in the basic footprint of traditional office space that is now required as compared to before the pandemic. There's a lot of vacant office space that—as my president said earlier, we feel there's a great opportunity to convert that into residential housing.

I'm actually calling in this morning from Washington, DC. I'm at a conference in Washington. Just down the road in Virginia, there are a lot of really great examples of factories that were no longer being used for their traditional use, but have been converted into some really spectacular condo units that families are now living in.

I think my answer to your question, MPP Bell, is to just look at zoning opportunities and different levers that the government—

The Chair (Ms. Laurie Scott): Sixty seconds left.

Mr. Jason Lagerquist: —might have at its disposal to take advantage of some of these opportunities that have arisen with, as I said earlier, the changing nature of employment as a result of the pandemic.

Ms. Jessica Bell: Thank you. We have a very open mind on this matter of converting employment lands to housing, but we also are listening very carefully to stakeholders. When I hear of differences, I really want to tease it out a little further. Just to let you know, the Toronto Region Board of Trade had some questions about it, but obviously they were very open-minded as well. I know you talk to them frequently.

I'm going to follow up with my questions to Reena via email, because I do have some genuine questions about accessibility and the issue of accessibility in private housing. Thank you.

The Chair (Ms. Laurie Scott): MPP McMahon, for four and a half minutes.

Ms. Mary-Margaret McMahon: That was really great, Jason. Thank you for clarifying that, because I agree with you on that angle of utilizing employment lands. But I'm not sure if you saw the city of Toronto's submission; they're not really keen on removing that definition, "area of employment," because it would remove 25% of the city's employment areas, and it potentially puts 150,000 jobs currently at risk. I'm not sure if you saw that or you want to comment on that. I guess it's a fine balance, really.

Mr. Jason Lagerquist: Thank you, MPP McMahon, for the question. It's a good one. I will admit that I have not seen the city of Toronto's submission, so I don't want to comment on something that I haven't seen. What I

would say, though, is that we're facing a housing crisis, as my government relations chair spoke to off the top. Housing affordability is at an all-time low, and there's an entire generation of young people who are priced right out of the market. There is a crisis, and I think we do need to take some bold action to help address it.

As I said, I haven't seen the city of Toronto's submission, so I don't want to comment on that. But I would also just add I think it's important that there's a balanced approach, which I think is where you're coming from.

Ms. Mary-Margaret McMahon: Yes, I know. I have a 24-year-old and a 25-year-old, and they're actually out in British Columbia. It's not just home ownership. It's rental—trying to find some place to rent, at all, and a place that's affordable anywhere.

But I like what you said about being bold, and I'm all for that. I'm wondering, and this is for Wasim, Tania or Jason: Do you think the government is aggressive enough? Are they being courageous enough? Why not upzone all the avenues, especially along subway corridors in Toronto? Main streets: Upzone them to six storeys, eight storeys, 10 storeys more, four units per lot. We just saw what happened in Toronto yesterday with the multiplexes—woohoo, that was great. I'm just like, they seem a little timid, a little afraid of breaking into that yellowbelt and upsetting established neighbourhoods. I'm just wondering, why not go bolder? What are your thoughts?

Mr. Wasim Jarrah: Through you, Madam Chair, I think that the approach of the government is an approach that has been needed for a very long time. We have seen that we're in a crisis, and we're in a crisis because supply hasn't come to market fast enough. There are, I think, four pro-home-ownership bills that have been presented to be able to bring that supply to market. So I think bold steps have been taken.

0950

Bold steps need to continue to be taken to create that affordable stock, to create that supply to come to market and also make it affordable for your 24- and 25-year-old to be able to purchase—

Ms. Mary-Margaret McMahon: Right, but what about building up? We haven't seen movement on that, on upzoning, as of right, six storeys, eight storeys.

I represent the Danforth. It's two storeys; in many places, one storey. That's ridiculous on a subway corridor. So why not go hard on that?

Would you be supportive of that?

Mr. Wasim Jarrah: OREA has long been supportive—through you, Madam Chair—of ending exclusionary zoning. That's something that we've been asking for. In different reports that we've put out, we've said that we need to intensify in areas where that makes sense. We will continue to push for that.

Ms. Mary-Margaret McMahon: So that's a yes?

Mr. Wasim Jarrah: I gave you my answer.

Ms. Mary-Margaret McMahon: All right.

What else do I have? Reena, I wanted to speak to you. In the last 10 seconds, just your thoughts on your dream for Bill 97?

Mr. Bryan Keshen: To advance some of the protections for tenants and to give landlords the ability to meet

tenant needs without having to go change the complete zoning and status and advance that, which might make it easier to be—

The Chair (Ms. Laurie Scott): I'm sorry, we're out of time.

Ms. Mary-Margaret McMahon: Okay. I'll take it up with you off-line. Thanks.

The Chair (Ms. Laurie Scott): Thank you so much. Now over to the government side for the last seven and a half minutes. MPP Leardi, please go ahead.

Mr. Anthony Leardi: Taking up where I left off, I think, Ms. Artenosi, we were talking about commercial properties or industrial properties that were no longer suitable for such purpose and the redevelopment of those properties into homes. I was talking about my area, Essex county, which is partially rural, partially small town, with towns of approximately 15,000 people or around that area. Do you have any comment in that area? I don't suppose this is unique to Essex county. Is it happening in other areas as well?

Ms. Tania Artenosi: I myself have not yet seen it happening. Wasim might be able to talk about his neighbourhood and/or communities he trades in.

But the idea is that we want to see it happening. There are some commercial buildings that have been vacant for a very long time and can be converted. It's been, obviously, very successful in your community. So that's what we're promoting province-wide, to bring that same mindset that every guy has been experiencing in Essex county and let everybody else see the potential and the future, and that it can be great for future homeowners or renters.

Mr. Anthony Leardi: Okay. Now, I was dealing with the issue of the property taxes, where there had formerly been a rebate for vacant properties and now those rebates will be taken away. Simultaneously, these home builders were being denied the opportunity to convert these unused properties to residential use. So now they have the double whammy of full property taxes on a property they can't fill and which cannot be converted to any other use.

Are you familiar with the concept of highest and best use for property?

Ms. Tania Artenosi: I am. That's what we promote, right? We want to have the best use for property, to bring more housing. That's what we need.

I can't really comment to the three pillars you just spoke about. Maybe Jason can. But ultimately, we at OREA are working to help bring that supply to the market the best way possible, and working with government to come up with a strategy that would be beneficial, obviously, to future homeowners, landlords and developers. I mean, I think we all have to kind of play nice in the sandbox in order to have positive progressions in our community.

Jason, I don't know if there's anything else you want to add to that—

Mr. Anthony Leardi: I want to move over to Mr. Keshen now. Mr. Keshen, I met with Community Living yesterday. For people in my area—again, I'm talking about Essex county—there's no bus service, there's no subway service. If you want to get around in my area, you have to get around by automobile or a specialized bus, particularly if you have disabilities.

I was talking with people from Community Living yesterday. They have mobility concerns. They need to be situated in the heart of our little towns. And I want to keep families together. I don't want to tell families, "Sorry, you can't live in town. You have to move out of Essex county, away from your parents," or "away from your brother and sister," "away from your support network." I want to keep people close to their support network.

From your point of view, from the point of view of the people who you serve, what do you have to say about that?

Mr. Bryan Keshen: Through the Chair: Community Living Essex County is an amazing organization. Our approach through the network of organizations is really to look at access to community, and public transit or being in the centre of accessibility for employment, connections to health services is core. So housing needs to be built where all that lives, especially for people who don't have access to transportation, don't have the income to pay for expensive ways to get around. So I very much support the intensification and access to affordable, supportive housing in the heart of communities.

Mr. Anthony Leardi: Thank you very much.

Madam Chair, how much time do I have left?

The Chair (Ms. Laurie Scott): Three and a half minutes.

Mr. Anthony Leardi: Let me see if I can get Mr. Levitt back into the conversation. Mr. Levitt, again I'm going to remind you I'm from Essex county. I don't share the same type of neighbourhood that you share. My people can't hop on a subway to get to where they want to go; they can't hop on a bus. That's not going to happen in Essex county. We have to rely on automobiles. That's how we get around. We don't have the conveniences that you have. We also need housing. So when we build housing, we need to put that housing where people can walk. We need to have people in housing where they can walk to the grocery store or walk to the dentist or walk to where they need to get. That means we want to convert unused commercial property and unused industrial property to residential space so that people don't have to leave their small towns and move to large urban centres away from their families.

From that point of view, does that perhaps give you a different perspective on the conversion of what you described as employment land, what I described as unused commercial or urban industrial space? Does that give you a different point of view?

Mr. Jeffrey Levitt: My answer to that, and it's a theme I hope came through in my remarks, would be that the broad-brush-stroke policies that the government has may work in some areas and may not work in others—in Toronto, for instance. Meeting the affordability—they're on track to meet their housing targets. With the existing employment areas left intact, people need places to live, but they also need places to work—

Mr. Anthony Leardi: But you and I are talking about the same thing.

Mr. Jeffrey Levitt: But in your area, there may be different considerations, and it's kind of a shame that the same rules have to be applied both to my area and to your area.

Mr. Anthony Leardi: And isn't that precisely why we need that power of the minister to step in, to make sure that my people get the same fair treatment as your people, my people in Essex county get the same fair treatment as the people in the city of Toronto?

The Chair (Ms. Laurie Scott): Sixty seconds remaining.

Mr. Anthony Leardi: Isn't that exactly why we need that power?

Mr. Jeffrey Levitt: I would just point out that this is not a discretionary power of the minister; this is a rule for the entire province.

Mr. Anthony Leardi: But you just said we can't have that. You just said it.

Mr. Jeffrey Levitt: Well, I am saying I wish we didn't have the same rule for the entire province. But what you're talking about is where the minister has discretion. This is a case where the province has said one size fits all. We're going to have the same rule both for Essex and for the—

Mr. Anthony Leardi: No. In fact, that's why we've empowered the minister to do what the minister is empowered to do: so that he can do for Essex what is needed in Essex and he can do for Toronto what is needed in Toronto.

Mr. Jeffrey Levitt: Well, I think if you look at the legislation, you will find that—

Mr. Anthony Leardi: Oh, definitely, I've looked at the legislation; believe me. I've looked at it.

The Chair (Ms. Laurie Scott): Okay, we only have 12 seconds. Just let him answer.

Mr. Jeffrey Levitt: But that's not the case—the definition of employment lands is changed for the entire province, so the same rules as to conversion of employment lands will apply province-wide. There's no discretion of the minister to change or to modify.

The Chair (Ms. Laurie Scott): Thank you very much. I'm sorry, we're out of time.

Thank you to all presenters. This concludes our business for this morning. The committee is now recessed until 1 p.m.

The committee recessed from 0959 to 1301.

The Chair (Ms. Laurie Scott): Good afternoon, everyone. The Standing Committee on Heritage, Infrastructure and Cultural Policy will now come to order. We are here to resume public hearings on Bill 97, An Act to amend various statutes with respect to housing and development. Are there any questions before we begin? I don't see any.

ONTARIO'S BIG CITY MAYORS

145 ST. GEORGE TENANTS' COMMITTEE

The Chair (Ms. Laurie Scott): I will now call on this afternoon's presenters to come forward to the table: the 145 St. George Tenants' Committee and Ontario's Big City Mayors. Welcome. I'll give you a minute to get settled. It's okay.

I know, Patricia, we've got a headset, so you tell us how that works when you get there. We can do a "Test, test, can you hear us? Kind of?"

Ms. Patricia Johnston: Not too bad. I can hear you, yes.

The Chair (Ms. Laurie Scott): I think there's a volume on your side. The Clerk is going to come and give you a hand. We want to make sure you can hear. Okay, so we're good now? Okay, that's perfect.

Patricia, do you want to start first, or would you like Mayor Meed Ward to start?

Ms. Patricia Johnston: I'm sorry?

Ms. Marianne Meed Ward: Would you like to start, or would you like me to start?

Ms. Patricia Johnston: I'll listen to you for a while.

The Chair (Ms. Laurie Scott): Okay, so you can get acclimatized. No problem.

And if you're okay—thank you.

Ms. Marianne Meed Ward: I'm fine.

The Chair (Ms. Laurie Scott): That's wonderful. We appreciate that, Marianne, so thank you. Up to seven minutes for the presentation, and just state your name before you start. Please go ahead when you're ready.

Ms. Marianne Meed Ward: Well, thank you so much for convening these and for everyone being here, and I really look forward to our discussion and hearing any questions that you might have, and really hope that this information is helpful to you in your deliberations.

I appreciate the opportunity to address the Standing Committee on Heritage, Infrastructure and Cultural Policy today. My name is Marianne Meed Ward. I am the mayor of Burlington, but I am here today as the vice-chair of Ontario's Big City Mayors. I'm speaking on behalf of our 29 member mayors across Ontario representing 70% of Ontario's population. Our role is to advocate on issues and policies that are important to Ontario's largest cities, and I know you share our passion for them. I know I speak for our entire membership when I say that addressing the housing crisis is our biggest priority.

Today, I will be providing comments and suggestions with respect to Bill 97, the Helping Homebuyers, Protecting Tenants Act, 2023, on behalf of our member mayors. Joining me virtually today—hello, Alison—is Alison Enns, our manager of policy and community and an Ontario big city mayors member.

Let's talk about tenant rights and rental units. Ontario's Big City Mayors is encouraged to see the protections that have been proposed for renters in Bill 97, and we really do want to applaud the province for including these critically important amendments to help protect residents and make their lives easier. I can tell you that all of us as mayors do receive the calls from residents asking for our assistance, and what you've put into this bill will really help us help them, so thank you.

Additional funding for the Landlord and Tenant Board to appoint more adjudicators and hire more staff will really help to relieve what we know is an overburdened system, so we appreciate that and also appreciate reinforcing rules against evictions that will protect families from being forced from their homes without a place to go.

We all know there is a housing crisis and a housing shortage in Ontario. Ontario's Big City Mayors support

the government's goal of 1.5 million homes, and we have all signed the pledges and submitted housing supply action plans for how each of our municipalities will do our part to achieve that goal. In order to do so, of course, rental units have to be a part of the equation and the mix, both the build of new stock and—very important—to protect existing rental stock. And we need to create affordable housing units. We've all heard the stories about people competing and bidding each other up in our rental market.

OBCM also stands behind the province's call for the federal government to defer HST on new large-scale purpose-built rental units. We support the consultations on a regulatory framework to govern municipal rental replacement bylaws in order to protect rentals. However, we would also like to see the province prioritize the design of purpose-built rental projects that make sense for those looking to rent, starting with—we hear this a lot—family-sized units, which are not being built anywhere near to the degree that we need them, and, of course, student rentals.

Turning to some thoughts for you on the provincial land use planning policy: Ontario's cities have been working with the province for many years, with A Place to Grow and the current provincial policy statement. We acknowledge that there are challenges with these two documents, and updates are welcome. Many of our members are currently in the process of reviewing the provincial policy statement, the planning statement, and will have their submissions in June, in time for the June consultation deadline.

We support simplifying existing policies and a refocus on achieving housing outcomes, and we do agree with the province's recognition that one size does not fit all for all of our members. Flexibility is probably the one thing we agree on around how this should be done. Every municipality wants to be able to determine how to achieve those goals, literally on the ground, and we're very encouraged, to that end, to see the continued identification by the province that municipal official plans are the most important vehicle for determining the policy statement and achieving our comprehensive, integrated and long-term planning, and really achieving our housing goals.

However, along with these goals, we hope that the province will consider the impact of short-term benefits and long-term negative impacts on the natural environment, agricultural systems, infrastructure, transit delivery and the creation of complete communities. It is more than simply building units of housing; we need parks, community amenities, transit, social services and jobs for our residents. If all we achieve is housing, we will have failed our residents.

We would like to thank the Minister of Municipal Affairs and Housing for listening to municipalities, and his ministry for working with us and our staff, who have the technical expertise to help us find these solutions. We encourage the province to continue to consult with municipalities. We are at your service, and we thank the consultation that has happened, including today.

We also look forward to additional details on other aspects of Bill 97. OBCM is very interested in the role that

the provincial land and development facilitator will play, and how that intervention will work.

The Chair (Ms. Laurie Scott): Sixty seconds left.

Ms. Marianne Meed Ward: We look forward to an opportunity to provide that input. We're also carefully watching the authority for the minister's zoning order, and feel free to ask me any questions you might want about that.

Really, to conclude, I want to say that we are all working towards the same goal: facilitating and serving housing needs in our community and the flexibility that is required.

Thank you for your time, and I look forward to answering any questions you might have.

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The Chair (Ms. Laurie Scott): Thank you very much for your presentation.

We'll go to Patricia for her presentation, if that's okay, for—

Ms. Patricia Johnston: No, I'm just going to—I have no presentation, but—

The Chair (Ms. Laurie Scott): Oh, well, that's fine.

Ms. Patricia Johnston: My name is Patricia Johnston and I live at 145 St. George Street. I'm a tenant there and the reality is that having the developers put up condos where viable rental units are already there is deadly. I have many scared tenants in my building wondering where they're going to go. Even with the package, there's nowhere to apply it, so literally, you're going to have at least 300 people out on the street with nowhere to go and nothing to apply the money to.

Condos are not the way to go. We need rental housing. Fifty per cent of the population in Toronto are renters. We don't want to buy houses; we're happy living in our rental buildings. Right now, the rental unit that we might be able to come back to is a quarter of the size—I couldn't swing a cat in it, and you're asking us to live like that for the remainder of our lives? Most of us are seniors and we're on fixed incomes. We have a lot of vulnerable people who are in wheelchairs, are using canes and walkers.

We don't want much. We just want to be able to go outside our door and walk to a grocery store. At our age we obviously need fixing up occasionally at the hospital, and we need to be able to go there. In this bill, if passed, I don't see any hope for us at all. I'm getting comments like, "Maybe I'll be dead by the time they tear our building down," and that, to me, is a sad statement.

I have nothing more to say. Sorry.

The Chair (Ms. Laurie Scott): It's okay. That's fine. You take a breath, and maybe we'll get you a glass of water—Natalie is on it. We will do questions and answers from around the table, so you have time.

We're going to start with the official opposition and they have seven and a half minutes to ask some questions. MPP Burch is going to start.

Mr. Jeff Burch: Thank you both for being here today. I have a couple of questions to start off for Ontario's Big City Mayors before I pass things over to my colleague.

Thank you, first of all, for all the advocacy that you do. We do pay great attention to your policies and the comments that you've been making. One of the things that we've really picked up on and have been asking the government continually is that they've come out with policies to say to municipalities, "Look, there have to be approvals for housing that have to happen in a certain period of time," which we think is reasonable. I think it's reasonable for developers to expect that their approvals will go through the process in a reasonable time period.

But as you've raised many times, there are developments that have been approved for, in some cases, decades. I have one in my riding, in Port Colborne, that was approved in the 1980s and they haven't put shovels in the ground yet. There are all kinds of estimates and great information that you've come out with, with respect to how much housing we could get built if we had a sunset clause or a use-it-or-lose-it type of approach to developments. Because if we expect municipalities to do things in a certain period of time and we're putting pressure on them to hire the planners and go through those expenses, I think it's reasonable to expect that developers, when they have taken time to go through the approvals process and they've taken up the resources of municipalities to do that, get their shovels in the ground in a certain period of time and we don't have excessive speculation and land banking and things like that.

I thought you might want to make a comment about that.

Ms. Marianne Meed Ward: How much time do we have?

Laughter.

Ms. Marianne Meed Ward: Thank you so much. For sure, the clock should apply to everybody. We all should be laser-focused on completing our work in a timely manner. I know all of our member municipalities have added resources—thank you to the government, by the way, for the SDAF funding, the streamline development application funding. We have used that. We're asking for it again to streamline our own processes in Burlington, and many of our members have taken advantage of that.

That being said, we have thousands and thousands of units right now that have not been built, that have been approved across the 29 municipalities. In Burlington, our housing pledge, just to give you a picture, is 29,000. We have 23,000 under review, but about a third of that is tied up at the tribunal, and probably another amount is land-banked, approved decades ago. I call some of them the zombie files. They come back, and you're wondering why they're still kicking around and we didn't get shovels in the ground.

I think the message for all of us is to understand why they are not putting shovels in the ground. Is it supply chain? Is it labour? Is it interest rates? Is it something happening in the market that's out of all of our control? I think one of our messages is it truly oversimplifies the conversation to simply say that municipal planning processes is the culprit. We're not. Having said that, we need

to do a better job, as we all do, as all levels of government do.

So we really do need to dig into what all the other reasons are, but I won't comment on behalf of the big city mayors with respect to a sunset clause. We haven't taken a position on it, but what we have said is we've quantified that it's thousands and thousands of units that haven't been built, and that is part of the delay in getting affordable housing to our community, and that needs to be addressed.

Mr. Jeff Burch: Thank you. On the streamline development funding, by the way, I asked a question this morning in question period. We believe it's been cut by about 70%, so that's something big city mayors may want to look into, because I know that you've used that fund well.

The other question I had, and I just thought you might want to comment on—you mentioned the minister's zoning orders and the impact that has had on the members that you're representing. I thought you might want to talk about that for a moment.

Ms. Marianne Meed Ward: Absolutely. This is where the one size doesn't fit all. There are some municipalities that do value or do want a minister's zoning order. We have not seen the need to use that and wouldn't want it imposed on us. So I think the fail-safe for the government—and we do appreciate that they have, if not in policy at least in practice, embedded that they would consult or wait for a request from a local municipality before implementing an MZO. That provides a check and balance. Our members think that that is a very helpful part of the process.

What we've done in the city of Burlington is we direct our staff to prioritize certain files, so we've not needed an MZO. We get asked periodically by applicants for an MZO, and we ask them to follow our process and we'll do our best to speed them along to a permit.

Mr. Jeff Burch: As our party's municipal affairs critic, thank you for your advocacy. We pay close attention to what you say, and we appreciate the hard work that you do.

I'll hand things over to my colleague.

The Chair (Ms. Laurie Scott): There's about two minutes left. MPP Bell.

Ms. Jessica Bell: Thank you, both of you, for coming. This round, I'm going to focus my questions on Pat. To summarize for everyone, Pat lives at 145 St. George. It is a large purpose-built rental in University–Rosedale that is slated for demolition with the goal of turning it into luxury rentals or luxury condos. The developer has not at this point made up their mind; they're going back and forth. The challenge is that many of these residents, like Pat, have lived in the area for a very long time, and they're very concerned about Bill 97's proposed changes to make it even harder for them to get compensation and to move back into their unit once construction is complete.

Pat, what do you want the Conservative government to do around rental replacement laws?

Ms. Patricia Johnston: First, not take our building down, because it's a viable rental building. There's nothing wrong with it, and condos are not the issue for affordable housing. There are so many of them that are being built. There are investors who rent them out at exorbitant prices. That's not helping affordable housing whatsoever. I couldn't afford a condo at a million dollars. There's no way. And as I said, 50% of the people or more are renters. They don't want a house; they just want to rent. It's still a home to us. We're being forced to make a decision of, can we afford food? Can we afford rent? Can we afford health care if we need it? We can't do all of it, and I'm not—don't get me wrong. I think the city needs development, but not condos. We need viable rental buildings; people who are actually in it—

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

Ms. Patricia Johnston: —to give us a home, not developers to make money. And that's how we all feel, everyone I've talked to. I've talked to lots of tenants, lots of people—

The Chair (Ms. Laurie Scott): Pat?

Ms. Patricia Johnston: —and not only older people, younger people. We have university students out going to food banks—

The Chair (Ms. Laurie Scott): Pat, I'm sorry, we're out of time, but thank you very much.

MPP McMahon for four and a half minutes, please—your turn.

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Ms. Mary-Margaret McMahon: Thank you both for coming in and sharing your stories with us. It's important we hear from Ontarians such as yourselves.

I'll first start with questions for Ontario's Big City Mayors. Marianne, thank you for your presentation again. I'm not sure if you had a chance or have heard about the city of Toronto's submission, but they are very concerned about a few things. Like all of us—we know we're in a housing crisis. We are very keen on building more housing for renters, for homeowners—all types of housing, not just single-family homes, of course. We know that's not going to solve the housing crisis—and an emphasis on affordable. There are some good things in this bill, which we see, especially for renters, but there are other things that we're concerned about.

The city is recommending that the effective date of fee refunds be extended to December 31, 2023, instead of July. So I'm going to ask you your thoughts on that. As well, city staff recommend the legislation include stop-the-clock provisions to recognize the iterative planning process of back-and-forth discussions, which you would know well as mayor of Burlington—so just your comments and thoughts on that, and your experience.

Ms. Marianne Meed Ward: Thank you so much—very important issues. The fee refund gets people's attention, but it's not the solution. I sat at a round table yesterday of developers in Burlington—major developers that are doing 1,000- or 2,000-unit multi-tower applications in the city—sponsored by our chamber of commerce, and they said they don't even want it. What they want is

the quick development process, and that's what we're working on. So the fees are a bit of a red herring. Certainly, we're happy to have the extension until December, yes. Actually, we'd like it to go away, that there is a refund of fees, and let us focus on making sure that we can get a quick turnaround time, which is what we're doing, because that's the real issue we need to solve, and—to MPP Burch's comments earlier—to make sure that shovels actually get in the ground after the permits go out the door from our desk.

In terms of the stop-the-clock provision, planning is iterative, and I can tell you, in one example that happened when I was a councillor in Burlington, we didn't even have the traffic studies from the applicant before the 180 days at that time. The clock ran out, and they appealed us the day that that happened. We didn't even have the studies we needed to evaluate this application. So all of that went to the tribunal, which is overburdened. So there needs to be a better understanding of making sure that applicants have quality applications to our city, making sure that we all do our part to streamline, and that is actually becoming more challenging.

Ontario has never built—anywhere has never built 1.5 million homes in 10 years. It's never been done. We have supply chain issues; we have labour shortages. We have so many other issues that are outside the hands of both the development industry as well as municipalities, and we need to recognize all of those factors and be honest and clear-eyed about those, because that may frustrate our best intentions. We're having challenges getting enough planners to process in a timely manner, especially when they're pulled off to go to the Ontario tribunal. We lose half our staff at hearings. We're at hearings every single week in Burlington, sadly. It's not a way to plan a province.

The Chair (Ms. Laurie Scott): Thirty seconds left.

Ms. Mary-Margaret McMahon: Okay, well, I have a very short period of time, but I'll get another question and speak to you next round.

The Chair (Ms. Laurie Scott): Thank you. Over to MPP Sabawy for the government's seven and a half minutes.

Mr. Sheref Sabawy: Thank you very much. Thank you, Marianne. I think that was a very detailed submission about issues in regard to rental, and I can see positive vibes in your submission in regard to the steps the government took to accelerate, or try to accelerate, the building of 1.5 million units in 10 years. I do agree with you that I think that's a very ambitious plan, but I still believe that it's doable—not only doable; it's very doable, if everything aligns properly.

Let me start by asking you a question first. You know, because of your position in the big city mayors and what you hear from different mayors of different cities, it's the same problem: We have a housing crisis. There is a shortage. We know that there are 500,000 new immigrants who are going to be arriving for the next five years, every year. That's almost like two million new people coming. Those immigrants tend to go where the services and high-

density and rentals or apartments are—the cities. That means that's going to add almost, let's say, 400,000 per year in the GTA, Toronto, Mississauga—the Golden Horseshoe area. How do you think we cannot succeed? What's going to be the case if we didn't do that? With all those people looking for housing, how do you imagine the picture?

Ms. Marianne Meed Ward: Well, we're living it now, right? People don't have proper housing.

Mr. Sheref Sabawy: We're not even close yet.

Ms. Marianne Meed Ward: People aren't getting properly housed and we have a homelessness crisis too. But this is where the whole-of-government solution comes in. We can't do this on our own as municipalities; you can't do this on your own as the province.

And we welcome new immigrants to this country. We're all immigrants. We need skilled labour. We need people to come. Once they get here, we need a plan to house people—and that's the disconnect that has happened.

We need the federal government to work with us. We had the honour, actually, of having Minister Fraser from the federal government come speak to Ontario's Big City Mayors, and we talked very deeply about this, that we need them to help us provide housing for the people that they are welcoming into our country who will land in our cities. We can't expect that it's just going to miraculously appear because people have arrived.

And the student housing piece is a critically important part of that for those cities in our membership that have international students who come, and that have universities.

So the housing plan and funding for that need to be aligned with immigration plans, for sure.

Mr. Sheref Sabawy: Do you agree that some of the changes we are proposing in this bill—and other bills; there are about four housing bills that have been done. Do you agree that these building blocks could help in paving the way? Even if the funding comes from federal, it's still not going to solve the issue. Like, we got the money; now we have to have all the other legislation which allows for that building, and that fast.

How do you see this legislation—and maybe you already have been doing submissions for the other ones as well, I assume. What do you think?

Ms. Marianne Meed Ward: Well, I'm an optimist, like you. I believe that we can do it, but we have to do it together, right? Nobody can solve this alone, including the development industry—it can't solve this alone. So it's actually very helpful, the legislation that you've brought forward. It has prompted this conversation and now we are all, I think, laser-focused on the fact that we have a housing crisis in our country.

Mr. Sheref Sabawy: How much time do I have?

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

Mr. Sheref Sabawy: Okay. I have two quick questions for you. In your opinion, why don't we have enough rental units? In Mississauga, I hear that there are none that were built since 1999—new rental buildings. In your opinion,

what could be the reason nobody wants to invest in rentals?

Ms. Marianne Meed Ward: When those buildings were built, and we have lots of those—

Mr. Sheref Sabawy: Honest opinion, please.

Ms. Marianne Meed Ward: Absolutely. It was because of government subsidies and programs. When those programs went away, the shovels stopped. It's as clear as that. What we are seeing now is that it makes sense from a financial pro forma standpoint for developers to build condos. We have condos that are being built, sold to one owner—usually a pension fund—and it becomes rental, but that's not purpose-built rental, and those folks can be displaced as soon as the one owner wants to divide up the units and sell.

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Purpose-built rental will require government assistance. It did before, in the 1990s; it dried up when those programs went away. And so, again, all of government needs to be laser-focused on this, and certainly Bill 97 has some provisions that we're very grateful for.

Mr. Sheref Sabawy: Okay. One more question in regard to—the president of the mayors' association mentioned some very weird observations that the cycle for any developer to deliver units, from the day you start the process is 11 years to get the units ready for occupation—11 years average. In your opinion, from your position in the big city mayors, what's the biggest loss of the 11 years? What could be the breakdown for the 11-year average from the day a developer starts a project to the day the units are ready for utilization—like, occupation?

Ms. Marianne Meed Ward: We certainly have to look at those that already have a permit, that haven't gotten shovels in the ground. Why are they not moving forward?

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

Ms. Marianne Meed Ward: I can also say that there are times—and these are the files that have been kicking around in Burlington for decades—where they're asked to submit studies and they don't for years and years. Certainly we can speed up the process—that is not typical, and it's completely unacceptable; it's not a typical time frame. It's usually several years for a complex project from beginning to end. Even that needs to be shortened if we're going to meet our 1.5 million. But that would be an outlier, and I would say there are probably other factors happening.

Mr. Sheref Sabawy: Is one slot of two years' appeal—period of time, like there's an appealing period of time of two years—two years.

Ms. Marianne Meed Ward: Yes. Our official plan in Burlington was approved in 2020. It will go to case-management conference next spring, so we're shooting ourselves in the foot with this process.

Mr. Sheref Sabawy: Do you think this is acceptable?

Ms. Marianne Meed Ward: What's that?

Mr. Sheref Sabawy: Do you think this is acceptable?

Ms. Marianne Meed Ward: Absolutely not. Eleven years is nowhere near acceptable. Two years for a hearing is not acceptable. We have to—

The Chair (Ms. Laurie Scott): Thank you very much. Thanks very much for this round.

Now we go over to the NDP for seven and a half minutes. MPP Bell, please.

Ms. Jessica Bell: Thank you to both of you for coming in. I'm going to focus my questions on Marianne from the big city mayors.

The first question I have is about the recent government announcement around the homelessness prevention funding. I am a little bewildered by the formula that the government used to determine how much funding individual cities get.

Do the big city mayors have a position on the funding formula and how much funding specific big cities got?

Ms. Marianne Meed Ward: Well, certainly the \$202 million that was announced is a great start. We appreciate that the government recognizes this is a crisis. It is a health crisis first and foremost. That is a position Ontario's Big City Mayors has taken, as well as AMO and other partners: that it is a mental health and addictions crisis first, that leads to homelessness, and then we need to solve the housing crisis.

We know that there are different communities that are experiencing more challenges. Northern and Indigenous face different challenges than urban areas, and so we need to be mindful of that and make sure that the funding goes where it needs to.

Ms. Jessica Bell: It doesn't concern you that Ottawa got \$845,000 for homelessness prevention?

Ms. Marianne Meed Ward: In terms of what?

Ms. Jessica Bell: They received a fraction of the amount of money per population than other regions across Ontario, and they understandably have some concerns about what the funding formula was to determine what municipalities got.

If the big city mayors don't have a position on it, that's absolutely fine, but I was curious if there are some conversations about that.

Ms. Marianne Meed Ward: We will certainly be looking at that, but we have not taken a position yet as a caucus.

Ms. Jessica Bell: Okay. My second question is: We have been hearing in the news and talking to municipalities about the impact of Bill 23 and how it's impacting municipal finances. Can you describe how big cities in your caucus are being impacted by Bill 23, especially when it comes to providing housing services?

Ms. Marianne Meed Ward: The bill will create a giant hole in municipal finance—it's as simple as that—and it cannot be replaced. And there's no guarantee that the hole that's created will actually foster affordable housing or be passed on to first-time homebuyers. We have no way of knowing whether they're even going to be first-time homebuyers or investors.

The challenge is that when we as municipalities create development charges, we look at what transit is needed, what infrastructure is needed—sewer, stormwater, all of those factors—what community amenities are needed. There's lots of things that we can't collect for, hospitals

being one, and yet almost every municipality is having to expand their hospital and coming to the municipality for funding for that.

The development charge process is actually legislated and mandated by the province. The rules are very strict. We have to prove and identify, through an independent auditor, what our needs are for growing community. We forecast the size of the community growth. We forecast all of the growth-related costs. There's a discount for existing residents already built into that. There's a number of things that we can't collect for. That nets out a number, and then it's divided among the number of units so that the last person to bring in their building application doesn't get the multi-million-dollar bill. It's spread across all of the housing units.

When that goes away, our funding for all of those things goes away. The only way to replace it is through raising municipal taxes. So our position, certainly, is that that is not the way to go, that taking development charges away from municipalities is going to be disastrous for municipal finance. And more to the point, it will not give us the funding that we need to build the infrastructure to facilitate the \$1.5-million—well, some of them are \$1.5 million, but 1.5 million homes in 10 years.

I'll give you an example in Burlington. We have new land that's been converted from employment to mixed use, 400 and some-odd acres. We could put some amazing mixed-use communities, high density, thousands of units, mix of tenure—it's not serviced. Even though it's in an urban area, it's not serviced. And it was serviced for industrial—maybe 40 people Monday to Friday, not thousands of people doing their laundry, doing cooking. So we are right now having to review what's in the ground that might need to be upsized, what existing infrastructure do we have, and what do we have to build brand new. If we don't have development charges to do that, either it won't get built or it will get built well after it's needed, or the taxes go up. And that's all within our urban area, so this notion that the servicing exists within an urban area is not necessarily the case. It may not have been sized for the infrastructure that is going to be demanded of it with the significant growth that we have coming.

Ms. Jessica Bell: Thank you for that.

How much time do I have left?

The Chair (Ms. Laurie Scott): One minute and 45 seconds.

Ms. Jessica Bell: Okay.

You mentioned wisely that there is a real need for more student housing and family-sized units when we're talking about building to meet the need. That's also an issue we see in Toronto. Do the big city mayors have specific recommendations on how we can incentivize, require, encourage that kind of student housing and family-sized units?

Ms. Marianne Meed Ward: We're open to all suggestions. But yes, there need to be incentives, because the market simply isn't delivering those things. There are developments right now—five- six- or seven-building units, thousands of units—and they're all one-bedroom,

maybe one-bedroom with den, no three-bedroom for families. And what we've been told is it actually costs more to build a three-bedroom condo in a superstructure, because of the superstructure infrastructure, than it does to build a three-bedroom townhouse. So you can see why the charge to eat up all our land for that.

If we don't have the tools as municipalities to compel a certain mix of housing—and we don't; we get what we get. We can beg. We can ask. And sometimes, if the pro formas work or there's an amenable developer, they might do it. But we're not seeing those units come online naturally, and this is where we could really use the help of the province in giving us the tools to work with the development industry, see what makes sense, and make sure that we're getting that mix of size of units in those superstructures, because that's what we're going to be building in Burlington. We're built out, and we're not expanding into our rural area.

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Ms. Jessica Bell: Thank you both for your time. I will be following up to get some specifics around the incentives and what the provincial government should be advocating for or introducing. Pat, I'm sure I'll talk to you soon.

The Chair (Ms. Laurie Scott): Thank you. MPP McMahon for four and a half minutes, please.

Ms. Mary-Margaret McMahon: I just have four and a half minutes, so we'll be quick. Thank you so much, Marianne, for that story about the land conversion from employment to the mixed-use neighbourhood with not-appropriate servicing. It's huge. The devil is always in the details when we pass these things. The city of Toronto is very worried as well because they will lose 25% of their employment lands with this new definition, possibly losing 150,000 jobs. So it's a fine line, because if we do have these empty office towers, it's innovative to think about housing there, but then when you look at other employment uses, it's a concern.

My question to you is not going to be on that because you've already spoken on that, but the alumni for the Regional Planning Commissioners of Ontario also wrote in and had some interesting things. They're unclear as to why site plan control is being removed from smaller-size developments. They're also unclear as to why watershed-based planning is being significantly compromised by the province, including the conservation roles. And they're worried about the loss of prime agricultural lands. So I'm just wondering what Ontario's Big City Mayors think of those points.

Ms. Marianne Meed Ward: Those are very real considerations, and I go back to the original comment that one size doesn't fit all. The municipalities are in the best position to know what is best for their communities. We had this discussion at our last AGM of Ontario's Big City Mayors, where some were not wanting at all to expand into their agricultural area. City of Burlington council, over multiple councils, many, many years, has said, "We have a firm commitment to protecting our urban-rural boundary. We will not expand. We will fight every effort to do that." But other municipalities, including in Halton, are

saying, “This actually makes sense. It’s near to urban areas, and we’d like to look at some of that.” I have personal opinions about that, but I’m representing the OBCM.

So really what’s required on the ground is that flexibility and working with. Instead of the province determining, “Well, we’re going to open this without consultation with councils,” to do what they do with MZO and ask for the municipal council resolution, ask for a democratic public process, a transparent process to determine what the most appropriate approach is for that land use planning.

Ms. Mary-Margaret McMahon: All right. Terrific. I could ask you a million more questions, but I don’t have time and I want to give one to Patricia.

Patricia, just in the final minute—it’s all I have—if you could give us advice from a renter’s point of view about Bill 97 and how to make our municipalities better for renters, what would you say?

Ms. Patricia Johnston: As a renter, I think the buildings we already have that are rental buildings—I think we should keep them, and I think we should keep the people in them. And I think we should build more rental buildings, not condos, because as I said, most of the people are renters and we can’t afford a condo—there’s no way.

I think you could have both. You could have both rental buildings and you can have townhouses or maybe some condos, but not to the extent that I see when I stand at Bloor and Yonge. All I see is condo after condo after condo. And I know a lot of them are bought by investors and they rent them out at exorbitant prices. I know this for a fact, because I have friends who have bought condos, and they said if they knew then what they know now, they wouldn’t buy them, because they don’t have a long life period—maybe 25 years. You hear all the time they’re blocking streets in the city of Toronto because cement is coming off these buildings, or glass. They’re not even safe. They’re put up so quickly to make a profit. My—

The Chair (Ms. Laurie Scott): Sorry, but we’ve run out of time on that side.

Ms. Mary-Margaret McMahon: Thank you, Patricia.

The Chair (Ms. Laurie Scott): Over to the government side for seven and a half minutes: MPP Thanigasalam.

Mr. Vijay Thanigasalam: Thank you, Patricia, for your deputation, and thank you, Your Worship Ward, for being here and for your deputation as well. My question goes to the mayor.

In terms of housing plans, in all of the municipalities and especially in the GTA, there is a housing crisis, and we see that. In the last one year, we have seen an increase in the percentage of housing starts, from 2021 to 2022: an almost over 1,200 increase in Ontario. Even today in question period, the Premier mentioned that we have more cranes in Toronto than any of the states in the United States of America. Including Chicago, New York and San Francisco combined, we have more cranes. So we are building new houses and we are having rental housing

starts. So far this year, compared to the previous year, the rental housing starts also doubled.

We are becoming the number one jurisdiction for newcomers, for jobs and for businesses. The federal government is going to bring half a million newcomers every year moving forward. I’m sure they will find Burlington as their new home, as well, and you would also have to have new housing starts.

What’s your opinion in terms of what this bill can provide to increase the supply of housing? And how would you look at Burlington as a place for new housing starts? Where is Burlington in terms of new housing starts and would Burlington be ready to accommodate—because, whether we like it or not, from this year we’re going to have to accommodate the newcomers. So my question is, how will this bill facilitate and strengthen the supply of new housing?

Ms. Marianne Meed Ward: Thank you very much for that question. We know that Bill 97, because it will provide additional protection for renters, will make it both more attractive for people to rent, if that is what their choice is—they don’t have to have the same kind of fears and worries that they’ve had in the past; there are some extra protections—but also will be supporting purpose-built rental, which we don’t get enough of, for all the reasons that we’ve talked about. That tenure of housing, purpose-built rental, in addition to home ownership: Both are very important, so we’re very appreciative of that.

In terms of Burlington—and this is true of our fellow members across Ontario’s Big City Mayors; most of us have far more housing in the pipeline, or we’re almost at our housing pledge goal already. We have 23,000 in Burlington in our pipeline, out of the 29,000 that we were just asked to, and we unanimously as a council supported—and that was before we got another 400 acres of developable land. So we know that we will be able to meet and, in fact, we’re expecting to surpass the 29,000 homes.

That story is being told across the GTA. Most municipalities have either almost as many, or even more, housing in their pipeline than the housing pledge that they’re being asked to sign up for.

We’re all optimistic that we can get real close to this, and it will be other factors that we have to consider and do what we can to mitigate those. We’ve talked about those: supply chain, labour market, insurance, mortgage rates. All of those things have created some instability in the market, we know, and so to the degree that we can assist with those things—I think that’s the province and feds; we need your help with that. But we’re happy to issue the permits and we have a plan for not only where our housing pledge will go, but even beyond that.

Mr. Vijay Thanigasalam: A quick question before I turn it over to my colleague MPP Smith: As we know, our government is committed to regularly releasing housing action plans. My question to you is, what additional measures do you think would be most important for the government to consider for the future plans? A very quick answer, and then I’ll transfer to MPP Smith.

1350

Ms. Marianne Meed Ward: Well, setting a clock on all of us—we talked about that—letting us keep our DCs so we can build the infrastructure that is required for complete communities, and really just continuing to consult with us. Ontario's Big City Mayors want to be partners with the provincial and federal governments. We don't see you as opponents. We don't see you as the problem. We hope you see us as partners and not part of the problem. We are doing everything we can to speed up permits. We also need to encourage the industry to pick up and start to build those permits.

What we are talking about, we need to do that and then some, but partnership and communication and consultation is really key, because if you don't consult, there will be unintended consequences to the legislation. Those are the things that we'll speak up about too.

Mr. Vijay Thanigasalam: Thank you, Mayor. Thank you, Patricia.

The Chair (Ms. Laurie Scott): MPP Smith, there are two minutes remaining.

Ms. Laura Smith: Through you, Chair, thank you to all for being here. This is a tough spot. If we don't have housing or there's no incentive to build, then it doesn't happen, but yet we know that our population is growing and growing. This is concerning for me—and I've stated this before—as a mother, because there has to be a place for the new generation to come.

Thank you very much, Mayor, for providing your testimony. You talked about family-sized and multi-units, and we're exploring ways to increase housing supply for all types across the province, which is important for families in the province. But at the same time, we are also taking steps to protect renters.

You talked about a holistic approach. We are always looking to our federal counterparts to help in that direction, but it still remains—and I think my colleague brought this up—that it takes several years to get a build from one point to the next. I've actually heard as long as 15. I think 11 is sometimes—

The Chair (Ms. Laurie Scott): Forty seconds left.

Ms. Laura Smith: Okay. What would you do to change the delays, given the effective date of the fees refund provision, to help municipalities?

Ms. Marianne Meed Ward: We need all sides to do their parts. For the development industry side, that means give us a quality submission with all the studies that we need to evaluate. We don't always get that, and then it creates this back-and-forth. Sometimes we'll send it back to their side of the desk and then it sits there for months and months and months. So the delays—there's the cycle time and then there's the touch time. When we did a review through the SDAF funding, we found that it was about 10 or 15 days of touch time and a year of cycle time. We all need to do better on that.

The Chair (Ms. Laurie Scott): Thank you. I'm sorry, the time has expired.

Thank you very much to the presenters today. Our time has gone. You can step back from the table then, and we'll move on with the next—

Interjection.

The Chair (Ms. Laurie Scott): Just before we move on to the next item, I want to do a reminder that the deadline for submitting a written submission is 7 p.m. today, May 11, and the deadline for submitting amendments to Bill 97 is 5 p.m. on Tuesday, May 16, 2023.

SELECTION OF ESTIMATES

The Chair (Ms. Laurie Scott): I'll just read out the second item on our agenda today. It's the selection of estimates for consideration. I have a bit of the ground rules that I'll read out in a few minutes when we stop some interactions.

Interjections.

The Chair (Ms. Laurie Scott): It's all right.

I have a few pages of things to read, so I'll just start. The second item on the agenda, as I said, is the selection of estimates for consideration. The estimates for the following ministries and offices have been referred to the Standing Committee on Heritage, Infrastructure and Cultural Policy for selection and consideration:

- Ministry of Citizenship and Multiculturalism;
- Ministry of Infrastructure;
- Ministry of Municipal Affairs and Housing;
- Ministry of Tourism, Culture and Sport;
- Ministry of Transportation;
- Office of the Lieutenant Governor of Ontario.

All committee members should have received an electronic copy of the 2023-24 estimates and the corresponding ministry and office briefing books from the Clerk.

The objective of today's meeting is to select the estimates of certain ministries or offices for review by the committee.

Standing order 63 sets out the process by which the committee makes its selections. Each of the recognized parties on the committee shall select the estimates of up to one ministry or offices in each turn. The official opposition selects first, followed by the government. If members of one party decline to make a selection, the selection then passes to the next party in the rotation. The process concludes when either there are no further ministries or offices available to select, or if both recognized parties decline to make any further selections.

Pursuant to standing order 63(c), these selections are to be reviewed in the order that they were chosen. However, this order may be altered by unanimous agreement of the subcommittee on committee business or by order of the House.

Pursuant to standing order 63(d), the time for the consideration of the estimates of each ministry or office shall be determined by the respective committee.

The estimates of those ministries or offices not selected for consideration will be deemed to have been passed by the committee. As Chair, I will report those unselected

estimates back to the House, and they will be deemed to be adopted and concurred in by the House.

In accordance with standing order 66(a), the committee must present a report to the House with respect to the estimates it selected and considered by the third Thursday of November of this year: November 16, 2023.

When making your selections, I would like to add that if members could please look at the list of ministries and offices in the estimates book, or as displayed on the screen in front of you, and give the correct names of the ministries or offices when they select them for consideration.

Do members have any questions before we begin? I hear none.

I'll start with the official opposition for their first selection. MPP Bell.

Ms. Jessica Bell: Correct me if I need to alter my language and whatnot.

I move that—

The Chair (Ms. Laurie Scott): Sorry. Just to clarify, we're not doing motions yet. We're just doing selections of the ministries. Okay?

Ms. Jessica Bell: Sure.

Our first choice is the Ministry of Municipal Affairs and Housing.

The Chair (Ms. Laurie Scott): Next, to the government for their selection: MPP Thanigasalam.

Mr. Vijay Thanigasalam: I select the Ministry of Infrastructure.

The Chair (Ms. Laurie Scott): I'll now go back to the official opposition for their next selection.

Ms. Jessica Bell: We select transportation.

The Chair (Ms. Laurie Scott): I'll now go to the government for their next selection. MPP Thanigasalam.

Mr. Vijay Thanigasalam: I select the Ministry of Tourism, Culture and Sport.

The Chair (Ms. Laurie Scott): I will now go back to the opposition. MPP Bell.

Ms. Jessica Bell: We select citizenship and multiculturalism.

The Chair (Ms. Laurie Scott): I'll now go over to the government, if they have another selection.

Mr. Vijay Thanigasalam: I don't have another selection.

The Chair (Ms. Laurie Scott): Official opposition: any other selections?

Ms. Jessica Bell: We select the Office of the Lieutenant Governor of Ontario.

The Chair (Ms. Laurie Scott): Thank you for all your selections.

Are there any motions or questions that members wish to raise? MPP Thanigasalam.

Mr. Vijay Thanigasalam: I move that, pursuant to standing order 63(d), the following time be allotted to the consideration of the estimates of the ministries or offices selected by the committee:

—the Ministry of Citizenship and Multiculturalism for two hours;

—the Ministry of Infrastructure for two hours;

—the Ministry of Municipal Affairs and Housing for two hours;

—the Ministry of Tourism, Culture and Sport for two hours;

—the Ministry of Transportation for two hours;

—the Office of the Lieutenant Governor for zero hours; and

That the ministers responsible for those respective ministries be invited to appear before the committee; and

That for each ministry the minister be allotted 20 minutes to make an opening statement followed by question and answer in rotations of 20 minutes for the official opposition members of the committee, 10 minutes for the independent member of the committee, and 20 minutes for the government members of the committee for the remainder of the allotted time; and

That the committee meet for the purpose of considering the estimates of the selected ministries or offices at the following times:

—on Wednesday, June 7, 2023, from 9 a.m. until 10:15 a.m. and 1 p.m. until 6 p.m.; and

—on Wednesday, September 13, 2023, from 9 a.m. until 10:15 a.m. and 1 p.m. until 6 p.m.; and

That if any invited minister is unavailable to appear before the committee, the parliamentary assistant or parliamentary assistants may appear before the committee in their place.

The Chair (Ms. Laurie Scott): Thank you. There's just going to be a second until the motion is distributed, and then we're going to ask for any debate or discussion on MPP Thanigasalam's motion. So we'll just take a five-minute break here for a second. You're going to get a copy, and MPP Bell is going to be the first up. Is that okay?

Ms. Jessica Bell: Well, actually, I was going to call for a 10-minute break, just for us to process this. We haven't seen it. This is different than what we expected, so—

The Chair (Ms. Laurie Scott): Yes, that's fine. MPP Bell has called for a 10-minute recess, so we'll have one.

The committee recessed from 1401 to 1411.

The Chair (Ms. Laurie Scott): I'd like to call the meeting back to order. There is a motion before us by MPP Thanigasalam, and I will ask now if there is any debate on the motion. MPP Bell, please.

Ms. Jessica Bell: Thank you very much for this motion. This is a pretty sharp departure from how estimates is usually conducted. Typically, given that this is the process we use to assess the \$100 billion a year that this government is spending, it's important that we really have the time to drill into the details, especially at a time when we're seeing a difference between what the budgetary numbers are and how much the government is spending per ministry. We're seeing big disconnects, a big drop, which is impacting health and education and all the ministries.

The amount of time that's allocated to each of these ministries for estimates is too short. Typically, a total of 15 hours is allocated to each ministry and sometimes they're split. In this case, it's two hours, so that's a dramatic reduction in accountability and transparency.

And there are also some surprising changes—changes that I disagree with—around how much and when time is allocated to look at the estimates process. Having a time in June, once, and then meeting again on September 13: That's a shockingly low amount of transparency for a very important process. It's fundamental to accountable government to have a lengthy and thorough look at estimates.

I would like to propose a different motion that we can debate and discuss.

The Chair (Ms. Laurie Scott): We can only do one motion at a time. Would you like to move an amendment to the motion that's on the floor?

Ms. Jessica Bell: I can, but I will need a few minutes to prepare.

The Chair (Ms. Laurie Scott): Okay. Would a 10-minute recess be fine?

Ms. Jessica Bell: Yes.

The Chair (Ms. Laurie Scott): Okay, MPP Bell has asked for another 10-minute recess to look at an amendment. Thank you. We'll reconvene again at 2:23.

The committee recessed from 1413 to 1424.

The Chair (Ms. Laurie Scott): Thanks, everybody. We'll resume [*inaudible*]. I know MPP Bell has an amendment she'd like to read in.

Ms. Jessica Bell: Thank you. I'll read it. I move that the motion be amended as follows:

That the first five bullets under paragraph 1 be replaced with the following:

“—the Ministry of Citizenship and Multiculturalism for seven hours;

“—the Ministry of Infrastructure for 15 hours;

“—the Ministry of Municipal Affairs and Housing for 15 hours;

“—the Ministry of Tourism, Culture and Sport for seven hours;

“—the Ministry of Transportation for 15 hours.”

And that the fourth paragraph be replaced with:

“That until the time allotted for consideration of estimates of the selected ministry has expired that the committee shall meet from 9 a.m. to 10:15 a.m. and 1 p.m. to 6 p.m. on Wednesdays and Thursdays when the House is in session and from 9 a.m. to 12 p.m. and 1 p.m. to 5 p.m. when the House is not in session.”

The Chair (Ms. Laurie Scott): MPP Bell has moved an amendment. Discussion? MPP McMahon.

Ms. Mary-Margaret McMahon: I'm fully in support of this. I think we need to be measured and methodical and not speed up this process, and take the time and do it properly.

Also, I was very surprised by the September date. I thought that actually was a mistake and that it was supposed to be June. I think it's better to have the dates—just on the record for having the dates closer than spread apart, when you forget things over the long summer break.

The Chair (Ms. Laurie Scott): Any further debate or discussion? MPP Bell.

Ms. Jessica Bell: The reason I am introducing this motion is because this is standard practice for estimates. Until the Conservatives brought in their very abbreviated and unaccountable way to track the government's finances, it was standard practice to have a significant amount of time to really look at how the government was spending their money, by ministry, and to hold the minister, their staff, parliamentary assistants to account, which is why I think it is important that we formally vote on a proposal that reflects what's fair. This is representative government, and we've got a responsibility to Ontarians to be responsible and accountable. There are many people who are concerned about this government's attitude towards democracy, and they are concerned about how trustworthy this government is. Fast-tracking a budgetary process and fast-tracking estimates doesn't do a lot to build trust. That's why I'm introducing this amendment.

The Chair (Ms. Laurie Scott): Any further debate or discussion? Seeing none, are the members ready to vote on the amendment of MPP Bell's motion? Okay. All those in favour of the amendment, please raise your hands. All those opposed to MPP Bell's amendment, please raise your hands. The amendment is defeated.

We'll now move back to the motion made by MPP Thanigasalam. Is there any further debate or discussion? MPP Bell.

Ms. Jessica Bell: This is not normal. This is not how a government is supposed to behave; it's not how you're supposed to operate. This is an unusual, truncated estimates process. Given the size of the provincial government and the amount of power you have, it is essential that we have proper accountability.

The Chair (Ms. Laurie Scott): Any further debate or discussion? Seeing none, are the members ready to vote? Okay. All those in favour of MPP Thanigasalam's motion, please raise your hands. All those opposed to MPP Thanigasalam's motion, please raise your hands. MPP Thanigasalam's motion has passed. Carried.

That concludes our business for today. The committee is adjourned until Wednesday, May 24, 2023, at 10 a.m. Thank you.

The committee adjourned at 1428.

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