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of Ontario



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**Official Report
of Debates
(Hansard)**

HE-37

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

Planning Statute Law
Amendment Act, 2023

1st Session
43rd Parliament

Tuesday 28 November 2023

**Journal
des débats
(Hansard)**

HE-37

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

Loi de 2023 modifiant
des lois en ce qui concerne
l'aménagement du territoire

1^{re} session
43^e législature

Mardi 28 novembre 2023

Chair: Laurie Scott
Clerk: Isaiah Thorning

Présidente : Laurie Scott
Greffier : Isaiah Thorning

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LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY OF ONTARIO

ASSEMBLÉE LÉGISLATIVE DE L'ONTARIO

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

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

Tuesday 28 November 2023

Mardi 28 novembre 2023

The committee met at 1532 in committee room 1.

**PLANNING STATUTE LAW
AMENDMENT ACT, 2023
LOI DE 2023 MODIFIANT
DES LOIS EN CE QUI CONCERNE
L'AMÉNAGEMENT DU TERRITOIRE**

Consideration of the following bill:

Bill 150, An Act to enact the Official Plan Adjustments Act, 2023 and to amend the Planning Act with respect to remedies / Projet de loi 150, Loi édictant la Loi de 2023 sur les modifications apportées aux plans officiels et modifiant la Loi sur l'aménagement du territoire en ce qui concerne les recours.

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 conduct public hearings on Bill 150, An Act to enact the Official Plan Adjustments Act, 2023 and to amend the Planning Act with respect to remedies. We are joined by staff from legislative research, Hansard and broadcasting 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?

**STATEMENT BY THE MINISTER
AND RESPONSES**

The Chair (Ms. Laurie Scott): Seeing none, appearing today is the Minister of Municipal Affairs and Housing, the Honourable Paul Calandra. He will have 20 minutes to make an opening statement, followed by 40 minutes for questions and answers divided into two rounds of seven and a half minutes for the government members, two rounds of seven and a half minutes for the official opposition members and two rounds of five minutes for the independent member. Are there any questions?

Seeing none, Minister, you now have 20 minutes for your presentation. Welcome, and you may begin.

Hon. Paul Calandra: Thank you, Chair, and thank you, colleagues. Thank you for this opportunity to discuss the government's proposed Planning Statute Law Amendment Act. Following my remarks, I would be very pleased to take any questions that you might have.

I think it would be helpful to take a step back and look at the broader context in which this legislation has been brought forward. When our government took office in 2018, it was very quickly apparent that Ontario was facing a severe housing shortage. This, of course, is not something that is unique to Ontario. Indeed, the rest of Canada and many of our G7 partner economies are facing very similar challenges. People with good jobs are being priced out of the market. Rental accommodation is desperately scarce. The pressures are felt across society and across income levels.

We know that demand on our existing housing supply will only intensify, with more than 500,000 people moving to the province in 2022 alone. Recent projections show that as many as four million additional people will move to Ontario by 2031. In 2022, Ontario's population was just over 15 million, but by 2026 that figure is expected to be north of 21 million. That's an almost 44% growth in that time period, in a little more than two decades.

There's a very good reason why people are moving to Ontario, as colleagues will know, and I'm sure most will agree. They're moving here because of the opportunity—the opportunity for business, to make investments and for job creation. Businesses of all sizes, frankly, are setting up here. Last year alone, 18,000 businesses opened up in Ontario, which is 41% of the Canadian total. So far in 2023, 160,000 net new jobs have been created in the province. We want the province to thrive, to be a place where people can come to build a better life and raise a family. To match this bold growth, we need a bold plan for building more housing. That's why our government is determined to work with our partners to build 1.5 million homes by 2031.

Since we took office, our government has introduced four housing supply action plans, as colleagues will no doubt have heard me talk about this morning. This plan addresses the full continuum of housing. It includes affordable, community, market and rental, high-rise, low-rise and long-term care, which is the full range of housing that is needed to meet the needs of the people of the province of Ontario. In the plans put forward, we have a comprehensive plan to get shovels in the ground faster.

As colleagues will know, the housing supply action plans that we introduced were focused on reducing red tape and getting shovels in the ground faster and also eliminating some of the costs or reducing some of the costs associated with building. We're permitting more gentle

density as of right, in other words, without the need to apply for rezoning to allow for additional residential units. We're promoting building up around transit, which is something that we are hearing a lot of from colleagues and something that in other jurisdictions of our G7 partners has been very successful in helping them begin to meet some of their targets.

We're encouraging thinking outside the box on ways to build more homes: for example, laneway houses and modular construction. We've heard a lot from colleagues on the potential success for laneway housing, and we are seeing initial success in the member for Whitby's riding and in Clarington, which have shown initial progress on helping reduce and eliminate red tape so that we can get those done.

These and other actions are delivering results. In 2021, the province broke ground on a record number of new home starts, with nearly 100,000 starts in only 12 months. That was the highest level, colleagues, since 1987, and in 2022, Ontario saw the second-highest number of starts since 1988, with just over 96,000 new home starts. Last year also saw the highest number of rental housing starts on record, with nearly 15,000 new purpose-built rentals.

Obviously, on the topic of rentals, as colleagues will know, we also began advocating some time ago for the federal government to remove the HST on purpose-built rentals. Most recently, the federal government made the commitment that they would not only remove the HST but give permission for the province of Ontario to fully remove the tax on purpose-built rentals. That is the removal of 13% on qualifying new purpose-built rental housing in Ontario. As colleagues will know, with the agreement surrounding the HST, the province is not authorized to act unilaterally. It requires the consent of the federal government to make changes to the HST, and we were very pleased that the federal government came on board. In many respects, this is a game-changer in helping us build more rental housing across the province of Ontario. We're seeing savings of upwards of \$45,000 to \$50,000 per unit, and we are seeing people solidly get back into the business of building rental housing.

As I said, colleagues, we are in a housing supply crisis. We have a large and growing population, and we have a very strong economy that is encouraging jobs faster than at almost any other time in our history. That has all heightened the need to get shovels in the ground faster.

We recognize that some of the changes made by the province to official plans might not have positioned municipalities to help build housing in ways that match their local needs. We want to work with our municipal partners so that we are all pulling in the same direction and in a way that maintains and reinforces public trust. That is why we introduced the Planning Statute Law Amendment Act. The act, if passed, reverses provincial changes made in November 2022 and April 2023 to official plans and official plan amendments in 12 municipalities. Those municipalities are Barrie, Belleville, Guelph, Hamilton, Ottawa, Peterborough and Wellington county and the regional municipalities of Halton, Niagara, Peel, Waterloo and York.

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The reversal includes changes made to urban boundaries while maintaining protections for the greenbelt. The official plan legislation we are discussing today is somewhat of a reset with our municipal partners. We heard loud and clear that our priorities should be on building housing on the land that is already within the municipally adopted urban boundaries. This is land that can typically be developed faster because of proximity to existing or planned infrastructure: the roads, utilities and community services that are already in the ground or near to the proposed developments.

That is why our government has doubled down with unprecedented support for municipal infrastructure that we believe will unlock even more opportunities. We have introduced the \$1.2-billion Building Faster Fund to reward municipalities that deliver on housing targets and supports housing-enabled infrastructure. To be clear on that, colleagues, the Building Faster Fund is meant to support and provide support to those municipalities that are in a position to meet their housing needs. It is obvious that not every municipality is going to be able to meet their targets in the short time frame. But there are some, and I always use the example of Stouffville, my hometown, which has the ability to not only meet but exceed its housing targets over the next couple of years. The challenge that they have is the resourcing and the staffing that is required to go above and beyond to not only meet but to exceed. The Building Faster Fund will recognize that and provides them additional resources so they can meet staffing challenges in their community to do that.

At the same time, there's a recognition that not every community is going to be able to meet that goal because there could be infrastructure issues that might prevent them from meeting that goal.

As you know, in the fall economic statement, a new \$200-million Housing-Enabling Water Systems Fund will help municipalities repair, rehabilitate and expand critical water, waste water and stormwater infrastructure in those communities where we have the ability also to add significant housing. These investments will be bolstered by the new Ontario Infrastructure Bank which was announced as part of the fall economic statement. The government is proposing, obviously, with that investment, some \$3 billion in initial support to unleash investments in critical infrastructure. Again, as we've heard from across our partners, there is a need to get shovels in the ground fast, but there is also a need to put infrastructure in the ground to allow the maximum number of homes to be built in a short period of time.

But we've also heard from some communities that say their housing pressures are so acute, they do need to grow outside of their existing urban boundary. Milton, which is part of Halton region, is a very good example of this.

I should also underscore that since announcing this wind back, I've heard from several mayors and heads of council who agree that we need to be much more ambitious if we are to meet our targets, and I think, on that, we are all on the same page.

The proposed Planning Statute Law Amendment Act before us, as I said, reverses provincial changes to official plans except where needed to align with legislation or regulations such as protections for the greenbelt. We are, in parallel, seeking municipal feedback on potential changes based on those originally made by the province that the municipality would like to see maintained. We are also interested in understanding what projects might already be under way. This information will help to ensure that local plans are keeping pace with the evolving needs of the 12 affected municipalities.

Now, I'd like to walk the committee through the mechanics of how the proposed legislation would work. The reversal of the official plan decisions made by the province would be retroactive to the original date that they were made, so either November 4, 2022, or April 11, 2023. Construction that is already under way would obviously be able to continue. Applications already in progress seeking planning permissions—for example, zoning bylaw amendments or plans of subdivision—would continue to be processed. These in-process applications would need to conform to the municipality's official plan approved under the Planning Statute Law Amendment Act, 2023.

As I've mentioned, we recognize that in some cases, more than a year has passed since the plans were approved. This is why we have a 45-day engagement period with municipalities, which ends on December 7. We anticipate that impacted municipalities, as well as affected lower-tier municipalities, will submit comments and provide information on proposed updates.

I wrote to the impacted municipalities on November 2 and asked them to submit comments and information on projects that are in progress and to bring forward requests for provincial modifications that they would like to see implemented. More specifically, I asked for information on projects where construction has already begun based on the official plan or official plan amendment decisions, particularly those projects that are reliant on the modifications made to the plan through the province's decisions. I also asked for information related to changes that the municipality would like to make to the official plan.

Based on the modifications that the province had previously made and which the municipality supports, the Ministry of Municipal Affairs and Housing will then assess the items brought forward by municipalities in a consistent way and based on criteria. For example, the ministry may consider items such as:

- whether the change is consistent with provincial policies; for example, increasing housing supply or boosting density around transit; or
- whether the change might help to resolve a conflict with provincial legislation or regulations; or
- if the change might be needed to address a public health and safety concern; or
- changes may be needed to address a provincial priority project; for example, a long-term-care home or transit-oriented community.

If the proposed change meets the criteria to be included in an official plan, the province will then explore, in con-

sultation with the municipality, the most effective way to implement it.

This would be, obviously, a good time to discuss the legal protections, otherwise known as immunity provisions, within the legislation. The proposed legislation would introduce immunity provisions intended to help protect taxpayers from potential costs based on government actions related to the Planning Statute Law Amendment Act, 2023, regardless of what has been said or done by government officials. These provisions will protect both the province and municipalities. The proposed immunity provisions would apply to all matters related to modifications under the act, affecting 12 municipalities' official plan matters.

The proposed legislation would also introduce similar immunity provisions related to the making, amendment or revocation of minister's zoning orders, commonly known as MZOs. As part of our overall work on land use planning, the ministry is reviewing the use of MZOs and exploring a use-it-or-lose-it policy.

As we have discussed, the proposed legislation would reverse changes to urban boundaries while maintaining protections for the greenbelt. However, through the province's review of official plans, we are proposing to maintain a limited number of provincial changes under the legislation. These instances include changes that the province made to protect the greenbelt, protect public health and safety and to align with existing provincial legislation regulations. More details on the provincial changes to be kept under the proposed legislation can be found on the Environmental Registry of Ontario. And, as you know, that is up for 30 days of public input.

I think it would also be helpful to walk the committee through some examples of the types of provincial modifications that are being kept. As we look closer, we can understand the common-sense reasoning supporting these changes. Some changes are being kept to protect the greenbelt. This applies to Hamilton and the regions of York, Niagara and Peel and the county of Wellington. Provincial changes to be retained in official plans address instances where elements of municipally adopted official plans would have been in conflict with greenbelt policies. For example, a municipally adopted urban boundary may encroach into the greenbelt when, in fact, this type of urban expansion doesn't align with the greenbelt plan.

Next, let's turn our attention to modifications being kept to strengthen Indigenous relations. These changes apply to Hamilton, Belleville and the county of Wellington. Changes to be retained in official plans include ensuring that, where a marked or unmarked cemetery or burial is found in Indigenous communities, the known interests in the area are notified. Changes are also being kept to ensure that planning approval authorities coordinate and engage with Indigenous communities having Aboriginal and treaty rights regarding cultural heritage and archaeological resources.

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Another area where we are proposing to keep provincial modifications relates to how we share built-up areas. In planning terms, this is called compatible land uses. These

changes apply to the cities of Hamilton and Peterborough and the regions of York and Niagara.

Provincial policies set out rules for how sensitive land uses such as homes or long-term-care facilities and other uses such as industrial lands and sewage treatment facilities should be planned for when in proximity to each other—several changes that would be retained to ensure these uses are appropriately separated to avoid any negative impacts from odour, noise and other contaminants.

A final retained provincial modification that I'll share with the committee relates to safe drinking water. To protect drinking water, the province has rules that prohibit certain land uses and activities surrounding drinking water resources. Provincial changes ensure that these rules are reflected in municipal official plans. These changes apply to the regions of Peel and York and the cities of Barrie, Belleville and Peterborough.

With that, I wish to thank the committee for your attention—I apologize for the length of the speech—and I can turn it over to colleagues for any questions.

The Chair (Ms. Laurie Scott): Thank you, Minister. You had a minute and 40 seconds left, so there you are.

Anyway, we'll go to the official opposition for the first round of seven and a half minutes. MPP Armstrong, please go ahead.

Ms. Teresa J. Armstrong: Thank you to the minister for presenting today. I have a question, and I'm not presuming that I know the answer to this. Under Bill 150, we've discovered an inconsistency between the explanatory document, on the ministerial modification number 20 to Halton's official plan, and what is in the original MMAH decision document. So I just need clarification—what the intent was, if it was just an oversight.

On the original decision document, the modification 20 says that map 1 is in relation to Halton, but then on the explanation document, it says that modification 20 is map 3. So we just need clarification that it is the intent of what Halton presented. They didn't want to go beyond the urban boundaries. I just need clarification on the intent of government on that—

Hon. Paul Calandra: Yes, I'm told by officials that that was an oversight in the drafting of the bill.

Ms. Teresa J. Armstrong: Can I ask, will that be corrected in the bill?

Hon. Paul Calandra: Yes, we're presenting amendments to correct that.

Ms. Teresa J. Armstrong: Okay. Thank you.

Also, we wanted to ask if the minister supports the re-designation of the primary farmland in the greenbelt fingers from agriculture to rural, which would allow for the destruction of up to 1,400 acres of prime farmland to develop urban parks. I'm just wondering if that's something that you were going to support, the re-designation—

Hon. Paul Calandra: Sorry, I didn't hear the front end of the question.

Ms. Teresa J. Armstrong: There's a re-designation of prime farmland in the greenbelt fingers from agriculture to rural, which would allow the destruction of up to 1,400 acres of prime farmland to develop urban parks.

Hon. Paul Calandra: Well, the specifics on that one—do you want to—

Interjection.

Hon. Paul Calandra: Yes, come join us, Hannah. Hannah is the ADM.

The Chair (Ms. Laurie Scott): I'll just get you to state your name and title, and go ahead.

Ms. Hannah Evans: Hello. I'm Hannah Evans. I'm the assistant deputy minister for the municipal services division with the Ministry of Municipal Affairs and Housing.

I can confirm that the matter you're asking about with respect to the greenbelt fingers, so-called, in York region was adopted by York region. The York region official plan that came to the province included that policy provision. There were no modifications related to the details of that, so we are reverting back to the York region official plan.

Ms. Teresa J. Armstrong: So just to clarify then, Bill 150 before us doesn't address that, because York region had applied for that—

Ms. Hannah Evans: It was part of York region's original official plan that they adopted.

Ms. Teresa J. Armstrong: Okay. Thank you. Those are my two questions.

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

The Chair (Ms. Laurie Scott): It's okay, there are four minutes left. MPP Harden, go ahead.

Mr. Joel Harden: Thank you, Minister, for being here this afternoon. As you know, the decision to change Ottawa's urban boundary was a very controversial one. I know you've been to our city to meet with Mayor Sutcliffe and officials. I'm just wondering if you could clarify for this committee how you foresee the reversal of these changes and what conversations you want to lead now as minister as to where the urban boundary will proceed. We're agreed we need housing. We're agreed that communities need to be aware of how housing is utilized in the city and how land is utilized. Can you give us a picture of where things are headed?

Hon. Paul Calandra: I think with respect to the urban boundary, we've obviously said that we will reverse that and revert back to the original plan.

Having said that, we have had a number of discussions with Mayor Sutcliffe, who is, I think, going before his council one more time this week, if I'm not mistaken. They will be identifying parts of the provincial changes that we made that they may want to continue with to begin to address within the existing urban boundaries how they will meet their targets. I think they're talking about—and forgive me, I'm not sure what stage we're at. If I'm not mistaken, the mayor has sent me a letter from council with respect to heights in certain areas that they would like to see maintained. So, I would say Ottawa is working and Mayor Sutcliffe and his council are working very well on identifying where we can meet those densities within the existing urban boundary.

But I think it goes a step further too. As I said in a previous committee meeting—on Bill 134, I think it was—they're also helping to identify some of the provincial lands within

that area that are adjacent to Ottawa housing projects that they already have under construction. I think Pinecrest is—Pinecrest keeps coming to mind. Forgive me, I can't remember the councillor's name, but they are looking at it within existing boundaries, where the densities make sense, where maintaining height makes sense for them, and I'm expecting some additional information back.

The mayor has been pretty clear that he also wants to help ensure that he meets his targets within the existing urban boundary. That's part of the reason why we've put the immunity provisions in here as well, to protect not only us from some of the decisions that were made but also protect municipalities from the decisions they would have had to have made because of the official plan that was approved.

Mr. Joel Harden: Okay. It's heartening to hear that.

One of the discussions we've had in our city that I'm sure you're aware of is the Tewin proposal, which was recommended against by city staff because of the cost of the infrastructure required to service that area because of the kind of land we're dealing with—marshland, not amenable to solid infrastructure development—and the amount of money that people would be investing in it from a municipal side and from a private sector side.

So, can we understand this afternoon that when city staff in any municipality are recommending, even within urban boundaries, against the usage of certain land, that's something you're going to take seriously from a ministerial perspective? Because this is the conundrum we were thrown in before.

Hon. Paul Calandra: The reality is we want to work as closely as we can with municipalities. Not every municipality, if I can be honest with you, is going to be as easy to work with as Mayor Sutcliffe has been in Ottawa. Not every municipality is as anxious to meet their targets as others are.

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

Hon. Paul Calandra: Thirty seconds?

I have many examples of where planning staff have made recommendations, but the politicians have not supported the recommendations of the planning staff, and where the planning staff have said quite clearly, "You have to build to this level in this community in order to meet your targets," and the political side have said, "No way, that puts me at risk."

I don't ever want to leave the tool where the province can say, "Look, around transit, around infrastructure, in the areas where we can meet the targets"—that we're going to say, "No, hands off." We will work as closely as we possibly can, respecting the plans that they have brought forward, but ultimately—I'll just say this last thing, Madam Chair—infrastructure in the ground is our most limiting factor right now. That's where our challenge is, infrastructure under the ground, and that's what we want to utilize the best.

The Chair (Ms. Laurie Scott): Thank you very much. MPP Blais, if you would like—five minutes.

Mr. Stephen Blais: Thank you, Minister, for coming today. I think I heard you mention in your presentation that processes that have already started on the lands that were

added will be allowed to continue. So for lands that were added to Ottawa's urban boundary, by example, if those landowners have begun a secondary plan process, will that secondary plan process be allowed to continue? If so, at what point does the stop date start?

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Hon. Paul Calandra: Yes. My understanding—because I asked that question in both Ottawa and in Hamilton, specifically. My understanding on both accounts is that they would not deem those to be lands that are in progress, so they will be fully restored back to their official pre-change.

Mr. Stephen Blais: Okay, perfect. Well, that's very good to hear.

The other thing I wanted to get at a little bit this afternoon was that, you know, because of the Integrity Commissioner report and because of the Attorney General—excuse me, the Auditor General report; I guess the Attorney General might come later. Because of those reports, we know a fair bit about the details of how the decisions were originally made and who was involved in those decisions, but what we don't know yet is what the process was and who the players were in making the decisions to undo the original decisions.

I'm wondering if you can explain for us a little bit when the decision to undo that work was originally conceived of before the announcement was made. Who was involved in that decision-making process? Were there external consultants providing advice? Were the landowners that were going to have their land changed consulted ahead of time? Maybe just highlight some of that for us.

Hon. Paul Calandra: I think it became pretty clear, when I was appointed in September and following the Integrity Commissioner's and the Auditor General's initial reports on the greenbelt, that we take a look at some of the official plans that had been previously approved and was a process followed that would ultimately result in the highest level of confidence on the plans.

Now, I will note, it is true that only Hamilton, I believe, had taken the aggressive step of bringing it for a judicial review. I think it was only Hamilton, and there was a pre-existing York region one, but it wasn't based on our changes. It was a disagreement between—

Ms. Hannah Evans: And just to clarify, Minister, it was not the city of Hamilton that brought forward the judicial review; it was a third-party environmental organization. I think Hamilton was a party to it, but not the originator.

Hon. Paul Calandra: That's right.

Based on that, I have received a lot of questions: "What made you make the decision then to go back and look at some of the official plans?" It just became clear to me, as I was speaking with many of the mayors in the areas, the regional chairs in the areas, colleagues, that there was a level of apprehension, if I can say, that it didn't meet the test that we would have expected in terms of—and ultimately, too, if I could just say this last thing, that was specific to urban boundaries. It didn't make sense, in some instances, to try to meet our goals through areas that just were not—and that was a decision I made on my own and with the permission of the Premier.

Mr. Stephen Blais: Okay, thank you.

There is, at present, provincial policy that says that comprehensive official plans have a 10-year shelf life.

Hon. Paul Calandra: Yes.

Mr. Stephen Blais: Is the 10 years for these cities going to begin at their original submission or approval date, or is it going to restart once this legislation is enacted? Because, in some cases, there is a two-and-a-half-year to three-year gap there.

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

Hon. Paul Calandra: Sorry, you can correct me if I'm wrong, but because we're going back, my understanding is that it will begin at the previous approval.

Mr. Stephen Blais: The 10 years?

Hon. Paul Calandra: Yes, that's right.

Ms. Hannah Evans: And just as a point of clarification, the 10-year cycle is for a new official plan. For the cases where it was an official plan update, it's a five-year cycle.

Mr. Stephen Blais: Sure, yes.

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

Mr. Stephen Blais: Okay, I'll wait till the next one.

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

Over to the government round: MPP Coe, please start us off.

Mr. Lorne Coe: Thank you, Chair. Through you to Minister Calandra and his assistant deputy minister: Thank you very much for being with us.

Minister, you will know that what this legislation will do, if passed, will empower municipalities, but also strengthen local decision-making. I would like you to expand a little bit about how that relates to official plans, because it's an important planning and development tool within both lower-tier municipalities and upper-tier municipalities.

Could you expand on that point and how this legislation supports that process going forward, and also allows more transparency, as you spoke about earlier in your remarks? Thank you, sir.

Hon. Paul Calandra: Thank you—a very good question.

In proposing the legislation, first and foremost, the decision was made that we would seek the input of lower-tier municipalities to review the provincial changes and to report back to us. As colleagues will know, through Bill 23, we signalled that planning authorities would be vested in lower-tier municipalities. At this juncture, we believe the important part, as we reset these plans and reset our working relationship, is that it would go with the lower-tier municipalities to remain consistent with Bill 23.

The overriding thing that we heard in the pre-consultation part of this—and just to be clear, colleagues, it was direct consultation with many mayors and councillors, and some colleagues who have expressed opinions both in the House and question period but also more effectively, I think, outside of that forum, which has brought us to where we're at today. It was a very difficult decision to make, given that, as I've said, there weren't a significant amount of judicial reviews that have been requested. But I think the process is we're bringing it to the lower-tier municipalities, consistent with where we're going on Bill 23, allowing our partners to identify if any of the changes that had been proposed through the original official plans and,

whether they want to retain them or not, giving them the authority to do that, as opposed to us making it happen through council or heads of council.

All of this just helps us in resetting, and then recognizing too, as we've said in the answer to Mr. Blais, and in essence to Mr. Harden as well, that there's an understanding that if we're going to build these homes, it's got to be in areas that, given our infrastructure challenges, especially on sewer and water—we're going to have to do it in areas and focus on those areas that have that capacity to do so. That's why we made this decision and we've done it in the way that we're doing it.

Mr. Lorne Coe: Thank you, sir, for that response.

Chair, through you to my colleagues who have additional questions, please.

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

Mr. Sheref Sabawy: Thank you very much, Minister Calandra, for the informative speech. One of the most common concerns I hear from my constituents—and I'm sure this is something everybody here, our colleagues on both sides of the House, hear—is that Ontarians are worried. They are feeling that they are being priced out of the housing market and they are worried that they will never attain their dream of home ownership.

Young families are worried that they will be unable to find their dream home to grow in. Hard-working professionals, new grads, new immigrants are worried that they will not be able to find a home close to their work and loved ones. All of the Ontarians I talk to say, "How will my son be able to get a house?" Everybody is worried that their kids won't be able to leave the house, and new Ontarians are worried that they will not be able to find a home to settle down in and lay down roots.

This bill, if passed, is going to further empower local governments to team up with the province and tackle this housing crisis head-on. Can you outline how this legislation, if passed, builds on our past successes as just one of the many positive steps our government is taking to address the housing crisis?

Hon. Paul Calandra: To be clear, obviously, colleagues, there's no point in suggesting otherwise: This is a reset that has caused a temporary challenge in some of these communities, right? So that's 100% a challenge that we're facing in some of these communities, and to be clear, these are some of the communities that are the fastest-growing and have the ability to meet their targets quicker than in some of the other areas.

That is why we felt that it was important that we looked at these plans immediately. That is why we felt that we'd reach out to them and say—and frankly, under tighter time restraints: December 7. But of all of our colleagues, there has not been anybody so far who said that they couldn't meet the target of December 7, so they've been very cooperative with us.

We're finding that it's just that: Everybody wants the same thing. They want to get more homes built. They want to do it faster. They want us to remove obstacles to getting homes built. They understand that the province, on occasion, has to use tools at its disposal to speed up the process.

But at the same time, our municipal partners have said, “Give us the tools and let us do that job with you.” So this legislation that we’re bringing forward is really a recognition of that.

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We say it often: As you’ve heard me say a lot in the House, nobody should be under any illusion that somehow we’re stopping or that these municipalities in these areas that are affected by this simply stopped and weren’t moving forward anyway. They were moving forward on applications that were there in front of them, existing applications that were there in front of them, where they had the infrastructure to do so. This bill is a recognition that they can do that and that we expect it to be done

There has been great work on the initial housing supply bills that we brought forward, but the next phase has to be about shovels in the ground fast and infrastructure to support that housing, full stop. We have to do whatever it takes, and we will meet the goal. Nobody should be under any misconstrued—should be ill-informed that somehow this reset means we can slow things down. It’s just the opposite, and our partners in these areas are actually on the same page with us.

The Chair (Ms. Laurie Scott): I’m sorry, that’s all the time we have for this round, but you’ll have another round.

I’ll go now to the official opposition. MPP Harden.

Mr. Joel Harden: I want to pick up the thread from our last discussion, Minister, because it would seem to me, from what you’ve told us this afternoon and what I’ve heard you say before, that the government is feeling great urgency. The government is going to be relying on partners to make sure that you’re clearing the way for housing to be built in particular places quickly and built well. I’m just making that assumption given what I’ve heard this afternoon and what you said before.

With that in mind, when you think about transit-oriented communities, do you have confidence that the government is working with the right partners?

Hon. Paul Calandra: Yes, I do, in the sense that as we build our transit-oriented communities—and look, some of the work that we’re doing right now in Toronto, in particular, is very encouraging to me.

I will say this, and Deputy, if I stray too much, then just slap me down: When Toronto gave us their original plans, they weren’t as aggressive on transit-oriented communities as they now recognize they should have been. It was really Toronto that has helped us say, “Hold up. Let’s take a look at it again and let’s see what more we can do around the transit infrastructure that is being built.” And it is in a much more collaborative and effective way than, I think, at any other time.

You look at other jurisdictions and what they have done around their transit infrastructure—and how their transit infrastructure has helped pay for the transit, frankly—and whilst we’re making great strides, we’re really far behind. But what we’re also seeing with our municipal partners where transit has been built, whether it’s Waterloo—they have the rapid transit, and they were telling us yesterday

that if you’re a student in Waterloo, you get a free transit pass and you don’t—

Interjection.

Hon. Paul Calandra: Well, look at what that could mean for Ottawa, once it is fully up and running.

In Waterloo, they’ve given a transit pass and you don’t have to live near the university, as long as you’re near the line, right? So I think we have the right partners, but it’s helping people understand, it’s the full continuum of—

Mr. Joel Harden: Thank you, Minister. I only have a certain amount of time.

I’m glad you’re enjoying the relationship with Mayor Chow. I’m glad that’s working well.

There is a partner I’m concerned about, though, and that is Metrolinx. You may be aware that the first transit-oriented community partner for Metrolinx was Vandyk Properties, and you may or may not be aware that they are currently on the brink of receivership, owing two lenders \$203 million. That’s KingSett Mortgage Corp. and Dorr Capital Corp.

I just want to go over some of this to get your reaction, because I think we share an interest at this committee to make sure housing gets built when we make urgent changes like this. I’m quite concerned with what I’m reading from lawyer letters, demand letters that read, literally in the case of these two lenders for Vandyk, that they’ve lost all confidence in the ability for this partner, Vandyk Properties, the first transit-oriented partner for Metrolinx, to complete developments in a timely manner or at all. The company was supposed to bring 1,757 homes to the market; 830 have already been sold, but most of them have not even realized the construction stage.

The allegations in court, at the moment, include misappropriation of funds; cost overruns; failure to discharge construction liens registered to Uptowns, Grand Central Mimico and Lakeview; and failures to make monthly interest payments on The Ravine and Uptowns in Heart Lake.

Do any of these revelations in court concern you as minister? Do you think we’re working with the right partner in Vandyk Properties?

Hon. Paul Calandra: Look, I appreciate that. Would I be happy over an individual partner making or having a challenge over that—that’s one of the reasons why the province has to retain the tools that it has in order to ensure that we build, whether it’s in transit-oriented communities or in others. We will have hundreds of thousands of homes of all types built along our transit corridor.

Would I like to believe that 100% of every single one of those developments—yes, that’s the goal. But where there is a challenge to that, the province retains the tools in order to fix that. I think we are going to get this done along transit-oriented communities. We have other partners, not necessarily in Canada, but global jurisdictions that have done this and have done it very effectively. We can see what they’ve done and see the mistakes that they’ve done.

To your earlier question, it’s one of the reasons why I want to retain the tools in order to fix challenges where they exist. We will not lose the opportunity along transit-oriented communities. We can’t. We can’t afford to lose it—

Mr. Joel Harden: I would agree with you. We certainly can't afford it.

Hon. Paul Calandra: —but if somebody doesn't step up to the plate, we will find somebody else to do it.

Mr. Joel Harden: If Metrolinx is maintaining the relationship with Vandyk Properties, in the face of evidence like this, which is now before the courts, is this not a cause for us as a Legislature to have non-confidence in Metrolinx's leadership in signing these agreements on our behalf, on not properly enforcing the tools that your ministry has and that the government has? How much more of this do we have to watch?

Hon. Paul Calandra: Look, I would disagree with you. Metrolinx are right now—I know your feelings on the leadership at Metrolinx. I can appreciate that. I would respectfully disagree.

The amount of work that we have asked Metrolinx to do in the province of Ontario in the short period of time with its GO train expansion, whether it is the subway expansion and combining that with transit-oriented communities in different areas—so what we've seen, whether when they have been expropriating some properties for transit-oriented communities, for a station and then putting back the infrastructure for the expropriated entity in another place, it is a tremendous amount of work that we've asked them to do in a short period of time. Are they 100%? Probably not. I can't imagine that anybody would be, but we've asked them to do a lot.

Individual projects, like that—look, you know, I'm not going to answer that. I don't know; I'm not a lawyer. I haven't seen the depositions. I haven't read through the materials.

But this is why I fight so hard when you ask questions in the House about ministerial zoning orders: “Will you retain the tools?” Yes, 100%, I'm going to retain the tools, because I will not allow the value—

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

Hon. Paul Calandra: —of transit-oriented communities—

Mr. Joel Harden: I appreciate that.

Hon. Paul Calandra: —to be dispersed in a way that doesn't impact us in a positive way.

Mr. Joel Harden: I appreciate that. Though I would say, Minister, candidly to you, that you have enough evidence, because in my five years in elected office, I have yet to see Metrolinx successfully complete a project. I have seen billion-dollar cost overruns in the case of the Eglinton Crosstown project. I have seen, in this particular matter with Vandyk Properties, which is the marquee original relationship for Metrolinx—not any partner. This is the marquee relationship. They're currently in court owing two creditors \$203 million.

Are we going to do all the hard work with Bill 150, only to watch organizations like this fail, or are we going to hold them accountable?

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

Hon. Paul Calandra: I invite you to come to my community to see two-way, all-day GO train service. I invite you to the community to see what Metrolinx has done:

improving the GO train stations in my area, improving the access to busing in the area right across the Stouffville line—

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

Hon. Paul Calandra: That is work that had sat there and nobody had done for years. Metrolinx got that done in the time—

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

I'll now move to MPP Blais for five minutes. In one second, I'll start.

Mr. Stephen Blais: Minister, you've lived in Ottawa. You're familiar with the city a little bit. One of the areas that will be a key area for intensification and new housing starts is in and around St. Laurent. There is an LRT station there. It's inside the greenbelt so it's prime time and ready to go.

Recently, Ottawa city staff intervened in an Ontario Energy Board process. Enbridge was trying to replace a natural gas line for St. Laurent that would service 160,000 current users and obviously support growth in that community. The line is 60 years old and in need of repair and about to fail. Obviously, that would be catastrophic for the community.

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They used the excuse of official plan policies in and around the energy transition as their reason for intervening, but obviously that is in conflict with the need for housing and, I think, just good common sense. I'm wondering what measures legislatively you might be able to bring forward to stop bureaucrats from freelancing when there is this kind of conflict between elements in an official plan or city policy.

Hon. Paul Calandra: Look, I'll say this: I do know that area quite well. Actually, I was there not long ago in my previous portfolio as long-term-care minister. Significant changes that are happening in that community are actually quite impressive, but the ability to grow is also quite evident there. So again, I think it speaks back—and please interrupt me if I'm wrong. I don't know the specifics to what exactly you're talking about, but it is part of retaining tools. We have to retain certain tools that allow us to make decisions that give us the opportunity to look beyond.

I'm trying to say this in a political way. There's no political way of doing it. Once in a while, those of us who are elected need to have the tools in order to break a logjam between officials. That's why I'm very guarded on giving up all of the tools. It's just how we use the tools. It's got to be based on homes. Right now it's homes, homes, homes; transit, transit, transit.

You guys have a lot going on now on that. The expansion of the line is out that way too, I think, right?

Mr. Stephen Blais: It is. The LRT expansion kind of goes through there.

That's basically what I was getting at. MPP Harden had mentioned the Tewin lands in Ottawa. That, of course, was a political decision to bring those lands in, specifically, as you were referencing, in order to alleviate growth pressures in other parts of the city. That infrastructure doesn't currently support additional growth, but to ensure the overall

target for growth was met, these Tewin lands were brought in. So that was what I was trying to get at.

Are there additional measures that you can have to ensure that the political will of those we elect retains a little bit more sway or certainty and that civil servants, as well intentioned as they might be, can't undo through delegations to administrative authorities etc. the will of the political body?

Hon. Paul Calandra: Help me if I'm wrong on this, but I think where we ran into difficulties on this is that we have the tools there and we didn't use them, I would say, in this instance effectively. The provincial planning statement is there, right? We know what we want to accomplish. The ministerial zoning order authority there—I know the Minister of Energy has authorities that he can act upon, but sometimes we don't necessarily talk to each other and, at the same time, we stray from—I'm not going to give you the answer that you want, and I apologize—

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

Hon. Paul Calandra: This is why the relationship with our partners is so important. Through Mayor Sutcliffe and his delegations, he has helped identify things like this, not specific to this one, where you want to have something accomplished, but the way you're doing it is wrong and you're just causing me more grief, so go about it in a different way.

This is one of those areas I'd be happy to look into because it's housing, housing, housing, housing right now and whatever we've got to do to support that housing, and then using the tools that either myself or the Minister of Energy or other ministers have in their tool box but using them for the specific reasons why they were there.

I've found that with the public service, when you give the rationale, their job is to give us the rationale on why something can't happen, but always understanding that elected officials—

The Chair (Ms. Laurie Scott): Thank you. That's all the time we have.

Over to the government for the final seven and a half minutes: MPP Pang, you can go ahead.

Mr. Billy Pang: Chair, through you to the minister: Minister, official plans are critical tools through which our municipal partners prepare for growth. They set out where homes, infrastructure, industries, shops, offices and businesses can be developed. Municipalities are key partners in tackling the housing supply crisis and bringing dreams of home ownership back into reach for our young Ontarians. As we have said on many occasions, it's the municipalities who are best positioned to understand the needs and concerns of their local communities.

Can you expand on the role municipalities play in building homes and why our government is focused on further empowering them to help us meet our shared housing goals?

Hon. Paul Calandra: I would say one of the challenges that we have right now, and one of the reasons why, in Bill 23, we identified moving planning to the lower tiers, for instance—we see it in our community in Markham: the constant tension between the city of Markham, for in-

stance, and the regional municipality of York. They do things completely different, in some instances. York region, for instance, identify water and sewer allocations at permit level, and our municipal partners across the region do it at the draft plan approval level.

So this difference even in something like that, water and sewer allocation, will stop housing being built in areas where there is infrastructure in the ground. They, themselves, in those areas—and I'm just using York region as an example for us—want us to help them eliminate the challenges between them. They understand that the rules we put in place for a regional municipality and the rules we put in place for lower tiers sometimes are in conflict with each other. I would say, speaking with Chair Emmerson, speaking with Mayor Scarpitti, they have both—and Mayor Lovatt—unilaterally, across the board, said, "You've got to make this change to the lower tier sooner rather than later. You have to proclaim that part of Bill 23 because it is getting in the way of building homes in our community."

They have a lot of expertise at the lower tier, but here's the one challenge I'll say—I'm learning this; you guys probably already know. Every community is so different. Every county is governed so differently. Every county and region is at a different state of development. It's why we brought this bill forward, because it recognizes the fact that, first and foremost, we have to listen to what they are saying, where they're growing and why they've made plans in the way that they have, as long as they're meeting the goals that we have set for them with the provincial policy statement and then having the tools that we need to get things built faster.

It is a very challenging relationship, bringing everybody together. Like I was just saying, we're seeing it. In your riding, in particular, think of the growth that is happening in your riding. You went from one of the smallest ridings in terms of population to probably, in the next little bit, one of the biggest ridings in terms of population, and all focused around infrastructure, right? Markham was kind of leading the way: focused around the 407, focused around the GO train expansions, focused around the university that we're building there and the new downtown that is coming into Markham. They identified it. Markham was even ahead of the curve when you talk about new urbanism with Cornell—mixed types of housing in a smaller area, thousands of people in a smaller community.

That is what our municipalities have been able to do, and they're asking us to trust them. We will, but at the same time understanding this is what the provincial policy statement is, this is where we're going to be, and these are the targets that we need. And within that context, you have to help us meet those targets.

It's a long-winded answer to say that we can't do it without them, and we have to listen to them. The number one thing they're all saying—I know all colleagues are getting this; no one can tell me that they're not—is infrastructure in the ground. Sewer and water is the number one obstacle to meeting their goals on housing, employment

and long-term care, in some instances. So that is where our focus is going to continue to be with them going forward as well.

Interjection.

The Chair (Ms. Laurie Scott): There's two and a half minutes left.

Mr. Billy Pang: What do you think, say, for my riding of Markham—is it more personal issues or policy issues? Is there a policy that can solve this human issue?

Hon. Paul Calandra: I think it's always going to be a bit of both. You're always going to get—it is what it is. You're just going to get NIMBY. You're going to get councillors, for instance, who just do not want—not only councillors, some of us, even, who just do not want a certain thing built in their backyard.

Look, when I was a federal member of Parliament, they wanted to put a communications tower in my community for cellphone use, and I was dead set against them putting that tower in my downtown because I thought it would look ugly, and I feel that I was right. But every day I drive into my community and I lose cellphone service, I think, “Oh man. Maybe somebody else as opposed to the member should have been in charge of that.”

Sometimes we just don't want things in our community, but right now we have identified that housing and building

1.5 million—we are all agreed on that. We are all agreed on it being a crisis, that we have to work with the federal government; although I might not necessarily agree with the direction they're going in, they agree. Municipalities agree. The provincial government agrees. Home builders agree. So all of our energies are focused on doing that. It also then means we have to break down those barriers—

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

Hon. Paul Calandra:—and where there is a barrier, where there is NIMBY, the policy outweighs the NIMBY. That's just where we're at right now. Along transit-oriented communities, as-of-rights, laneway suites, it is what it is, and that's what we're going to do in order to meet these targets.

The Chair (Ms. Laurie Scott): Forty-five seconds.

Interjection.

The Chair (Ms. Laurie Scott): Okay, then. We'll take that time back.

Thank you very much. That's the end of the session today.

As a reminder, the deadline for filing written submissions and amendments to the bill is 5 p.m. today.

The committee is now adjourned until 9 a.m. on Wednesday, November 29—tomorrow—2023. Thank you.

The committee adjourned at 1632.

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