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**Official Report
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(Hansard)**

HE-54

**Journal
des débats
(Hansard)**

HE-54

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

Regional governance

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

Gouvernance régionale

1st Session
43rd Parliament
Monday 8 July 2024

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43^e législature
Lundi 8 juillet 2024

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**

Monday 8 July 2024

Lundi 8 juillet 2024

The committee met at 1000 in Best Western Plus Mariposa Inn and Conference Centre, Orillia.

REGIONAL GOVERNANCE

The Chair (Ms. Laurie Scott): Good morning, everyone. The Standing Committee on Heritage, Infrastructure and Cultural Policy will now come to order.

We're meeting in the city of Orillia to conduct public hearings on the study on regional governance. We're joined by staff from legislative research, Hansard, and broadcast and recording. Please wait until I recognize you before starting to speak, and as always, all comments should go through the Chair. Are there any questions before we begin?

Seeing none, 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?

**TOWN OF COLLINGWOOD
OXFORD COUNTY
COUNTY OF SIMCOE**

The Chair (Ms. Laurie Scott): Seeing none, we will move to our first group of three. I'll read them off, but I'll ask you to come forward when you're ready: town of Collingwood, Oxford county and county of Simcoe. If the representatives just want to move to the table, that would be great, and if we can go in the order that I had announced.

So, when you are ready, Yvonne of the town of Collingwood—Yvonne Hamlin is the mayor—just state your name, and you have up to seven minutes. They've turned the microphone on for you. Please begin whenever you are ready.

Ms. Yvonne Hamlin: Yvonne Hamlin, mayor of the town of Collingwood. Thank you, Madam Chair, members of the committee.

As you know, Collingwood is a town located on the shores of Georgian Bay. To the east of us are the ski hills in the Town of Blue Mountains and to the west the lovely freshwater beaches of Wasaga Beach. Today our population is about 30,000 people. Of those, about 4,000 are part-time.

I guess the bottom line is, today, Collingwood has no concerns with the existing municipal structure and does have a close relationship with the county of Simcoe.

In terms of the provision of housing and doing our fair share as this great province expands, Collingwood is looking ahead. In 25 years, the Collingwood population is forecast to be between 40,000 and 50,000 people. As such, we anticipate that we may evolve within the Simcoe county structure. Inasmuch as we are content to work collaboratively now within the existing structure, we can see a day when the town may need to pursue a structure with greater autonomy for town-delivered services. We will continue to build collaboratively with our neighbouring Simcoe county municipalities as well as other south Georgian Bay municipalities in Grey county to meet the many needs across our region, with a goal of avoiding duplicate investments in infrastructure and services and maximizing effectiveness in how we serve our taxpayers.

Now, I just mentioned south Georgian Bay. Collingwood is part of the area known as south Georgian Bay. This is not a regional government. It's not a government of any kind. Rather, it's a group of six municipalities spanning two counties that finds itself with tourists, artists, businesses and residents alike seeing south Georgian Bay as a distinct area to live, work and play. The population in 2024 of south Georgian Bay is about 103,000 people. The two counties are Simcoe, with Wasaga Beach, Clearview and Collingwood; and Grey county, with the towns of Blue Mountains, Meaford and Grey Highlands.

Collingwood has several advanced manufacturing companies active in the international stage in many sectors, from mining to architectural glass to underwater sonar acoustics to auto parts. And also, just so you know, Collingwood is known for its burgeoning tech sector and an outstanding entrepreneurial community anchored by 240 members—that's 240 companies represented—in a privately co-owned working space known as the Foundry.

We also have an amazing small business enterprise centre that includes an incubator and an accelerator that serves our successful small businesses across southern

Georgian Bay. So, it's fair to say that south Georgian Bay is an economic unit, not just from a tourism standpoint—because we do attract some three million a year—but between our residents and workers who travel between our individual municipalities everyday. We also share health care with the regional hospital in Collingwood and a majority of the health care-related services for south Georgian Bay based in Collingwood.

And we wanted to let you know that, collaboratively, the mayors and CAOs of our six municipalities meet on a regular basis to discuss issues that are common to all of us. Of course, none of us can bind each other. We're each separate towns or townships in two separate counties, but I for one find it quite helpful to share and discuss our common issues.

So, yesterday, in preparing these remarks, I looked up our agenda just to share with you some of the things we've talked about over the last few months:

- transit and transportation between our communities and around our communities;
- physician recruitment;
- attainable housing;
- youth climate action initiatives;
- support for our regional humane society that has embarked on an expansion campaign;
- delegations at the upcoming AMO conference on matters of common interest;
- green development standards; and so on.

I'm telling you all this just to show that, as we grow and accommodate more population in our area, governance may have to evolve. But I'm not here today asking for that.

The last two points I wanted to leave with you: As we move forward in the history of Collingwood, it may be of assistance eventually to have a provincial facilitator or other resources made available to help us develop a coordinated, multi-municipality growth plan as a foundation for larger investments, such as infrastructure. And lastly, consistent with AMO and FCM advocacy, we strongly believe that all orders of government must develop a new financial framework that funds and enables each of us where we are best placed to deliver services locally. Thank you for your attention.

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

And we'll now move to Oxford county and—do we have two people with Oxford county? Just you? Okay, you just go ahead and state your name and title and you can begin when you're ready—up to seven minutes. Thank you.

Mr. Marcus Ryan: Thank you very much, Chair, members and staff.

First thing I'll clarify is that I am one person, even though the delegation request outlines me as warden of Oxford county and mayor of Zorra township. I specifically highlighted both because I think it's relevant today that I am head of council for the region of Oxford—it is "county" by name, but in the Municipal Act, it is a regional government. So I have the perspective of the regional chair and all the services that we try to deliver—primarily land

use, and water and waste water—but also the perspective of a local area mayor trying to deliver those local services in the community.

Oxford has a unique municipal regional governance structure that allows the region to do high-level services that benefit from economies of scale and keeps the local small-area municipalities focused on truly local area services. We have a single official plan in Oxford county. Each of the eight municipalities does not have its own official plan; they have a zoning bylaw which complies with the Oxford county official plan, which of course complies with the provincial planning—now policy—statement.

There is regional ownership and operating authority of water and waste water in Oxford. Oxford county, as the regional government, owns and operates all of the water and waste water infrastructure in all of the eight area municipalities within the county and we have a collaborative asset management structure to coordinate with the area municipalities when we are maintaining water and waste water infrastructure under roads and when the area municipalities are updating their roads.

In my opinion, government functions best when services are delivered at the smallest, most local, most transparent and accountable level that they can be delivered at and should only be moved to a higher level when there truly is an economy of scale or a regional scope to that service being delivered. I think that Oxford, organically—and I'm not going to lie—through some politics in the distant past, has ended up in that sweet spot of division of services in our municipality and in our region.

As a region, Oxford county delivers services that truly are regional in scope or benefit from economy of scale—regional roads, ambulance, solid waste collection, long-term care, housing, water and waste water services in a single county-wide official plan. The single official plan covers the entire region of Oxford county and is developed in collaboration with the eight area municipalities who then develop zoning bylaws that comply with that. The coordinated structure also means that the area municipalities, through a shared services agreement, get planning staff supports from Oxford county. So it is the same staff in the same department which are developing the OP, which complies with the PPS, and that are developing for the area municipality a zoning bylaw that complies with that OP.

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With a single OP and a single zoning bylaw, this also means that, for developers, it's an extremely streamlined process. There are not two OPs to apply to get a development through; only a single OP and a zoning bylaw that, by definition, complies with that OP.

When it comes to water and waste water servicing, we have also provided that at a regional level. The county has ownership and operating authority of all water and waste water services in Oxford. This means that the official plan and water and waste water servicing are all developed and coordinated out of the same building by the same regional council, with representation from all of the eight area

municipalities. We develop our water and waste water master plans, along with our official plan, and they are coordinated. This ensures that we are not developing land for development where there is not water and waste water servicing and we are not putting water and waste water servicing where there isn't land for development. It's a coordinated approach that I believe works well.

When it comes to asset management, we have a coordinated approach there with the eight area municipalities. Again, land use planning and water and waste water management is coordinated with them through water and waste water master plans, the official plan and zoning bylaw.

Perhaps unusually, I am the head of two councils and I am not here asking for money. I will not be asking for money at AMO in August. Because we have a true economy of scale in operating our 17 water systems, 11 waste water systems and nine waste water treatment plants at a regional scale, we charge an affordable water and waste water rate to our residents. We collect that rate; we assign it to the assets and we maintain those assets. It is self-sustaining, as an asset management plan should be.

In Oxford county, we prioritize our growth to make the best use of land and municipal infrastructure. Our unique municipal regional governance and service structure results in a truly coordinated and integrated and comprehensive approach for growth planning and the creation of complete and sustainable communities—communities that do not permit or encourage development where there is land but not water and waste water servicing, or water and waste water servicing but not suitable lands. This allows us to focus on local interests and how we work together within the region to achieve the broader public and provincial interests.

How do people living in Oxford experience this? Usually, not at all. They are completely unaware; it is seamless. They turn the water on; it is clean; it is safe. They pay a reasonable price. It is financially sustainable; likewise with land use planning. Behind the scenes, they benefit from the economies of scale of truly regional services and having a local municipal council that can deal with the truly local, transparent, highly accountable local issues, and all of this while complying with the provincial planning statement and housing action plans.

So, in closing, I would just like to say that while Oxford county specifically is not a subject of interest, as I understand it, for the legislation, I think that there is something to be learned from how Oxford county has developed as a region and the benefits to our residents. Again, both as the head of council for Oxford county the region and as the mayor of a small local municipality, I think it works in both contexts and I would not want it any other way.

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

Moving on to the county of Simcoe: Please begin when you're ready. You have up to seven minutes.

Mr. Basil Clarke: I started my timer because I tend to digress a bit. I'm Basil Clarke. I am warden of Simcoe county. I'm also the mayor of Ramara township, but I'm

here today speaking on behalf of Simcoe county. My deputy mayor will be here this afternoon to speak for Ramara township.

If you drove here—and I appreciate you coming this far; it's a long drive for some of you folks—you get to see somewhat the size of Simcoe county. If you came in from the south, you're halfway. If you want to head north, you've got the equal distance before you get to the end of our borders. This is a very large county, with 93 settlement areas. So one size doesn't fit all when you're dealing with some areas as large as what Simcoe county is, with so many small municipalities—16, to be sure. And you're in one of our separated cities, which—the city of Barrie and this, of course, is the city of Orillia, which brings us to 18 when we're doing human services or social services. However, they are separate when it comes to the planning issues, which I really want to address today.

Do you know what? I am going to go off-script, which I always do.

As a small municipality, we rely very heavily on the services of Simcoe county. When you look at waste management now run at that macro level, we are second in the province of Ontario for diversion, and that's something we're very proud of, with our challenging landscape. When you look at social housing, we surpassed our target of over 2,700 homes in the last 10 years, and we hit close to 3,000 in nine because we work efficiently and we've learned—and we're building for the hundred years. Our paramedic services are one of the most cost-efficient in the entire province—no offence to my good colleague here.

Again, we operate without borders through the city of Barrie, Orillia and the entire area. Our senior-living long-term care—we're mandated to have one; we have four. We have one that we're very proud of in Penetanguishene right now: Georgian Manor. It's an entire community hub that we've built there where you can buy condos and you can age in place. We're building a second one now in Beeton, if that name rings a bell. I think you all heard of the Honda plant which is doing a very large expansion there. Honda is our biggest employer. We knew years ago—a lot of employees we're going to have a lot of retirees. That's why our second campus is being built in Beeton now and should be in place when the wave comes in 30 years.

We plan for the 100 years, not the four years. To achieve these targets, somebody has to be looking at a reasonable level to make sure these services get there. So we were a little shocked when we read that there was talk we may lose our planning department. I know that's still up for discussion, and that's why I'm here today, to stress how important that is to us because somebody has to be looking at the long term, the macro services.

We also understand that there's duplication, and we do have some suggestions on how to—we've already taken steps to increase efficiencies through delegation and processes. But with provincial support and legislation updates, we can make further improvements. For example, there are some local official plan amendments that don't affect county policies at all, and we don't want to be

involved in those. We're always looking at the macro level.

We propose a new concept as an upper tier with prescribed planning responsibility. Perhaps that could be accomplished through a new Simcoe county act. Here in the county, we hope to manage macro growth, as I said. There's no point having a subdivision if nobody's looking at how we're going to get transit there, how we're going to move that traffic. We don't want a 400- or a 4,000-home subdivision in the corner of the county. Now, that might be okay, as long as the land all around it is also zoned for development because we can't have a county road leaving a subdivision that doesn't link to anything else or any other county roads. We're trying to make a big picture.

We absolutely want to work with the province of Ontario—more homes faster. We want that open dialogue. We've got suggestions. We need that long-term planning. Our local municipalities are well positioned to do the focus on the planning for their neighbourhood, what their municipalities want to look like. We do want out of that game. We want to stick to roads, transit, our Lake Simcoe Regional Airport—we're one of the few counties that actually owns an airport, and we're expanding the runway to 7,000 feet and hoping to have passenger carrying services there one day, so we really are planning way down the road.

I won't belittle you too much longer with my rant other than to say Simcoe county really does value its partnerships. You heard me mention long-term care. You heard me mention social housing and our paramedics. These are all partnerships with the province, 50-50 on some of them. We have a very open dialogue, and we work well together. We want to work well with the province going forward to achieve these numbers.

You're not going to get the houses overnight. It's taken a few years to get here, but if we work together and plan it properly, not only can we meet the housing target, but we can meet that with sustainability, with things like public transit and still protect our farmland and still protect our natural area protections. But somebody has to be looking from above and planning the entire region, so I need to stress that again, that we really do need to hold onto our planning department. They are invaluable to us here at Simcoe county. Thank you.

The Chair (Ms. Laurie Scott): Thank you very much for your presentations, all three of you.

We're going to start with the first seven and a half minutes with the official opposition. MPP Burch, please begin.

Mr. Jeff Burch: Thank you all for appearing today.

I'll start with Mayor Hamlin from Collingwood. You had started out by saying that there are no concerns with the current structure of governance in the region. Are your constituents—is that the way they feel as well?

Ms. Yvonne Hamlin: I would say the residents don't have many thoughts about the county structure. They don't elect anyone separately for that; it's the mayor and deputy mayor. I think a lot are even surprised that their garbage is picked up by the county, so I can't really say.

Mr. Jeff Burch: And with respect to housing, I remember last time we heard from you, you talked about the specific challenges related to tourism and with housing, especially during those peak tourist months with the return of tourism. How is that going?

Ms. Yvonne Hamlin: Housing—I acknowledge it's for sure a national problem. But in our area, we are so deficient in housing for people who work in our community. Our staff have really moved the needle a lot on encouraging our residents to build accessory dwelling units. And we have a grant program, we have blueprints online to help people, we have a dedicated staff person to help on that housing if someone comes into town hall—and I could go on and on.

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We're also considering zoning, currently, to add a fourth unit to every single-family lot, and in December, we approved our official plan for Collingwood, where we have pre-designated higher density in the areas where we think it should go on our main routes. So if a developer comes forward, we're ready, but I do understand we still have that market gap between what it cost to build and the cost that they can offer it out to the market at.

We've had a study done by the Barry Lyon firm, which is a housing specialist out of Toronto, and we're short right now about 1,300 rental units for people who earning, roughly, between \$40,000 and \$80,000 a year. That's a lot for a small community, and I don't know how we're going to bridge that gap, honestly.

Mr. Jeff Burch: Thanks very much.

Mayor Ryan, Oxford county: Planning you touched on a fair bit, and it's an area of regional government that can be contentious. It sounds like you have a formula that works. Why is that? And is there any pressure, as there is in some other areas, to devolve planning functions to the lower tier?

Mr. Marcus Ryan: Yes, as I said, I think we have hit the sweet spot, right? These things constantly evolve. As we experience growth like we are and the housing pressure that we're all experiencing in Ontario, there are different tensions and tugs each way. And to be clear, no system is perfect. No matter what any of us do, there will be flaws. We're choosing which problems we're going to solve.

But I think that having a single official plan and then the area municipal zoning bylaw developed by the same planning staff through a service agreement, and that coordinated with the water and waste water, frankly—I'm familiar with how it works in other regions of the province, and I'm certainly not here to throw any other regions under the bus, but it works. And when I look at some of the struggles that happen in other parts of Ontario, I say, "Well, of course that's a struggle, because"—and I compare.

Now, obviously, I'm biased, right? But frankly, I've kind of studied this. I did not come here lightly to say, "The way Oxford does it is right because that's the way Oxford does it." I think that is actually makes sense.

For example, in the village of Thamesford—about 2,500 people in the township of Zorra in Oxford county—

we have a planning application in front of us right now for over 1,100 units. That's going to be a 20% increase in the township of Zorra over the next five to 10 years when that gets built out. That single application in the tiny village of Thamesford is probably going to be about 1% of the growth of the population of all of Oxford county, and, that planning application is going to sail through in probably a matter of months—1,100 units, massive growth.

This is what we want done, right? This is exactly how we want it done. We're going to get it done. It's going to happen. I couldn't pretend to speak for the heads of council of other area municipalities, but I'm here, confident, on behalf of the township of Zorra and Oxford county, that this is the structure that works and is delivering for our residents.

Mr. Jeff Burch: Okay. One of the main things we hear when it comes to regional planning is the importance to protecting both the environment and farmland. So how does having a regional planning perspective help in your county with the protection of the environment? And also, we're losing an awful lot of farmland in Ontario.

Mr. Marcus Ryan: Yes. These are key features of the regional planning. As Warden Clarke said, when you are allocating land and water and waste water service in order to accommodate that growth on a regional level, then you can prioritize land according to its value for other purposes. So you have the ability to say that, in some respects, a certain community may be done its growth because of the land types that surround it and the capacity of its water and waste water system. That doesn't mean the region is finished growing; you're going to allocate it somewhere else. So it allows us great flexibility in terms of preserving green spaces and agricultural land.

In Oxford county, agriculture is the number one economic sector, number one employer and by far the number one land use. We work hard to protect that, and the regional perspective on land use and development is an absolute critical aid in doing that.

Mr. Jeff Burch: Great, thank you. How much time do I have left, Chair?

The Chair (Ms. Laurie Scott): A minute and 10 seconds.

Mr. Jeff Burch: Warden Clarke, same type of question: What specific concerns do you—it sounded like you have some concerns with planning changes and that making sure there is that regional perspective when it comes to planning. Do you want to talk a little bit more about that?

Mr. Basil Clarke: Yes, we want to make sure it's coordinated on a macro level. See what we're afraid of—and one of the troubles we have in Simcoe county, every time provincial policy changes, we immediately change the county official plan.

All of the official plans, the 16 municipalities conform with the county official plan. However, you'll find the smaller municipalities don't do the updates. That's where the disconnect is, but they're not in confirmation—and Ramara was one of them—with the county official plan, which is provincial policy. So that's where we're seeing

discrepancy, and that's something that we're willing to work on: that when changes come to provincial policy, they must be pushed down and the local plans must come into appliance.

Again, we want out of the small stuff. We want that oversight to do away with the duplication, which we've always seen as a problem. But we do rely on the county for the heavy lifting. When it's an official plan amendment and it's something that you made before or not, you really do need somebody with deeper pockets that can look at the big picture and say, "Does this make sense in that area?"

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

We'll now move on, for four and a half minutes, to MPP McMahon. You can begin when you're ready.

Ms. Mary-Margaret McMahon: Thank you, all of you, for coming—I was going to say coming down—coming over. I came down—or up.

So my first question—I have a very short period of time; we can discuss the benefits and problems with that later—but I will ask my favourite mayor from my favourite municipality, Collingwood: You just opened a new waste water facility, right? Can you tell us a bit about that? It had been years in the making, and there had to be a bit of a moratorium on development until you got that, right?

Ms. Yvonne Hamlin: We realized we needed to expand our waste water treatment plant—not waste water, pardon me, our water treatment plant. Waste water is coming. We're looking at a study for that right now, but our water treatment plant.

To make sure that we didn't run out of water for new development before we had the expansion in place, we did an interim control bylaw. That's now been lifted. We struggled, and I think I spoke briefly about this to you when I was here last time looking for some support for the financing of the expansion, because the price had escalated from originally \$70 million to \$120 million to \$240 million. We were struggling to find financing for that.

I'll just say, at the end of the day, New Tecumseth came on board, as they had originally planned to, but were getting put off, I'll say, by the price increases. They're taking 63% of the capacity of the first phase of that plant. The plant in the two full phases will be able to accommodate 60,000 new homes or the equivalent in commercial and industrial. So this is a long-term solution. We have sized this not only for Collingwood, but for other communities that may want to participate.

Ms. Mary-Margaret McMahon: Great. So the backlog is now being dealt with because you have a new plant.

Ms. Yvonne Hamlin: It's coming. Yes, we've done the groundbreaking.

Ms. Mary-Margaret McMahon: Fabulous. That's a great success story.

With the limited time left, I'm going to go over to Marcus where I'm going to have to take a trip down to Oxford county, because it seems like everything is running tickety-boo. Nothing needs to be tweaked or anything?

That's the first question. The second question is: Words of advice for other counties and areas, and us?

Mr. Marcus Ryan: Yes, I think the gist of my presentation is that in an Oxford-county perspective with respect to how the region works with its municipal partners, no, I would agree nothing needs to be tweaked. That's expressly why I came today. It was to say I think that we are in fact delivering on our local needs, our regional needs and on the province's goals. I think we're doing it.

So to me, while I am a recovering engineer and I always look for opportunities for continuing improvement, when something is working, let's examine that, let's understand it. We frequently study things that don't work, as a society. We're not as good as studying things that do work. So I think that it works, and I always hesitate to give advice to my other municipal partners. If they want to ask, I will give it to them, but I'm not here to tell my other regional partners how they should be doing their work. Warden Clarke and I have conversations about that.

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Ms. Mary-Margaret McMahon: Any advice for us as we review the regions?

Mr. Marcus Ryan: I think that regional government is a good thing when you make the divisions appropriate, when you put the things at the regional level and at the area municipal level that fit those areas. So recreation services, local roads, fire services fit at the area municipal level. As I said in my presentation, things that benefit from economies of scale—water and waste water use and land use planning, long-term care homes, ambulance—I think those things work best at the regional level.

As I said at the outset of my presentation, my view of government, in general, is that we should always strive to put things at the smallest and most local level that we can put them at and deliver them effectively and efficiently, and only move them up when we need to do that.

But in the case of Oxford, as I say, it's working. It's delivering on the targets that we have both locally, regionally and provincially. I think we should keep doing that. I frankly think it's a good model.

Ms. Mary-Margaret McMahon: It sounds like your next career is a life coach. Thank you.

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

We'll now move to the government side. MPP Saunderson, please start.

Mr. Brian Saunderson: Thank you to each of the presenters today.

Having come from Collingwood and been the deputy mayor and mayor there, particularly when we went through the ICBL, infrastructure planning is a huge issue and one of the driving forces, I think, in this regional review. So I want to thank each of you for coming today and offering your comments and expertise.

I was very struck by the comment that one size does not fit all. And so, with that in mind, I'm going to start with you, Warden Clarke, just to kind of get a better sense about Simcoe county. It's 16 municipalities, so 16 member municipalities, and what is the population of the county?

Mr. Basil Clarke: It's close to 500,000 now and projected to be that by 2030. Again, Ramara township, 10,000, and you look at the city of—separated, so 54,000. You look at the size of Barrie and then you look at Penetanguishene, much larger areas, and even Collingwood with a population much heavier. So what works in one area doesn't necessarily—the one-size-fits-all.

And if you're going to hand all this planning down, I see it as de-amalgamation. I know none of us liked to hear the word “amalgamation” years ago, but I look back and I can't imagine splitting Ramara up again. But now, you're going to take one planning document and break it into 16 individual documents spread across the county, and now, you're going to try and coordinate them with transit and those type of systems? I don't see how it can work.

Also, we look at water and sewer, and you'll find we're trying to build homes. We probably have enough homes passed, subdivisions passed to meet the demand. It's the infrastructure gap. You look at Simcoe county, our last numbers were a \$1.5-billion shortfall on sewer and water, and the local municipalities just cannot afford that. Somebody needs to be planning that for an upper level, directing the money where it needs to be to make that happen. When you look at all that's been approved—and that's where you're getting feedback even from the development industry. They want to go, “Okay, we need infrastructure. We need roads. We need gas. We need hydro.” Now, if they've got to build their own sewer and water, and you add all that to the cost of the homes, it's just not feasible anymore to build these homes.

So some of the things need to be at the upper level, as you say, but the local planning—what do you want your neighbourhood to look like?—no, that belongs at the individual municipality, where some are more rural than others, others want density. You want that home choice. We want to leave that at the lower level; the large planning, at the upper level.

Mr. Brian Saunderson: I appreciate all that, and we're going to get into the relationship between the planning and the infrastructure. I just want to get a better sense really of the dynamic of the county. My understanding is that your budget this past year was over three quarters of a billion dollars.

Mr. Basil Clarke: Yes, it was.

Mr. Brian Saunderson: And the 16-member municipalities are the ones that pay taxes into the county?

Mr. Basil Clarke: Yes, they do.

Mr. Brian Saunderson: And the separate cities do not pay taxes to the county?

Mr. Basil Clarke: Not taxes, but they do pay for the services they use. Ambulance, long-term care, social housing: they do pay a portion of that based on their population.

Mr. Brian Saunderson: And so that's kind of à la carte, really.

Mr. Basil Clarke: Yes, it is.

Mr. Brian Saunderson: So getting a sense then—my understanding is, of your three-quarters-of-a-billion-dollar

budget, about 60% of that comes from flow-through from other levels of government, primarily the province.

Mr. Basil Clarke: Absolutely, and that's those long-term partnerships that I spoke about, in long-term care, and in our ambulance and paramedic services. We very much value those partnerships.

Mr. Brian Saunderson: You guys have done a fantastic job with the paramedics, and my understanding was that when it was uploaded to the county, there were 14 different contract providers, now there's one, and our response times are some of the best in the area.

Mr. Basil Clarke: The best, and regional—again, through the city of Barrie, city of Orillia, seamless. We don't want to lose that efficiency either.

Mr. Brian Saunderson: So that means then that of the services the county provides to the resident taxpayers, they are only paying 40% of those costs, essentially, from the tax base.

Mr. Basil Clarke: Correct.

Mr. Brian Saunderson: And that regional efficiency—Warden Ryan, you spoke of that, the regional efficiency stretching the tax dollar. We know that we're in a cost crisis now, and efficiency in municipal government—you guys are one of the most efficient government levels, municipalities across the board. If you take all taxes and put them into \$1, municipalities get eight cents on the dollar, the feds get about 46 cents and the province gets about 44 cents, and then you guys make up the difference. So, for the services you provide on the ground, you're extremely efficient, but finding those efficiencies, as we now know from infrastructure, that's become a real problem.

So, Warden Ryan, it was interesting to me when you talked about the economies of scale and your model where the county controls or handles water and waste water on a regional level in co-operation. So, how does that work? Are the municipalities shareholders? Is there a corporation? How does that work?

Mr. Marcus Ryan: No. Oxford county, as a regional government under the Municipal Act, owns entirely and is responsible under the Safe Drinking Water Act for all of the water and waste water systems. We own the treatment plants. We own the linear infrastructure under the ground. We are responsible for operating those systems.

In two cases, we contract out operation of the Woodstock system and the Tillsonburg system to the area municipalities. That's somewhat of a legacy from, frankly, decades ago when they had separate systems. We have a shared service agreement with each of those municipalities where they do that work, but Oxford county is the owner and legally responsible operating authority of those systems.

Mr. Brian Saunderson: So your county councillors have all the responsibility under the Safe Water Drinking Act, all the liability?

Mr. Marcus Ryan: Correct.

Mr. Brian Saunderson: And what about the municipal councillors, because it's—

Mr. Marcus Ryan: They do not.

Mr. Brian Saunderson: They do not, because it's you guys running it.

Mr. Marcus Ryan: Yes.

Mr. Brian Saunderson: Okay. And did that evolve? Did that go from the separate municipalities owning their systems to you guys uploading it? How did that work?

Mr. Marcus Ryan: It did. That was before I even lived in Oxford county, but I know that MPP Hardeman would be happy to give you those details because he was involved intimately from both the municipal government side and then from the provincial side at the time.

Part of the reason that Oxford became, while a county by name, a region legally under the Municipal Act was specifically because the area municipalities at the time wanted to upload the water and waste water to the region to deliver those economies of scale. Each of the smaller municipalities did not want to have to staff and have all the expertise and, most importantly from a financial perspective, have the reserves to manage small-scale assets.

Uploading them—as I said, 17 water systems, 11 waste water systems and nine waste water treatment plants—means that you can have a pooled reserve to manage those assets. So the area municipalities at the time wanted to upload it to the regional level to deliver those economies of scale and combine that with the official plan, and that's why Oxford county is a region, specifically to achieve those goals.

Mr. Brian Saunderson: So it was a conscious decision by your member municipalities to do that?

Mr. Marcus Ryan: As I say, I was not at the table at the time, but that is absolutely my understanding, yes.

Mr. Brian Saunderson: All right. And that's rate-based? It's not tax-based, the water and waste water?

Mr. Marcus Ryan: Yes. It is managed entirely by water and waste water fees that are collected for users of the system only, and those are going to the reserves and pay for the operating and capital long-term asset management of all of the facilities that do treatment and the linear infrastructure under the ground that delivers it to the properties.

Mr. Brian Saunderson: Thank you.

Warden Clarke, I don't want to put you on the spot, but—

The Chair (Ms. Laurie Scott): You only have three seconds left. You may have to do another redo.

Mr. Brian Saunderson: Okay, that's second round. Thank you very much.

The Chair (Ms. Laurie Scott): It was going so well that I didn't want to interrupt with time.

Anyway, back over to the official opposition: MPP Burch for seven and a half minutes.

Mr. Jeff Burch: Great. I think it's fair to say that these committee hearings inform what the government does, and when we get back in the fall, we'll all have a chance, both the government and the opposition, to discuss what we heard here from municipalities. So I thought I'd give each of you an opportunity to say what you think we can do as a Legislature to best help you fulfill the mandate of this committee, which is actually to look at your governance

structure and the way things operate between the tiers to create more housing, to make your municipalities run more efficiently. What are the one or two things that we could do when we get back to the Legislature in the fall to accomplish that?

I'll start with Warden Clarke.

Mr. Basil Clarke: You mentioned governance structure. I don't know if you mean the amount of councillors. We are the largest council. We're also the largest amount of municipalities, so when you look at two representatives from each municipality, it's not out of line. We do look at our governance every single term. Just because we don't change something doesn't mean that it's broken either. If it's working very well—you know, it's funny; our municipality and our council works amazingly well until you mention regional review, and then everybody wants to protect their own small kingdom, right?

1040

Mr. Jeff Burch: Niagara is the same way.

Mr. Basil Clarke: What we'd like to look at—again, the planning. We do have ideas on how to streamline that so that, again, we're more oversight, and we'd like to continue to work with the ministry of those streamlining processes that do away with that duplication, still looking out for future planning down the road. Infrastructure is a key one: sewer and water. There's a deficit. The last time we looked up the number: \$1.5 billion in Simcoe county. So the \$200 million that was announced by the province is going to fall just a little bit short of that number.

That was a year and a half ago. In today's dollars, it's probably closer to \$2 billion of infrastructure deficit just to meet the demands that is there now—you know, the homes that are approved that are waiting to go ahead.

As much as I said I wouldn't talk about Ramara, I will say we've approved enough homes that with just a small \$200-million cheque, we can double our population. But that is the trouble you get into: A small municipality cannot afford to do that. So that growth just sits in abeyance waiting for the day when the value of the homes go up enough to justify it. Hopefully the value of the homes goes up faster than fixing, and we've all seen that hasn't happened recently. That's where the municipalities are struggling.

So we need to take a serious look at how we'll deal with the infrastructure over the long term and how to better coordinate cross-border infrastructure, because that becomes very onerous even when it crosses municipal boundaries. I know many of the councillors here have that; I have that in Ramara as well. There's a whole other set of rules when the water crosses the line. You are now responsible for water that you're buying that's already treated. Why can't it be one system? Why do you have to have all these complicated rules? It really needs to be streamlined and coordinated so it's much easier to get those pipes across municipal boundaries.

Mr. Jeff Burch: Great; thanks.

Mayor Ryan, same question.

Mr. Marcus Ryan: I think, frankly, as I said, in an Oxford-county context, we're delivering on the provincial

planning statement, on housing targets; we're financially responsible with respect to our water and waste water servicing and how we manage those assets. I think some legislative calm would be of benefit. We're spending a lot of time with our county staff and area municipal staff responding and reacting to the land-use-planning goals coming from the province around how we deliver on different housing targets, our financial staff is spending time talking about development charges, and at the same time we're basically still building the units before we've even implemented all the changes. I would say, frankly, it's at times challenging for our staff to keep up with that and keep actually doing what our residents want, which is more homes so the market has more supply in it, and that reduces upward pressure on rent and purchase price. We're trying to do that work. But frankly, a lot of the time, our staff are doing the work of telling us what the impacts of new legislation are.

In response to the member's question, for Oxford county, I'm not looking for any change other than if we can just get to work, I think we're going to deliver on the goals of Zorra township residents, Oxford county residents, and the government of Ontario's goals for us to deliver the housing.

Mr. Jeff Burch: So we've heard that a lot, actually, in the last round of governance hearings—folks saying, "Look," and a lot of concern expressed. I know, being from Niagara, governance is like a blood sport for the last probably 40 years. At least in Niagara, whenever it's mentioned, everyone goes off on a tangent, and we sometimes forget about the core things we're supposed to be doing.

So a little bit of stability, I guess, you're asking for—and just let's digest the legislation that has already happened, and it's time to do our jobs.

Mayor Hamlin, same question.

Ms. Yvonne Hamlin: Yes, thank you. You know, our council had a brief discussion about what my remarks would be and thought for the time being, as I say, we're content with Simcoe county. We know the province has decided to take away the planning authority of the county, and of course the warden spoke about that. Because one size doesn't fit all and Collingwood is more sophisticated than some of the smaller municipalities, I would say we're content looking after our own planning matters.

I know the county council recently decided we're going to be looking at—just as an example I'll give you—the natural heritage features across the county. Well, Collingwood has already done that for our own community, and then I found out, well, they aren't going to do that for the settlement areas anyway; it's just for the rural areas. So it is hard, because we have such a big county with so many different-size communities to know where all that should fit. So I'll just say, on the planning side, I would say Collingwood is fine. Maybe some of the others would say something differently.

On the infrastructure, because clearly that's a topic that is so critical to making housing happen, I don't know what to say. We struggled with getting—

The Chair (Ms. Laurie Scott): You have 45 seconds to say whatever you would like.

Ms. Yvonne Hamlin: Okay. I can do it.

I can just say, the county council, as I understand it, has decided a couple of times in the past not to get into that business because of this small-versus-large and “Where are all the funds are going to go?” So I don’t know what the answer is to that. I think it’s too big of a bite for the whole of the county to get into that. But anyway, I don’t have any more—I don’t have all the facts. Let’s just say that.

Mr. Jeff Burch: Okay. Thanks.

Thank you, Chair.

The Chair (Ms. Laurie Scott): We’ll now go to back to MPP McMahon for four and a half minutes. Please begin when you’re ready.

Ms. Mary-Margaret McMahon: Just quick question for Marcus about your numbers: You had 17—it was 17 what? It’s 17, 11 and nine. I’ve got nine plants, 17—

Mr. Marcus Ryan: So we have 17 water treatment plants, with 63 wells; 11 waste water treatment systems; and nine waste water treatment plants.

Ms. Mary-Margaret McMahon: Okay. Thank you—and I like what you said: “legislative calm.” It’s going to be a new line.

That’s the segue into the next question, for Basil, and I’m giving you a lot of time to discuss this, because it’s kind of the elephant in the room, about the planning, right? It’s the be-all and end-all for our municipalities, our province. You were saying that you guys, Simcoe county, were shocked that you might lose your planning department. Can you just elaborate on that? And take your time.

Mr. Basil Clarke: Yes, I will, because, as I mentioned, with long-term care and the open dialogue we have with the province, honestly, it kind of came out of the blue. We read it on a website that we were included in a bill and maybe losing our planning department. Now, we know your goal and your concerns, and you’re hearing rumblings, maybe from the development world and maybe from local municipalities, and I will stress this, that official plans were not in conformity with provincial policy. So I think there was that false rumour out there that the county official plan was somehow stopping growth.

I know many of the rural municipalities blamed Simcoe county for the natural heritage mapping. That was not a county-driven mapping; that, again, was provincial policy at the time. However, the county does strive to enforce provincial policy. That’s the relationship we’ve had. So if you’re looking for more houses faster, and when you look at our track record with waste management and our track record with paramedics and our ambulance times—an open dialogue. If you wanted to streamline planning—and, really, we would have liked to have been at the table before that was discussed. Reach out to our planning department and say, “Are there issues? Is there duplication?” Absolutely, and we have suggestions on how to get rid of this duplication. It will require you to change provincial policy as well as the County of Simcoe Act to allow to us do away with some of that duplication that we don’t want.

Even my good mayor, here beside me, has said that yes, Collingwood can take a much stronger role in their local planning because they’re matured to that level, where other municipalities not so much. So we need the freedom to be able to put those services where required in the municipalities that depend on us but still be there to do the whole picture.

So, no, it was actually shocking to us, because—especially the mayors in the smaller municipalities saying, “Wait, wait, wait. What? What’s going on here? We’ve been working with county for so many years.” As I said, we all worked together very well until you mentioned the words “regional review,” and then people started getting concerned.

Does that answer your question?

Ms. Mary-Margaret McMahon: Yes. I’m shocked myself that you had to read it on a website and you weren’t at the table. But you know what they say: If you’re not at the table, you’re on the menu, I guess.

But with this legislative calm, this idea, it has not been that way. And I know, because I was at Toronto city council, and I know the members in the planning department there are—if they’re in a tizzy trying to sort out this yes, no DCs; no, reversals; this and draconian changes without consultation. I can only imagine smaller regions and municipalities. So how have you guys navigated all these changes in these bills that have been coming out, and the reversals?

1050

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

Mr. Basil Clarke: First of all, we have great staff and we’ve convinced them to stay, because the first thing—everybody would want to jump ship—because we know we work well. We understand that aspiration of 1.5 million homes. It’s a desperate situation. So we understand that. What I’m saying is, we can work with you to make that goal happen. We just need that open dialogue. Please listen to us. We have ways we can streamline; ways we can make it more efficient. We know you’re working desperately on the provincial side to make these goals. We can help you make it happen. We need to be at that table, and we’ve got some great suggestions.

The Chair (Ms. Laurie Scott): We’ll go to the final round. The government has seven and a half minutes.

MPP Byers.

Mr. Rick Byers: Thanks to the presenters. I appreciate your comments.

The first question is to you, Warden Ryan. You outlined the long list of services and how they’ve been allocated as between county and municipality, and I’m interested in that. I think I heard you say this is presumably an evolution over time that you got to this balance, but you feel you’re in a sweet spot.

Are all municipalities comfortable with the balance now, or are there ongoing challenges that you have to manage year by year, typically? Or is it a pretty good, as you say, sweet spot?

Mr. Marcus Ryan: Well, I think, as you know, in government, there are always ongoing challenges. You're never done.

Mr. Rick Byers: Not with us—just kidding.

Mr. Marcus Ryan: So we're never done. And as I said earlier, there are no perfect system. Whatever system we choose has its pros and has its cons. You're always choosing the problems you're going to solve on a daily basis, and that includes who's elected to council and how those councils interact with each other. I'm not going to pretend that I can speak on behalf of other area municipal councils. They have their own heads of council, and I leave those comments to them. From the perspective of Zorra township and Oxford county, though, as I say, it's working to some extent. If there are disagreements between any of us, whether it's my members of Zorra council or the members of Oxford county council, that's politics. What matters to residents is, when they turn their tap on, is the drinking water safe? Is it a reasonable price? Good. That's all they care about. I agree with Warden Clarke. They don't know whether they get that from me, as the mayor of Zorra township, or the warden of Oxford county. They put their garbage and recycling out at the beginning of the day. Is there a good diversion rate? Does it get collected? Good. Is that Zorra township or Oxford county? I'm not going to pretend that they know that either. The vast majority of residents are perfectly—and they don't care because it works. The moment that it doesn't work, we hear about it, but when it's working, we don't hear anything about it and they don't care, and they should not when it is working.

So I think that the system that we have has evolved, but only in relatively small ways. It was largely by design at the time that Oxford county—and it has its own special line in the Municipal Act to make it a region. When that happened, that was when that division occurred, of services between the area municipalities and the region of Oxford county. And I think that, again, from the point of view of delivering on the housing targets that the province has, which I fully agree with, we're doing that; we're delivering it.

Mr. Rick Byers: And just carrying on—the last question from me. Within the province, counties are different. Each one is different for geography—all sorts of reasons. Because of that, that complicates this question we're dealing with. As people said, one size doesn't fit all, and I don't know how we accommodate that in our decision-making here with this question, because what may work for your county may not work for others in the very same model.

I don't know whether you have any quick thoughts on that.

Mr. Marcus Ryan: I do. I could not agree more with Warden Clarke when he said that one size does not fit all, for all the reasons that you said—there are different land use needs, different pressures in different areas and different municipalities, different growth rates, different regional infrastructure and different provincial infrastructure serving those regions. One size cannot fit all, and it

shouldn't. We would be doing our residents a disservice in governing if we said that one size fits all.

Likewise, Ontario has its own provincial government that is not the same as Manitoba or Quebec to our west and to our east, because it is unique and it is different. At a high-level governance level, it is the same, but at a detail level, it is not the same. We do it differently here. And I think that same thing goes for regional governments.

My suggestion would be to look at the way the different regions work. As Warden Clarke said, talk to those different regions about what are their challenges, what are their opportunities locally and provincially, and what is the structure that works best there. Pick the one that works and deliver that.

Again, as a recovering engineer, I don't care—I am agnostic as to the system as long as it delivers. I think our role in government is to deliver results for our residents. If that means I'm out of a job as a local mayor or as a regional warden, that's fine. My residents don't care. What they care about is that we deliver the services they pay their taxes for and we do it in a responsible way. I think if that means a different solution in different regions, then it's a different solution. But I don't think that different solution can be achieved without deep and meaningful consultation with those area municipal councils and the regional governments to say, "What are the challenges and opportunities there and what is the structure that would or wouldn't make it better?"

Mr. Rick Byers: Thanks very much.

I'll pass it over to MPP Rae.

The Chair (Ms. Laurie Scott): MPP Rae, you have two and a half minutes—or a little more than that.

Mr. Matthew Rae: Good morning, everyone. Thank you to all the presenters for presenting today. It's nice to see Marcus, my neighbour, here as well. If you wanted to see me, Marcus, we could have just went to Stratford for a coffee.

My question, though, is to the town of Collingwood and Mayor Hamlin. You obviously have heard from today's presentation with Oxford and how they deal with their waste water and administer that, and their treatment. I know the town of Collingwood has sort of been pushing that with New Tecumseth and others. Do you think it would be beneficial—I'm just asking for your opinion; I know each county and region is unique—if there was a similar type of arrangement in Simcoe?

Ms. Yvonne Hamlin: Do you know what? I honestly don't think I have the technical background to answer that, because it's a watershed issue. It's, "How far should pipes go?" It's, "What would the costs be that are borne on each municipality for that service?" I don't know.

I have thought there may be some advantage to having water and waste water shared beyond one municipality, because it does seem that there's some overlap. I can say that for our town, we're making, as you know, this major investment in water, and we'll be doing waste water next. In the Town of the Blue Mountains, they're looking to put in their own water treatment plant to our west. To our

south, Clearview is looking for their own solution for water.

Sometimes municipalities just want to do their own thing. Is that the best? I sort of adopt the remarks—I think someone needs to get into the weeds on this and figure out what's the best way to provide these kinds of hard services, rubbing out the need for people wanting to do their own thing and just looking at what really makes sense from a dollars-and-cents and delivery point of view.

Mr. Matthew Rae: Thank you.

My next question—how much time do I have left?

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

Mr. Matthew Rae: Your opinion on use-it-or-lose-it—I know our government recently brought those changes in, on use-it-or-lose-it around development.

Ms. Yvonne Hamlin: Yes, I'm a big fan of that, because it ties up land in the municipality, land that's designated or zoned for higher-order uses or has draft plans of subdivision on it. It's taking up brain space, too, in the local municipality, while we're trying to think about who we're going to service and where the schools should go, and this and that. It's not useful on a million different levels.

Mr. Matthew Rae: Thank you, Your Worship.

Thank you, Chair.

The Chair (Ms. Laurie Scott): Thank you very much to all the presenters. That's all the time we have for questions. We appreciate you coming down today on a nice, warm, sunny day in July. I'll let you leave the table.

MR. DON MAY

BLUE MOUNTAIN
RATEPAYERS' ASSOCIATION

MR. ALAR SOEVER

The Chair (Ms. Laurie Scott): I'll ask the next group of Don May, the Blue Mountain Ratepayers' Association and Alar Soever to come forward.

Interjections.

1100

The Chair (Ms. Laurie Scott): I hate to break up the chatty session. I'm enjoying it myself, but we have to move forward.

So in the order that I asked you to come forward, if Don would be ready to start for up to seven minutes, we will let you begin.

Mr. Don May: Yes, thank you very much.

My comments are just slightly briefer than what I submitted earlier, so everything is contained in my earlier submission. I just have the time limit.

I am a semi-retired professional planning consultant. I have no other interests other than my professional experience. I'm a graduate of the first urban planning class in 1973 at Toronto Metropolitan University, formerly Ryerson. I had the privilege of being president of the Ontario Professional Planners Institute from 2003 to 2005. I began my career in 1973, when regional governments were being

formed in Ontario, and I have followed their evolution over the past 50 years.

Simcoe county is the only county in your review of the remaining two-tier regions. My submitted brief focuses on Simcoe county, and the submission is that there's enough evidence and need to warrant the recommendation from this committee to recommend an implementation study to create a more effective and efficient government structure within Simcoe county.

Municipal governments' form and structure should reflect and be capable of serving the needs of the geographic area they serve. One of the primary differences between a region and a county is that the major cities are not part of the county government and counties do not, as a rule, deliver trunk water and waste water services. Oxford county region is the exception, where these differences were overcome, and I'm very glad that we're here today to speak because I think it's a good model to consider for Simcoe.

Today, many municipalities are challenged with providing and financing the required services to meet their needs, including affordable housing. Many services need to be effectively provided in their logical geographic area, which span a number of local municipalities. The financial benefits of sharing the costs over a larger catchment are obvious. One of the options is the development of a municipal service corporation—in that case, it would be user fees and whoever uses the system pays for it.

Simcoe county, with its population of over 500,000 people, is fast becoming a part of the GTHA and significant pressures are on the designated growth centres throughout the county. The 17 municipalities within the county of Simcoe municipality represent two thirds of the population. You have Barrie and Orillia being the other third of that 500,000. So the county government represents two thirds of that population.

I would like to acknowledge that the county municipality did make an agreement with Barrie and Orillia to share the responsibilities for health, EMS and the range of social services. Unfortunately, the county council has denied proposals to undertake critical regional trunk hard services. There are some examples of municipalities sharing services, such as the Collingwood-Alliston waterline; the Innisfil-Bradford West Gwillimbury waterline; the Midland-Tay township limited service agreement; and Midland-Penetanguishene shared professional services agreement. They share the building inspector and the fire chief and economic development as to municipalities.

The county's financial ability to undertake shared trunk services is greater than all of the local municipalities combined. Unfortunately, there is no political will by the county council to undertake any trunk services.

In conclusion, the province must mandate the county council to take a leadership role in providing trunk services. You watch the difficulties Collingwood had in developing their system, which 62% of it was to Alliston and New Tecumseth. I have provided two maps. One is of the existing municipalities in Simcoe county, and the

second one is of the logical sub-areas which should be provided trunk services by the county.

On a final note, while doing away with planning at the senior level of a two-tier system may be appropriate in the two-tier regional governments, this is not the case for Simcoe county. Our municipalities need the planning assistance from the county to meet their needs to plan and grow. In those two maps, they're helpful to you—sorry they're hand drawn these days; I don't have staff anymore—you can see the 16 municipalities and the exclusion, the darker areas being Barrie and Orillia. But what's important is that eight of the municipalities, half of them, are populations of 9,000 to 20,000, five are between 20,000 and 30,000, and three municipalities are 30,000 to 50,000, those being Innisfil, Bradford West Gwillimbury and New Tecumseth, which are the furthest south of the county.

The other illustration is the sub-areas which have common servicing requirements together. Those areas would have a population of 50,000 to 80,000 people in those areas, a much more even and larger population to deal with that.

We already have at the bottom, in essence, the health and community services designed for the whole area. We use "county," and we use "municipality county," and they get confusing from time to time. But the second one, being engineering, infrastructure and planning, is very important. That could be done through a municipal service corporation.

In conclusion, what I'm saying is I think we have enough evidence that the next step would be a study to see how this would function and move forward. Thank you very much.

The Chair (Ms. Laurie Scott): Right on time.

I'll now ask the Blue Mountain Ratepayers' Association. I have three of you there, so whoever speaks, just say your name at the start of it. Please carry on.

Mr. John White: Very good, thank you. I just want to confirm everyone has a copy of our presentation we handed out. Thank you, Mr. Clerk. My comments will only touch part of our presentation today.

My name is John White. I am the vice-president of the Blue Mountain Ratepayers' Association, otherwise known as the BMRA. I am joined today by our president at the end, Mr. Jim Torrance, and fellow board member Mr. John Relihan beside me. The BMRA's focus is the efficient and cost-effective use of tax dollars on municipal services and infrastructure. The BMRA has no political affiliation.

Our purpose here today is answering the minister's four questions. I won't repeat them, but in turning to the next page, I will give the answer to all four questions in the southern Georgian Bay area: Yes.

The two-tier county and municipal boundaries find each government body operating in and focused on their own silo, which hinders home construction and provision of effective and cost-efficient local governance. The south Georgian Bay area requires a combined Simcoe county and Grey county solution.

I'd invite you to turn to page 5. This map, drawn from Collingwood Mayor Hamlin's January 17 presentation, shows southern Georgian Bay and highlights, for our presentation, the south Georgian Bay area, or SGBA. The Simcoe county and Grey border splits down the middle of this area, three municipalities on each side.

Today, the area has grown up. We need to follow the advice of former Minister Darcy McKeough when he set up regional governments nearly 50 years ago: We have to always be ready to recognize when it's time to evolve into something bigger and what goes where and to always be examining where the best place is to do things.

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Today's upper-tier county and lower-tier municipal boundaries do not align with economic development, current settlement patterns and projected expansion. The census population is 100,000-plus, but in reality, the actual municipal dwelling servicing requirement is closer to 200,000, and that is before tourism accommodations in each community are factored in. We are the third-largest tourist area in Ontario after Toronto and Niagara Falls. That's in the Blue Mountains alone, not counting Wasaga Beach, not counting Collingwood. That's just in the Blue Mountains.

Is there a more efficient delivery mode? Current five-year capital projects for just water and waste water in the Blue Mountains and Collingwood total nearly \$500 million. The other four municipalities—Meaford, Grey Highlands, Wasaga Beach and Clearview—each have multiple water and waste water projects. A combined total project value for the six municipalities approaches a billion dollars.

Both Collingwood and the Blue Mountains have infrastructure-constrained building holds in effect today. Our neighbours will have similar constraints soon. So, are smaller municipalities, which operate in their own silos, the right place to plan, design and manage these projects? No.

The geography of Grey county often makes the integration of service delivery impossible. The limited influence on Grey county decisions is a critical issue for Town of the Blue Mountains. Town of the Blue Mountains contributes 30% of total Grey county tax revenue but has just 15% of weighed voting. Projects to support TBM growth are not prioritized at the county level.

The SGBA is suggested as a logical and efficient municipal governance alternative approach in our area. These six municipalities share geographic, economic, transportation, settlement patterns and recreational links and, in some cases already integrated activities. The SGBA is positioned for the establishment of municipal service organizations or corporations. These could be new for just the SGBA or have boundaries overlapping other areas.

Infrastructure investment across the SGBA needs to exceed \$2 billion within the decade. That's completed. It seems patently obvious that the level of expertise and resources to manage this level of spending is unlikely to exist in each of these smaller municipalities. Municipal service organizations are not constrained by existing

municipal boundaries and could bring capabilities and cross-regional approaches to realizing desired servicing outcomes.

So, what did the Blue Mountains ratepayers come here today to talk about? We have a series of requests to the committee:

- a provincial facilitator be appointed to lead a south-Georgian-Bay-area-focused study of the logical municipal constructs in the area, focused on integrated service and infrastructure delivery;

- municipal service organizations immediately be considered for cross-boundary requirements within and beyond the SGBA;

- the Ministry of Municipal Affairs ensures there is comprehensive public availability of municipal information, including sources, allocation, agreements and uses of revenue;

- county-weighted voting model for Grey and Simcoe counties be adjusted to match lower-tier taxation percentage of county total taxation revenue;

- legislative committee hearings, like this, on adjustments to the municipal construct of the entire Georgian Bay area be held in early 2025—ideally the hearings be preceded by the Ministry of Municipal Affairs hosting public forums and consultations;

- could/should the south Georgian Bay area become a new single-tier municipality in the future? A good question worthy of study.

So, in conclusion and on behalf of the ratepayers association, thank you for the opportunity to come here today and share our views.

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

We'll now move on to Alar Soever for the final presentation. Your slide deck is up.

Mr. Alar Soever: I have paper copies for anybody who wants them later.

Thank you for having me here today. I'm the former mayor of the Town of the Blue Mountains. I'm retired. I'm like Don: just an old guy with no political agenda. I'm taking my retirement seriously.

I chose not to run in 2022 partly due to the dysfunction I observed in municipal government, particularly between the county and the local level. I took a data-based approach to municipal governance. When one examines the available data, it becomes clear that many municipalities—you might not have heard this before—are not functioning at a high level. I don't think any politician comes here and tells you they're not doing their job. But what does the data tell us? The financial information reports, FIRs, are due on May 31 of the following year, but less than 20% of municipalities actually meet this filing deadline. What would the government say if 80% of Ontarians filed their taxes late?

Actually, this is an updated slide that I made last night which shows you the status of the municipalities in Simcoe county and Grey county. You can see that only two have filed their FIRs, which were due on May 31, and there's actually two that have not even filed the ones from the year

before. This may not be a big thing, but it does give you a very precise indication of the dysfunction. If they can't even file paperwork on time, what can they do with other things?

The data quality is poor. Back in 2019 when I looked at it, less than half of municipalities actually had the correct household counts that they were supposed to submit, comparing MPAC data to what was actually filed. When you try to use the data—I try to use building permit information to look at where growth was happening in Grey county—I found lots of mistakes: Georgian Bluffs, in 2016, didn't report building permits; Hanover used the fees they collected instead of the building permit value. So the data needs to be submitted, but to be useful, it needs to be correct, and I don't think anybody is watching to see that it is.

The shocking thing was, during COVID, phase 2 of the recovery funding was by application. Only 48 out of 444 municipalities submitted applications which received funding. When the funding amounts were announced by the province, two local municipalities—at least two that I heard about—phoned our treasury and said, "How did you get that money?" There was money that was being offered to people for their COVID assistance and they didn't even have the wherewithal to apply. And when you look at which municipalities did apply, you can see that the smaller municipalities struggled. They applied at a far lower rate than the larger ones.

Now, those are just examples of paperwork, and you might say, "Well, paperwork is paperwork." But there are real-life implications. We've heard of a town that didn't recognize the limitations on their water treatment plant capacity until it was too late, and they had to impose an interim control bylaw on development.

In another town, it was only after a waste water treatment plant's expansion was already being engineered that it was discovered that the outfall pipe was half the size of what they thought it was. It's hard to believe that somebody operated that system, somebody built the system and nobody recognized that there was a section of the pipe that was half the size that people thought it was.

Then, there's another example of a sewage collection system that is currently being reconfigured at a cost of \$8.1 million to bring it to what it should have been built in the first place.

Then, there's a township that applied to upgrade a road from a seasonal gravel road using the wrong class of EA. This resulted in expenditures of \$1.6 million on legal and engineering fees only to have the Ministry of the Environment say, "Yes, it was the wrong class of EA from the beginning."

There are lots more examples. We don't have time to go through them all here today because we'd be here all summer. I thank you for coming out in the summer to listen to all this. Over half of the municipalities in Ontario are part of a two-tier system, but county boundaries no longer reflect current realities. The Blue Mountains, as we've heard, is a prime example of this. It has far more in common with Collingwood and Wasaga Beach in Simcoe

county than it does with Owen Sound, Chatsworth, and West Grey in Grey county.

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Our real estate market is also quite different. This means, with the coming reassessment—and I think the province knows that; that’s why we haven’t had one—there will be a huge shift in taxation because property values in our part of Grey county have gone up far more than the others, so that will put a lot more tax burden on the taxpayers of Blue Mountains.

In conclusion, many smaller municipalities simply do not have the competencies they require to meet their responsibilities. Their small tax base does not allow them to be adequately staffed so they can function properly. And the two-tier system, particularly where county boundaries do not reflect current realities, is inefficient with a lot of duplication and does not serve current needs. The shifts in tax burden that will happen on reassessment is a nightmare waiting to happen.

With a population of 16 million in Ontario, I think the number of municipalities should be reduced to about 160 single-tier municipalities of approximately 100,000 people each, each with an adequate assessment base to be able to afford the staff they need to function at a high level. This is not easily achieved in the short term, particularly politically. This should be a technical rather than a political exercise, with boundaries drawn so they reflect the distribution of existing infrastructure, population and geography. And please, don’t involve the local politicians. Most will place their job security above what is good for their community, and I think you’ve seen that already. The minute you mention amalgamation, then everything else falls apart—

The Chair (Ms. Laurie Scott): On that note, I have to cut you off, Alar. I’m so sorry. But it has been entertaining.

I’ll go over to the official opposition. MPP Burch, please begin.

Mr. Jeff Burch: Thank you for your presentations.

I’ll start with Mr. May of Simcoe county. You talked about your desire for an implementation study, and I thought you might want to talk a little bit more about that. I gather you like the way Oxford county is operating. I gather you suspect that the planning changes may not work out and so you want a study to make sure that those changes are working.

Mr. Don May: Thank you very much for the question.

All of the regions that were formed back in 1973 had an implementation study. Those studies designed and created the regions that we started out with. Many of the regions became one-tier supercities. Some of the regions went back to two towns, like Haldimand and Norfolk. And there were changes over the years for specific reasons.

I think government can be more effective if you have a professional study before you which gives you the facts, and I’m talking about the numbers and structure—can the region of Simcoe take over the trunk services; through what means, and what things should be done. Then you, as a government, would have professional recommendations before you.

It’s hard to make decisions today on the fly, with presentations, and make changes. So I think by saying an implementation study—these are professionals who would give you the proper ideas and why, especially the numbers and how that would all work. So an implementation study—I’m saying there’s enough need shown, where Simcoe county has now become part of the GTHA and it needs restructuring. What’s interesting is that the county of Oxford did it by being called a county region. They got the major cities involved and they got around the trunk services and moved on, so they were acting like a region. Therefore, the time has come for Simcoe, with the growth and what’s happening, to make that change. Counties were formed 160 years ago for different reasons, and as they say, the major cities like Barrie, where all the transit is coming, the GO train, all the roads that are being invested in by the province.

So having that work with it, obviously—and we have tons of knowledge over the last 50 years—to structure something that works for Simcoe, and I showed some maps in there.

Mr. Jeff Burch: Thank you very much.

Mr. Don May: Thank you.

Mr. Jeff Burch: The Blue Mountain ratepayers, Mr. White: One of the changes that was made in the last government bill was actually one that had pretty widespread support by both the government and the opposition, and the local politicians asked for a use-it-or-lose-it policy for developments that have already been in the pipeline. Not all builders and developers are fans of that.

In your experience, are you in favour of that and has that had an effect or do you see it having an effect in your area?

Mr. John White: Thank you for the question. In the Town of the Blue Mountains, we have had numerous projects that have sat on the books for decades, we have some that are, 50 years ago or more, approved by cabinet. The use-it-or-lose-it policy would be a very positive step forward. In fairness to some developers, there needs to be some process of checking. If your use-it showed up right in the middle of a pandemic, you’ve got a problem, and it’s quite legitimate.

But setting aside for normal administrative processes, it needs to happen. We are supportive of it. It would have made a difference in our town to date, and frankly, we have two major developments going forward. One will be thousands and thousands and thousands of homes in the area of the escarpment, but it was approved through the prior planning system by cabinet back in, I think, the 1950s or 1960s, and it’s still valid today, and because of the changes to the Planning Act, there is no way to appeal it.

Mr. Jeff Burch: And I have to compliment you for your presentation. You actually went right at the questions that were asked from the committee, which is great. Question number 3: What specific changes would support the construction of new homes—because that’s one of the main focuses of this committee and you seem to have

some specific examples, but are there others that this committee could actually—

Mr. John White: We believe that our county government in Grey is not aligned with the growth on the west side of Grey—it's not experiencing that growth and we understand that.

On the flip side, on the east side of Grey, you have the Blue Mountains that's the second-fastest growing municipality in the country, and the others in that area identified are all going to be in the top 15 or 20, and projects are not identified based on need; they don't go forward.

So changing, as we said—which was suggested in this committee under a similar discussion earlier this year—to taxation representing your percentage voting at county to address that, we're all in favour of that. That would make a big change in the Blue Mountains.

We have large developments that can't be serviced because county roads are not done, they're not updated, and the tens of millions of dollars in development charges collected from that area have been spent 60, 70, 80 kilometres away. So those things will make a big difference.

Also, the south Georgian Bay area, the whole area has outgrown itself. Simcoe county was created in 1843, Grey county in 1852. It was created in a day of horse and buggies. I'm sorry, but I haven't seen my county put up a hitching post or deal with horse discharge in a long time, yet these boundaries are meant to today constrain us as for what we can do. I'm sorry, that's ludicrous.

We need to adopt—as previously mentioned many times—we need to adjust our municipal structure to reflect the settlement and economic development patterns. Is it popular? It's approaching, I think, 80 municipalities that have come before this committee. I've reviewed the transcripts. Only in the exception of Durham where, generally, people happy with the two-tier split, the answer to the question was always, “Yes, we don't want to change anything”—what a surprise—“except it'll be better if you give us all the power and take it away from them.”

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The Chair (Ms. Laurie Scott): Thank you very much. That's all the time we have in this round.

MPP McMahon for four and a half minutes, please.

Ms. Mary-Margaret McMahon: I'm just going to kind of do some speedy rapid-fire questions to all of you, because it seems like—I could be wrong, but I'm gathering you're all on the same page.

So you're all in agreement that the current system is not working.

Mr. Alar Soever: Yes.

Mr. Don May: Yes.

Mr. John White: Yes.

Ms. Mary-Margaret McMahon: Everyone, yes—also, thank you for coming in and thanks for your presentations.

The ratepayers in the Town of the Blue Mountains: First of all, what's your membership?

Mr. John White: Our membership is over 500 at the present time. We've been around since 1977.

Ms. Mary-Margaret McMahon: Okay. So you are requesting the establishment of municipal service organizations, right?

Mr. John White: In part, that's correct, yes: taking services and setting them up closer to a utility model, not creating another tier that's doing four or five things. Give one service to one organization or corporation to focus on it.

Ms. Mary-Margaret McMahon: Okay. Then I think that Don May was saying that too, right? Don, were you saying that?

Mr. Don May: Yes.

Ms. Mary-Margaret McMahon: And would you be saying the same thing, Alar?

Mr. Alar Soever: No. I think we need regional government—one regional government to look after all the services. I think the two-tier system has so many problems in our area that adding a service corporation would deal with part of the problem only. It will not solve all our problems, and it just creates another bunch of bureaucracy.

You can have a sewer and water service, but then how do you deal with the taxation issues, transportation, planning and all of that stuff? There are huge amounts of duplication. In the Blue Mountains, we actually had to go to the OLT to oppose the county twice because of things they did which weren't good for our community.

Mr. Don May: Just on that point, I think it's too early to go to a one-tier system in the sense that some of the two-tier systems, like Hamilton, Ottawa and others, have evolved into one tier from the regional governments that were formed in 1973. A number of them became one tier.

Where I would not agree with Alar is that I don't think we're ready in a place like Simcoe, with the size of it, to go to one tier as a first step. But that can evolve over time with the regions, and the regions had that effect throughout Ontario.

Ms. Mary-Margaret McMahon: Okay. And then—

Mr. Don May: Just to finish—

Ms. Mary-Margaret McMahon: Sorry. Go ahead.

Mr. Don May: Places like Muskoka and Niagara are ready now. They're tired of 13 municipalities—or Muskoka, where it's five. The public wants a one-tier. They've had enough experience with two-tier that they think they're ready to go to one tier.

That's my answer.

Ms. Mary-Margaret McMahon: Okay. So then, for you three at the end: Are you suggesting that the towns of the Blue Mountains, Collingwood and Wasaga Beach become a south Georgian Bay region itself? Like, you kind of—

Mr. John White: I would say that that should include Wasaga Beach, Clearview and Collingwood. It should include the towns of the Blue Mountains and Grey Highlands and a large portion of Meaford.

Ms. Mary-Margaret McMahon: Oh, okay.

Mr. John White: A portion of Meaford should probably go west, and that should be created. I don't think today you could walk in and turn it into a single-tier. But in my personal, professional and educational experience in

this area, would I move in that direction? Absolutely. That may not be the opinion of the entire BMRA, but I think that's what we need to be studying.

We have grown up. We're a few hundred thousand people today. We're 200,000 people today. The growth projections—we're going to be 400,000 to 500,000 people while all of us are still alive.

The Chair (Ms. Laurie Scott): Twelve seconds left—

Ms. Mary-Margaret McMahon: Okay. We'll continue that vein in the next—

The Chair (Ms. Laurie Scott): Oh, no. He just wants to say something too.

Mr. Jim Torrance: Yes, I just wanted to say that as a ratepayers' association, our focus is of course on the efficiency of the way that our members' taxes are spent. So we don't come at it primarily with a political lens on it; it's really, "How do we get to a more efficient place for delivery of services and the spending of the millions and millions of dollars on infrastructure, and avoid having municipalities competing with one another for resources, capital etc.?" So we're really looking at it with a financial lens.

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

Mr. Matthew Rae: You have to press it.

Mr. Dave Smith: Okay, thank you. I give it to you, Matt.

There's an adage that I heard when I was first elected that there are two things that people are opposed to: change and status quo. What we've heard so far today is that really is a pretty accurate statement. I look at the Blue Mountain Ratepayers' Association: You guys have suggested something that is completely outside-of-the-box thinking. You essentially want to create a new county.

Mr. John White: A new county or a new city, something. Yes, sir.

Mr. Dave Smith: So you've got three municipalities from one county and three municipalities from another county. I get it; there are natural flows of information, natural flows of people. I see it in my own region, just looking at my riding as a riding itself. I've got the city of Peterborough, and then I have five townships and a First Nation as part of it.

The federal realignment takes two of the townships away from what would have been my riding and brings in two that actually do make more natural sense because they border on the city of Peterborough. But then, it also leaves some of the other areas somewhat underserved because of, as we've talked about and heard a number of times, the economies of scale.

I'm curious, then, on the ratepayers' side, how did you come up with that you should take three townships from one and three townships from the other to form that group of six? Why not seven or five?

Mr. John White: It just makes logical sense, when you live in the area and you examine the services, how people have voted with their feet, how businesses have voted on their establishment and how the area runs. We should

thank Mayor Hamlin for having put this slide up in January. It saved us doing bad handwork. It's not a perfect boundary; we will say that. Those are existing boundaries, and they would require some adjustment. But it is the logical construct in the area to be looking at.

Even if we're not all one single-tier municipality, the water services, for instance—Collingwood is going to spend \$360 million, give or take a bit, on building a water plant. The Town of the Blue Mountains is going to spend, for another water plant, about \$160 million. Anyone who has been in that business, and there are a lot of people up there who have been in that business because we have some of the bigger water plants in the country for pumping water for ski hills, will tell you that deep-water intakes, which the Town of the Blue Mountains can achieve at about four times the depth of Collingwood, just saves money, operation, a whole pile of things down the road.

Blue Mountains approached Collingwood for, basically, a municipal services corporation. "Let's take water out. Let's all be part of this, along with some other municipalities. Let's deal with the realities of geography for reservoirs up on the escarpment, not hundreds of pumps and a huge amount of expense." They turned it down flat. Why? Because they want to be in their own silo.

New Tecumseth wanted to buy into it. "No, it's ours. It's our silo." That doesn't work. Is the expenditure of that half-billion dollars going to be the same as private sector would do in terms of maximizing efficiencies and effectiveness? I would suggest no.

The mayor can tell you that, in the summer and the winter, when the east side of the Blue Mountains takes some water from Collingwood, in the past, because of what they have to do to treat that water because of low-water intake and lack of flow in the bay, 80% or 90% of the complaints received at town hall become about water quality. There's no desire to get out of the silos.

Mr. Jim Torrance: I'll just make, if I could, one brief comment in response to your question about the logic of the grouping and how we came to it. Alar is better versed in this than we are, but the mayors and CAOs of, I think, most of those municipalities actually started working together, whether it would be informally or formally, themselves recognizing they had shared interests and shared issues. So I think our thinking is really reflective of what we've seen in the past, as well, in terms of those municipalities trying to figure out ways to work more effectively together.

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Mr. Dave Smith: Chair, how much time is left?

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

Mr. Dave Smith: I will defer my time, then, to my colleague.

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

Mr. Logan Kanapathi: Thank you for being here. Thank you for all your wonderful presentations. In my former life as a councillor for the city of Markham, I had been working with the ratepayers very closely. Thank you for your voice. You bring across your voice to the council and to the forum.

My question is going to start with the former mayor, Alar Soever. Thank you for your passion and thank you for your honesty, bringing your voice to us. You talked about the data. The data tells us there's a lot of dysfunction, a lot of duplication. Also, most of the residents don't even know, across Ontario, what's going on inside the council: all the bureaucracy and red tape, not to report the proper numbers to the public, the real taxpayers. People deserve to know all this information. The taxpayers deserve all this information.

Please elaborate on the problems with the two-tier system. You have a lot of issues. You mentioned about how there's a solution. You always talk about the recommendations. I want you to elaborate on the dysfunction of the county system, the two-tier system.

The Chair (Ms. Laurie Scott): Whoever is answering, you've got a minute.

Mr. Alar Soever: Okay. Well, in the two-tier system, we have duplication in planning. The county is responsible for the plans of subdivision; we're responsible for changing the bylaws. So basically, we both look at the same data on the same development, and there's duplication. There's no sense to have two staffs dealing with it. Now, some smaller municipalities will struggle with this. The Blue Mountains, being a fast-growing municipality, has a very strong planning department, and so we initiated discussions with the county on taking over the plans of subdivision, but that in itself is a multi-year problem. So that's one of the main ones.

There are all kinds of things, like with missing tax assessment. We made a big effort in our first year in office to track down assessment that hadn't been picked up yet. We found a million dollars of tax revenue for the town, \$1 million went to the county and \$500,000 to the school board. I tried to bring this information to the county; the county said, "Oh. Well, taxation is not our problem. It's the lower tiers. It's their problem."

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

Mr. Alar Soever: You try to explain that to some of the people, and they go, "Oh. How are we supposed to work with that? That's MPAC's problem."

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

Mr. Alar Soever: Well, unless you—

The Chair (Ms. Laurie Scott): Alar, we have to cut you off, but thank you very much.

MPP Burch, please.

Mr. Jeff Burch: I wanted to give each of you an opportunity to talk about something the government could do when they come back in the fall to actually spur the construction of new housing. I'm always fascinated to hear people try to make the connection between governance changes and the immediate construction of homes, because obviously governance changes take many, many years and it has taken decades for these systems to evolve, and we're talking about a very immediate housing shortage. So the two things don't actually really go together very well.

Is there something specifically that this committee could recommend when they go back in the fall to actually

spur the construction of new homes now in your areas? I'll start with Don.

Mr. Don May: I'd say it's a very good question. I think all of the development in Simcoe county is being held up by infrastructure issues, and I think that's the most important, is getting those services out there. The county can do it—I mean it's allowed to do it—but it chooses not to. It has had those proposals put before it, and you can see where, in Oxford, it changed the whole way of thinking and got things going.

So unfortunately, it might take a little bit of time to put a municipal service corp. in place, or the county doing it properly, but that's what I see in Simcoe county, is services to build. You can't have a house if you don't have a sewer and a water system.

Mr. Jeff Burch: Okay, thank you. Mr. Soever?

Mr. Alar Soever: Yes. Last time we were here, we talked about an attainable housing credit system, and I think this would be a big help because what we see in the Blue Mountains is we don't have a problem building homes. We build expensive homes, \$2 million-plus in general, and so, basically, what we had proposed last time we were here at the committee was an attainable housing credit system where we put in place inclusionary zoning across the province and every developer has to build either 20% or so homes—I don't know what the right number is, but it's probably around there—that are affordable for the average person. In other words, less than the average assessment in a community. And if they don't want to build that, they can buy the credits from people who are willing to build exclusively smaller homes—because I think we can build 1.5 million homes, but the problem right now is we're building fewer, large homes and almost no affordable housing.

So I think just saying one out of five homes in Ontario going forward has to be affordable or, let's just say, not at the very bottom but below the average assessment in that community, and if a person wants to build a high-end development, they'll have to buy the credits from somebody, and it changes the economics, because building homes comes down to economics. People will build homes if they can make money doing it, and people aren't building smaller homes because they can't make money doing it. But add to that a credit that they get for building it, and the builders of large homes will have to buy those credits.

But what is \$200,000 to buy a credit when you only need it for 20% of your homes? That works out to about \$40,000 a home. So your \$2-million home becomes \$2,040,000. Well, does anybody notice that? That's less than the real estate commission.

So I think there are things the government can do, and I think they should do it to change the economics of building smaller homes, because right now people aren't building them because there's no money in it.

Mr. Jeff Burch: Thank you.

And the Blue Mountain ratepayers—I don't know; how much time do we have left, Chair?

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

Mr. Jeff Burch: Three and a half minutes? Lots of time.

Mr. Jim Torrance: To some extent, I think that's the \$64-million question, because our town has been trying to build attainable housing for, I guess, six years or so, and very little progress has been made. I think there are a lot of good intentions, but for whatever reason, the various parties don't seem to be coming together in finding where the solutions lie. We've actually put together a stakeholder group over the last few months, trying to help provide some input on a housing strategy that might get us to a spot where we get more attainable units because our service industries really need employees housed in our community.

So I don't think we have any wondrous solutions other than it's really frustrating that we hear all levels of government and other stakeholders talking about a commitment to creating attainable housing, and yet, there seems to be so little progress being made. So I don't know if it's a—it's not a royal commission necessarily, but there's got to be a better way to get the various parties together in finding creative solutions to it.

Mr. Jeff Burch: Would it be useful if we knew what attainable housing actually was? Do you have a definition that you use for attainable housing?

Mr. Jim Torrance: Well, that's also—that's not the \$64-million question. I guess we've tended to use it in the context of, say, 20% below market rate as a way to try to set a number.

Mr. John White: What's attainable in one community will seem unattainable in another, and you have to accept that. Our settlement patterns, our economic activity are very different, but you need to set some benchmark, and 20%, as former His Worship has stated, may not be the right number, but we need to have a conversation that gets at the right number, and that's a pretty good place to start.

Mr. Jeff Burch: With the development changes that happened, a lot of money was taken away from municipalities and then there were some programs that municipalities could apply to to get some of that money back. But do you feel that enough is being invested in infrastructure like water, waste water so that builders actually have that there?

Mr. John Relihan: So one of the things that we try to focus on as an association is the single taxpayer in the Town of the Blue Mountains. There's only one of us, right? Someone earlier mentioned how they split up a dollar in their county, and our split is pretty simple. It's 40% of the taxes that as a taxpayer we pay go to the county. In theory, that's not a problem if we could figure out what we're getting for that 40%, but there is no disclosure at the county level of where the funding that the Town of the Blue Mountains's taxpayers are providing gets spent—

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

1150

Mr. John Relihan: So it's one of our asks. How can we get us some sources and uses of funds at the current regional level so that we can bring some thought to how better to spend that money?

Mr. Jeff Burch: Thank you.

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

Ms. Mary-Margaret McMahon: We're going to try and continue where we were. So I'm hearing from some of you, maybe all of you, that there are infrastructure problems you feel right now that are holding up construction of building homes. Is that accurate?

Mr. John White: There are holes because of infrastructure in place currently in the Town of the Blue Mountains and in Collingwood. I would humbly suggest, based on reviewing the other municipalities, they will all soon follow.

Ms. Mary-Margaret McMahon: What is it in Collingwood? Was it the water?

Mr. John White: Collingwood has got a water hold.

Ms. Mary-Margaret McMahon: But I thought that was lifted.

Mr. John White: Only partially, and it's a timing function. But it's not done until that plant is operational. They could build far more units quickly if that water plant was available.

In the Town of the Blue Mountains, it's a combination of waste water and water, both of which are under way, but we've only got so much capacity.

Ms. Mary-Margaret McMahon: And that development you were mentioning, John, that had been approved in the 1950s, 1960s, is that the Castle Glen estates?

Mr. John White: That would be Castle Glen. That's correct.

Ms. Mary-Margaret McMahon: Speaking of horse and buggies, what is your transit like out in Blue Mountains, if any?

Mr. John White: We have, to the best of my knowledge, no county transit program. We do have an integrated transit solution that is funded by the towns of the Blue Mountains, Collingwood and Wasaga Beach.

Surprisingly in our county, all transit is supposed to be the responsibility of our upper tier, but Blue Mountains pays for it. But we run a bus service that crosses the line to get workers to a variety of places. We've been doing that now about six years, I stand to be corrected.

Ms. Mary-Margaret McMahon: So it's kind of like—it's different from CollTrans—a shuttle bus?

Mr. John White: Yes, it's buses. They're very often CollTrans buses. We have not bought our own buses, but we cover the cost of routes inside the Blue Mountains. Wasaga Beach is covering the cost, I think, of routes inside their area. Collingwood is covering their cost. But we've made it an integrated transit system. Is it sufficient? No, but it is something.

Ms. Mary-Margaret McMahon: And is it for just workers or is it for tourists?

Mr. John White: Anyone can get on the bus. I would say that most of them are local workers.

Ms. Mary-Margaret McMahon: And it's probably more than the 75 cents when I first took CollTrans.

Mr. John White: I live on the west side of the Town of the Blue Mountains. I have no transit so I wouldn't know.

Ms. Mary-Margaret McMahon: So that's a problem, right? We have to figure that out.

This is back to the same trio at the end. So you're saying smaller municipalities are not able to manage and plan and design projects?

Mr. John White: Yes.

Mr. Jim Torrance: Yes. If I could speak to that, I think that it's not for lack of effort. And I think the funding to a large extent is available. We generate a lot of funds within our municipality, given our growth. I think the challenge is getting and keeping really qualified people, because there's lots of competition for the kinds of workers that we need: engineers etc.

And I think the capacity issues and the construction industry are adding to the challenges. So our concern is we're seeing headwinds that will make it more difficult for the infrastructure to keep up with the kind of growth that we know we have been and we'll continue to experience.

Ms. Mary-Margaret McMahon: Well, I mean half of Toronto is moving up there, so—

Mr. Jim Torrance: Yes, we noticed that.

Mr. John White: Yes, we can't put a tollgate in.

Ms. Mary-Margaret McMahon: Yes, well, I'm all for tolls, but these guys—and this professional facilitator that you're—God help that person, but who would you think that would be? What skill set?

Mr. John White: I'm not going to mention someone's name now. But our problem is that that person should work on all of south Georgian Bay, not just our area, because these issues exist around south Georgian Bay. Half of Toronto is moving up, not just inside those six, and that area needs to be carefully looked at. It is surprising that the prior reports over the last decade commissioned on this area have not been released. That tells you that there must be problems.

Ms. Mary-Margaret McMahon: Thank you.

The Chair (Ms. Laurie Scott): We'll do the final round with the government for seven and a half minutes. MPP Byers, please begin.

Mr. Rick Byers: Thank you to the presenters this morning for the discussion. I want to carry on the discussion of infrastructure development, because obviously, as you've stated, in terms of housing developments, it's critical. It needs to be there first, whether you're talking about water or roads, or whether we're talking about housing in the expanded area or intensification—which, frankly, is going to be the vast majority of the housing that's built, as it should be—infrastructure support needs to be there. Obviously this has been a big focus of the government through budget funding and whatnot.

But I wanted to ask you a little bit about the difference between the types of infrastructure, because to compare water and waste water, which has a revenue stream, versus roads that do not—although I think I heard MPP McMahon talk about tolls, so maybe the Liberals are keen

on revenue streams on roads, but we'll pursue that in a few months' time.

Ms. Mary-Margaret McMahon: Well, when you don't have transit—

Mr. Rick Byers: Thank you very much. Anyway, it is an important difference, that water and waste water have a revenue stream in particular, so forget roads.

I spent much of my career in infrastructure finance in various places, so I know the practicality of financing potential for it. I just wanted to see what your view is on the potential for alternative financing arrangements, either through a municipal services corporation or other funders, to help finance the water and waste water as part of housing development.

Maybe I'll start with the Blue Mountains. Anyway, anyone is welcome to comment on that.

Mr. John White: I will quickly say that moving to a municipal services organization or corporation, much like a utility, under law, gives you much longer amortization, as you would know, to finance these projects. That's number one. They're also single-purpose, so lenders have much greater credibility in your credit rating and your focus on repaying.

Also, I would say that we have seen numerous cases—Collingwood is a case, but they're not unique—of municipalities simply not having set water and waste water rates high enough to do the accruals necessary to build the projects. They're not the only municipality; all of them have that problem, and they're tremendously underfunded.

So there are solutions, but changing it so that the financing can be managed differently, as utilities do it—and yes, people are going to take some hits in terms of raising that revenue through fee structure, user fees, which has always been a model in Ontario.

Mr. Rick Byers: Good. Thank you.

I don't know whether others have thoughts on that model as well.

Mr. Alar Soever: Yes. There is room for private-public partnerships as well. There have been a couple of municipalities; I can't remember. But a few years ago, when I was mayor, we did go to a conference where people were funding the capital for the waste water treatment plant and were going to get paid back out of the revenue generated. Now, that was at a time when interest rates were different, so getting 5% on your money looked hugely attractive, which may not be the case today. But there is room for that kind of innovative financing.

I think there's a real problem with some municipalities. There are municipalities in Grey county that don't even have development charges yet, and they are going to need a sewage treatment system. They're going to have to get off individual wells and get a water system, and they're not putting away any money for it. So there's a huge problem with a lot of these small municipalities. They're not collecting development charges yet, and they're going to have a huge problem coming forward.

Mr. Rick Byers: Perfect. Thank you.

I'll pass it on to colleagues.

The Chair (Ms. Laurie Scott): MPP Saunderson: three and a half minutes.

Mr. Brian Saunderson: Thank you to all the presenters today for your time and effort. I've had conversations with many of you away from this table, so I know your thoughts on this, on many aspects of our discussion today. But really focusing the discussion: This is a regional review, so we're looking at governance, but also service delivery. What I'm taking from the comments I've heard so far is the common thread from all of you is that you don't think the current system is providing the most effective, coordinated and efficient service delivery, particularly in critical infrastructure like water and waste water. Is that fair?

Mr. Alar Soever: Yes.

Mr. John White: Yes.

Mr. Brian Saunderson: All right.

So, starting with you, Mr. May: You talked at length about the Oxford county model and how that could bring—and we did hear from Mayor and also Warden Ryan about the effectiveness down there. You mentioned it in your comments. I'm wondering if you can take us through how you feel this model brings efficiencies that can coordinate the delivery of critical infrastructure, because it seems to me, without a coordinated approach, you're going to get opportunistic development, which is not sustainable or resilient. So can you just comment on how you see those going together?

Mr. Don May: It was really good to have Oxford here; I didn't plan that. It was the next evolution of a county under pressure with growth. The key is that they brought the major cities, Ingersoll and Woodstock, into the picture as well. Their infrastructure was mentioned as well. It was part of the county/region's systems that they had. They were dealing with auto development and things like that in that area.

So, again, the example there—and I said it from the beginning: The main difference between counties and regions is that counties don't have the cities involved and, secondly, they usually don't do trunk services. I said that. There, they made that leap, and I think Simcoe has to make that leap as well into that format.

Mr. Brian Saunderson: Thank you. And just to correlate to that, and I'll open it to all the panel on this one—how much time do I have?

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

Mr. Brian Saunderson: Thirty-five seconds, okay. So maybe I'll just frame the question: Simcoe county, and specifically my riding of Simcoe–Grey, has probably one of the most diverse economies, I would say, in the province. We have large manufacturing with Honda and the spin-offs in Alliston. We have boutique manufacturing, as we heard from Mayor Hamlin, with Sensor Technology, Agnora and MacLean Engineering.

What we are talking about today is largely residential based, but part of proper planning is to make sure you create a specific number of jobs for every housing that you put in. So, the economy is a major driver, and understanding and acknowledging that Honda was a large region that

the hot-water pipeline went from Collingwood down to New Tecumseth. But understanding that we're not just talking about building housing; we're talking about servicing our local economies to make sure we thrive—

The Chair (Ms. Laurie Scott): It's been a long 30 seconds, MPP Saunderson.

Mr. Brian Saunderson: Thank you for that leeway.

All right. Thank you very much, gentlemen.

Interjection.

The Chair (Ms. Laurie Scott): I'm sorry; there's no time. You can answer off the record afterwards, if you wish.

Thank you very much to all the presenters that were here this morning.

I just want to draw attention to our agenda. The Town of the Blue Mountains is added onto the 4 p.m. slot, so just to let you know.

With that, we're now in recess until 1 pm. Thank you very much, everybody.

The committee recessed from 1204 to 1302.

TOWNSHIP OF RAMARA

MR. TERRY GEDDES

TOWNSHIP OF CLEARVIEW

The Chair (Ms. Laurie Scott): Good afternoon, everyone. The Standing Committee on Heritage, Infrastructure and Cultural Policy will now come to order. We will now resume public hearings on the study on regional governance.

I will call the next set of presenters—the township of Ramara, Terry Geddes and township of Clearview—if you want to come forward to the table. When you're settled, just in that order, you can begin your deputation, up to seven minutes. Our assistants behind me will turn your mikes on for you, so you don't have to worry about that.

The township of Ramara, just say your names at the beginning before you speak. When you're ready, you can start.

Mr. Keith Bell: My name is Keith Bell. I'm the deputy mayor for Ramara township. This is our interim CAO, Robin Dunn, who has joined me today. Thank you very much for the opportunity to speak to the committee. This is pretty near and dear to our hearts. We have been struggling with many different items, especially the infrastructure in our municipality.

We're a small, rural municipality—a lot of farms, a lot of aggregates, a lot of quarries. That's what, often, we're known for. We're rich in culture. We do have opportunity to grow. Unfortunately, we have some hurdles to overcome. Some of the things we want to talk about today will include information to help with this study.

First, I think to understand, we've given everybody a copy of this here pamphlet. I'm going to reference it as I go through. What we were looking at was to maintain the regional coordination of planning. Maintaining regional planning governance will manage and support growth within and across municipal boundaries. A regional lens

will also create effective and coordinated planning of integral systems and infrastructure, including transit, water, waste water, agriculture and environmental resources and areas.

Some of the things that we are working on right now—there are some hurdles that we have to overcome. Some of the infrastructure needs in our area have become so expensive, and we have some of the highest water and waste water rates in Ontario. We have 1,600 users currently on seven water systems and two waste water systems. The cost of these has just outgrown the ability to be sustainable. I think that one of the things we're looking at is how, if this is uploaded and coordinated by the county of Simcoe, this would give us some relief and ability to look at it from a larger, higher view and become part of a larger user group.

This helps make this more affordable. We currently have done an 8% increase this year, and it is still unsustainable for our users. We have to actually consider an 8% increase for eight years consistently to meet the demands that are coming with our systems. We're currently replacing one system for approximately \$7.6 million. In the next five years, we have a larger system that is going to cost us in the range of \$40 million. We currently are unsustainable without these increases and without the assistance. This is something we believe should be aligned with our county and with our other municipalities to make it a more broad base of users to help it become more affordable.

We believe that we have a lot of opportunity for growth within the township of Ramara. Right now in the Ramara corridor, we have an opportunity and we've approved 4,500-plus housing units to be built, including resorts resort residential, hotels and retirement communities, as well as residential housing, mixed housing, retirement community. In Brechin and Lagoon City, we've approved 1,200-plus units, including residential housing, industrial park and commercial units. We are here. We want to help the province meet that 1.5 million homes by 2031. But we need to be a part of something larger and we need to have that regional review consider that coordination of these services and infrastructure be a responsibility of the upper-tier system.

Currently, we are looking at expanding our services to 90 properties with sewers. This will cost us \$7 million this year. We have a lot of pushback, at this point, from those 90 users because of the exorbitant amount that it's going to cost to add them to our systems. So there lies the problem that we're having, and I believe that it can be overcome just by the realignment of these services and the infrastructure going to the upper tier.

I think that's about all the main points I wanted to get across today, but I will open it up for questions and maybe we can get into more of a conversation piece as opposed to just reading scripts and going over this stuff.

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

We'll now move on to Terry Geddes, if you—

Mr. Terry Geddes: Hello, everybody and Madam Chair. Thank you very much for the opportunity to speak

today. Good afternoon everybody. Thank you for the opportunity to speak today. I am speaking as a citizen of Simcoe county. I really want to stress that; I don't speak for anyone other than as a citizen of Simcoe county.

In my background, I'm a former three-term mayor of the town of Collingwood and a former warden of Simcoe county. I now work as a consultant to the development community on project facilitation and guidance.

Simcoe county is a unique region consisting of 16 municipalities and two separated cities, Barrie and Orillia. From a governance perspective, Barrie and Orillia are not in Simcoe county. County council consists of the mayors and deputy mayors meeting twice a month as a council to collaborate—I want to stress that word—on regional partnerships and initiatives. The county of Simcoe cannot be compared to the other regions surrounding the GTA. Why is the county unique? Because of its geography, size and diversity.

As a former mayor and warden, I look with pride to the accomplishments of the county in delivering services to all 18 municipalities—that includes Barrie and Orillia—many of which have received provincial recognition for excellence. Our paramedic service is one such example.

We now live in a world that each and every one of you recognize is ever-changing, and bringing with this change places tremendous demands on all levels of government. One such demand: The province is now stressing the need for increasing the housing supply to support our increasing population. For this need to be met, a coordinated housing and infrastructure delivery system has never been greater.

As I learned as a mayor, you can place all the developments you want on a map, but if you can't drink the water and flush the toilet, you're not building a house. Without this, a master coordinated transportation system is another issue that we have within the county. Right now, the GTA area is looking and they're coming out en masse to live within our county. Without this coordination, all development numbers will fall greatly short of their projections.

Each of the county's 16 municipalities is to be recognized in their efforts in trying to survive the day. And I use the term "survive" as in paying for the enormity of infrastructure pricing. The day of a municipality standing alone in this area no longer exists. I am using the term "coordinate" throughout my presentation. You have a natural coordinator already in place in the county of Simcoe and its 16 collaborative members. It's been working effectively for close to 180 years.

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Bill 23 currently calls for the removal of formal land planning responsibilities from Simcoe county and the GTA regions. In the case of Simcoe county, this would be a step backwards. The Planning Act should be modified to replace the term "upper tier without planning authority" to "upper tier with prescribed planning authority."

We have a need to build homes. The pace of development has reached historical highs. My advice to the development community as a consultant has and always will be to work with municipalities to ensure that the small-town flavour of who we are in Simcoe county is

never lost. Their development design must recognize this. They, too, are also a major stakeholder in these initiatives.

As the mayor who supported and opened the pipeline between Collingwood and New Tecumseth, I speak from experience when I say that success came from regional partnerships supported by stakeholder involvement. In my opinion, the time has come to bring all players together. A coordinated full-court press must be done to ensure respect is shown for the taxpayers of Simcoe county. To ensure this, the planning department of the county has a necessity to support regional planning that recognizes and supports this small-town flavour, so important to us, while recognizing the need for regional systems in infrastructure, transit, natural heritage and agriculture.

I listened with interest this morning around the talks about amalgamation. We've been talking about that for 30 years. In closing, I would like to say that we in Simcoe county have been aware of this present and future growth demand for the last 30 years. The county has assessed this at least three times in this period. The first goes back to 2006, when I had the honour to be warden, and it was IGAP, the Intergovernmental Action Plan. In 2012, the county initiated the Simcoe county water and waste water visioning strategy, and most recently, the regional government service delivery report on water and waste water.

The 16 municipalities in Simcoe county have been very proactive. They and the county realize that limited funding, the cost of building anything today constantly increasing—I look at my own water plant in Collingwood, as a citizen of Collingwood, and how it increased over those few years—engineering approvals and, not to be forgotten, watershed limitations limit their ability to tackle these challenges. I believe the answer, the solution must now be addressed with a process that is collaborative, implemented in an integrated manner based on new and innovative solutions. They are there if you bring everybody in the same room to talk together to do it. Thank you, Madam Chair.

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

We'll now move to township of Clearview. Please go ahead when you're ready.

Mr. Doug Measures: Thank you very much, Madam Chair and members of this committee. It's indeed a great pleasure to be able to sit here and deliver some comments from the most beautiful township in all of Simcoe county, Clearview township.

Ms. Mary-Margaret McMahon: Woo!

Mr. Doug Measures: Thank you.

Interjection: She agrees with you.

Mr. Doug Measures: I appreciate that.

I just want to give a little background. I was first elected in 2006 as a councillor. I then served right through 2018 as a councillor, and then I was elected as mayor. I am in my second term. And I want you to know that while that experience is excellent, the experience that I had in my professional life as a television producer—I was able to travel all over Simcoe county and witness government at work. In every corner of our county, I was able to see the

great work of politicians, administration and so on to bring services for their people. So that was one of the motivating things for me to really get involved.

But I want to speak about governance because that's why we're here today. When you speak about governance and governance review, it comes to mind that we need to speak about community and the role that we play in supporting places to live, work and to enjoy our lives. Each of us will go home tonight when we arrive in our own chosen community, a place that gives you relaxation and connection with your family and friends.

For me, my home is in Clearview township, a community that was created as a result of the 1994 amalgamations, 30 years ago. Our community is a great example of the challenges and successes of forced municipal amalgamation. Two former urban areas combined with two active agriculture areas and the leaders of our community at that time of amalgamation worked to keep the economy moving while balancing the needs of the public for recreation and cultural interests. It has been 30 years since those initiatives were implemented, and certainly the community has changed. The cultural aspects of individual community identity have been respected while we have grown into the new identity of Clearview township.

The work of the municipal leaders and staff continues to keep the balance of urban and rural living. However, the cost to the taxpayer has been much higher than anticipated. Our staff resources have doubled in number since 1994 and property taxes are needed for all the services offered across the township, including the increase in recreational demands and the public works requirements. Taxes have increased; there is no doubt about that.

Transfer of services to our upper tier, the county of Simcoe, has actually proven to be efficient and effective for Clearview township. Social services, land ambulance, county roads, public works, waste management and many other services are managed with efficiency that our lower tier would not be able to deliver on our own. The question of the county governance and service responsibility is, frankly, not a concern to me. County council delivers for our residents. The governance appears to operate with the support of the warden's office and a senior staff that are focused on effective partnerships with each of our local lower tiers.

I feel the decision that faces the county in the near future will be the difficult debate about the number of sitting councillors that serve. I won't get into that debate with you here, but I will say that that decision needs to be made by the county councillors and not by a provincial body. Communities need leadership and citizens need the confidence of their leaders to be accessible and attentive to the needs of the communities. The finest form of self-governance is the local municipal council, and mayors are needed in the future to be the balance I mentioned earlier. A good leader will always ask the public to give their opinion on issues affecting the community, and that leader knows the difference between NIMBYism and YIMBYism.

I did a little research before coming to see you, as most people would do when they want to come to this very

important committee. I asked our CAO of Clearview township for some input on this topic, because, frankly, he's from New Brunswick. He's not from Ontario, and he has a little different take on some of these issues. He gave me a quote that came from 1992 by Frank Rodgers, who is a solicitor of the city of Saint John. He spoke to a similar committee to this of the New Brunswick government: "The system of municipal institutions in Canada is an outgrowth of the principle that the surest method of safeguarding rights of self-governance is to entrust their exercise to representatives who are placed closest to the local scene in matters whose importance does not extend beyond the limits of locality."

My interpretation of this is that municipalities should be left to manage their own affairs. The province should create legislative tools to enable municipal governments to promote regional agreements and service boards that truly can bring cost savings without the bureaucracy of over-management. Forcing municipalities to amalgamate would surely bring more cost to the taxpayers, while also bringing up the challenging times of merging urban and rural communities once again. It's not an easy task and it can take generations to get over the pains of forced amalgamation.

There is a way forward, however. If the goal is to have communities operate well with amenities and services that the citizens require, then we need to look closer at the effectiveness of regional service delivery. Infrastructure costs continue to be the bane of a lower municipality, yet working together with neighbouring municipal councils and boards can bring conflict to local priorities. I suggest that the province establish regional entities to own, manage and operate public water and waste water infrastructure, and these could efficiently be operated and managed by the county.

Regional services need to be supported by both the lower-tier municipalities and the upper-tier and higher orders of government. Certainly, in rural Ontario, we are ready to work together for the greater good, while not losing our local identity in forced amalgamations.

Thank you very much for allowing me to speak, Madam Chair. I hope we have enough time for some great questions.

The Chair (Ms. Laurie Scott): We've got time. We'll see what the questions are like.

Mr. Doug Measures: You bet.

Mr. Rick Byers: Ouch.

The Chair (Ms. Laurie Scott): Well, I didn't mean it badly.

MPP Burch, did you want to start off with your great questions?

Mr. Jeff Burch: Sure. Thanks very much, Chair.

I think I'll start with Mayor Measures. Thanks for your presentation. Thank you all for being here. Clearly, you're not in favour of forced amalgamations. I'm not either. You did talk about how the transfer to upper-tier municipalities of services has been efficient and effective over the years and that local-based decision-making is best.

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Then you also brought up service and utility boards, that issue. So, one of the questions that often comes up when we discuss utility boards is the democratic control or responsibilities. Do you have comments on how you would have a utility board but you're still able to have that democratic accountability?

Mr. Doug Measures: Well, I personally think the ideal situation would be to have it transfer to the upper-tier government, and that government would then create a board that would be representative of the persons and the communities that are impacted. I'm not so sure that the local boards have been as effective between one or two municipalities, but I do believe transferring it to the upper tier, and then let that upper tier manage and operate and direct and create confidence in the public by having that board serve that area with the talent that's going to be available from the upper tier—I think that's a better way to look at it.

So, to your question about whether a board works or not, it all depends on the training and the support that they get. The individual members are going to be very localized, and yet, in this business, you need to be very wide open and thinking about a lot of services for a lot of people. So that's where I'm hoping that the upper-tier government will be able to provide that.

Mr. Jeff Burch: So some of the utility models have democratic representation on them, so maybe a couple of councillors would sit on them. That's more the kind of model that you would see?

Mr. Doug Measures: I could see that. Again, asking that the membership understand that they have to serve the greater good for all the citizens without having to have the battles between communities. I'm quite familiar with it, because in Clearview township, Stayner and Creemore to this day continue to have some battling going on. Yet, it's been 30 years that our municipality amalgamated, and we clearly have one public works department; we don't have two. We have one recreation department; we don't have two. So it works, but there are some community issues that come forward. Whether it be tree trimming or snow removal, it might be a little different in each area. But in every part of the province, you're going to find every road maintenance crew does it a little bit differently, right?

Mr. Jeff Burch: Thank you very much.

Is it Mr. Geds or Geddes?

Mr. Terry Geddes: Just Terry, thank you—Geddes.

Mr. Jeff Burch: Just a question about—you talked about the coordination that happens at the regional level around infrastructure and transportation, but I was wondering if you could also talk a little bit about agriculture and the environment, because that's often something that folks talk about when it comes to the benefits of regional coordination, obviously having that big-picture view of preservation of agricultural lands. We're losing at least 320 acres a day of farmland, and also, protecting the environment. So, where do we put development, and how do we encourage growth in dense areas?

Mr. Terry Geddes: MPP Burch, I think a very important component in that, as Mayor Measures just spoke to, would be a utility board. The governance model that we looked at at the county back in 2006 was something that we were looking to call Simcorp. I think the key to any type of utility board is that you must have terms of reference where you have a very professional, non-political staff involved in running it.

How does that implicate or bring agriculture into the picture? Well, Simcoe county prides itself on its agricultural component. All one has to do is drive from Collingwood over to Ramara, from Tay down to New Tecumseth, Innisfil, Bradford to see the strength of agriculture and how it's one of the driving forces behind our economy. My experience at the county as a warden and on county committees has been to ensure that that agricultural land is always protected. I won't get into the weeds today, but there are tremendous checks and balances within the county policies that ensure that that happens.

We cannot afford to give up agricultural land that is prime. There's a difference between developing on lands that are basically what I call cash crop—and I don't mean that in a negative way—as compared to crops that provide prime food for our people. I'm a firm believer in the 100-mile theory. I think we all know that: Try to eat everything that's produced within 100 miles. So, protect that land.

Mr. Jeff Burch: So you see a utility model as being a possible positive solution as well. Do you see that as something that the province would impose or facilitate?

Mr. Terry Geddes: I don't like to see things imposed. I like to see the opportunity for us to come to grips with where they're at.

When I was mayor of Collingwood many moons ago, I actually looked at Collingwood being a stand-alone community. I was a young, naive mayor going to solve all the problems of the world. I quickly came to realize that I needed my partnership with the county more than anything else because of what they provide.

That utility model is something that I believe that the county—and when I talk about Collingwood, I'm talking about a stand-alone municipality. When we put the water plant in place, we did that to support New Tecumseth and the creation of the Honda plant. A member of your committee right now's father was very, very instrumental in that, Ms. McMahon's. It was extremely important to us.

That utility model—now, municipalities can't stand alone anymore. They just can't, MPP Burch. They can't. As a result of that, they need now to come together collectively in the county, first of all, as the county is the coordinator.

We're forgetting a major stakeholder here: the development community. Some of us believe that development pays for development. As a result, you bring them all into the same room and talk directly and communicate, then go to the province and say, "This is what we've been able to put together." Thank you very much.

Mr. Jeff Burch: Thank you.

Mayor Bell, I just wanted to ask about—

The Chair (Ms. Laurie Scott): You've got 15 seconds left, MPP Burch.

Mr. Jeff Burch: We'll come back later to talk about the 8% unsustainable increase to your water and waste water. We're out of time.

The Chair (Ms. Laurie Scott): MPP McMahon for four and a half minutes, please. I hear you had a great dad.

Ms. Mary-Margaret McMahon: Well, that's—

Mr. Brian Saunderson: You're on the record.

Ms. Mary-Margaret McMahon: This is on record, so yes—

The Chair (Ms. Laurie Scott): I'm going to stop talking unless I get you in trouble here.

Ms. Mary-Margaret McMahon: He's great—he did great for Collingwood. He's quite a comical character and a good guy, yep, and his last name is not McMahon.

Thank you very much for coming in, all of you. It does feel like a bit of a reunion of sorts, a Simcoe county reunion.

My questions first are for Keith Bell. Thank you for your presentation and for your jazzy handouts. It's great. I always love me a map, so thank you. Ramara—what's the population?

Mr. Keith Bell: Our population is currently just a little over 11,000 with approximately 7,000 units or houses.

Ms. Mary-Margaret McMahon: So these numbers here, these are future housing proposals, the 4,300 and the 1,200?

Mr. Keith Bell: Correct. They've been approved plans, so they are standing—waiting for infrastructure is our hurdle. Some of them actually have infrastructure prepared for that, but some people, because of the costs of our infrastructure, are not seeing that as an opportunity for them right now to develop.

Ms. Mary-Margaret McMahon: So is it primarily water, waste water infrastructure, or is it something else as well?

Mr. Keith Bell: Mainly, water and waste water is our hurdle. Just the cost of it has gone through the roof. As I mentioned, the 8% increase this year—to be sustainable, that would have to happen eight years consecutively for that total. We're already the second-highest in Ontario. It would put us right over the top. People just couldn't afford it.

Ms. Mary-Margaret McMahon: As you probably are aware, we've been going around the province doing these regional reviews, and we've been hearing that a lot: "How could we possibly build houses?" As someone was mentioning—I think it was Terry—it's the taps-to-toilet requirements. So the government—I think it was \$800 million they were offering in water, waste water investments, which is what? Two plants basically. What kind of help do you need, like real help from the province, to meet your housing goals?

Mr. Keith Bell: I'll speak really quickly, and I'll pass it over to our CAO as well. He has some things to say about that as well.

I think we need help with coordination in our planning as well. I think economic development overall from a

higher view to see the opportunities that will be coming down the pipe. For me, I see the Bradford Bypass being built, bringing more business and opportunity into our corridor at that end in the Brechin-Lagoon City area. It allows transportation for people to get to the GTA to help with jobs and all those things. So I think we are going to see a lot of growth over the next 10 to 15 years. I think what we need help with is that coordination and planning piece.

1330

I'll just hand it over to Robin to add to that.

Mr. Robin Dunn: If I could just follow up on the deputy mayor's comments—and Mayor and past Warden Geddes's, as well—the gist of the focus from Ramara township is (1) with respect to coordination from a planning perspective and (2) some form, not quite as detailed as the mayor and past warden laid out, from a coordination for infrastructure. And certainly, there are governance models that MPP Burch flagged and were spoken to by the previous two individuals.

At the end of the day, it's still a challenge from a financial perspective, and in my short time in Ramara township, I've come to realize multiple attempts to get funding to be able to invest in infrastructure have not been successful. There are opportunities—and I believe Mayor Measures spoke to that—with respect to cross-border intermunicipal servicing. It's critically important. That could be something that is a strategic objective in Ramara township with our First Nations partners, not that it has been detailed. However, strategically, they're looking at building, from an economic perspective, the Ramara corridor, as is the municipality.

The Chair (Ms. Laurie Scott): Moving over to the government side: MPP Saunderson.

Mr. Brian Saunderson: I want to thank each of the presenters today. I think, if we put all your years of experience in the municipal sector here, we would probably be going back to about the 1700s.

Mr. Terry Geddes: Or 1650.

Mr. Brian Saunderson: Or 1650. So I appreciate that and I appreciate the level of experience at the table here, and I also really appreciate the fact that we have two mayors and a deputy mayor from two of our more rural communities where farming is so important to our economic food chain there. Farming, as you already know, is one of our largest economic drivers in the province—almost \$50 billion. One in 10 are employed in agriculture-related—and probably more in your sectors.

Just a yes-no question—nod of heads: Is there general agreement on this panel that governance isn't the issue; it's service delivery? I'm seeing nods from everybody, so let the record show that.

You've spoken at length, as well, about the integration of the planning processes and the actual service delivery, and when I say service delivery, we're talking about water and waste water as prime—and in each of your communities, water and waste water, I take it, is an impediment to you getting the growth you need.

Mr. Doug Measures: I'll start.

Certainly, water and waste water go together, and we are in a situation in Stayner, particularly, of 4,000 units of application, with no ability to add any further water units until we get our waterline connected to our wellhead, which will then provide us up to 3,200 or 3,800 more units right away. It's critical that we have that combination of water servicing available for houses to grow. So that's where we are in Clearview township.

Mr. Brian Saunderson: Deputy Mayor, did you want to add to that?

Mr. Keith Bell: Yes, I think that there are a lot of delays, as well, and this would help overcome some of those delays from a governance standpoint and from a planning standpoint.

Mr. Brian Saunderson: Let's talk a bit about the nuts and bolts on the ground. When you're talking about the waste water and water systems, you've told me how expensive they are. You've told me it's going to be an 8% year-over-year increase for the next eight years.

Mayor Measures, I know that your community is butting up against its debt load, which is 25% of debt-to-own source revenue. So the funding is a critical piece of the puzzle here for you, gentlemen, in your communities. Is that right? And if we were to create or if it was to be uploaded to a service delivery corporation, that takes that debt load off your table, yes?

Mr. Doug Measures: I think that's a good point because moving the debt from the municipal responsibility to another entity focuses that debt directly on that project and it gives it a longer term so it has the ability to be paid back over a longer period because certainly a water system is something that's going to be in place for 100-plus years, and so, yes, that's a very good review there, MPP Saunderson.

I would think the debt load issues, though, are related to how there are a lot more in a municipality's pocketbook in regard to debt than sewer and water. We have 72 bridge infrastructure pieces we have to do. We have aging arena structures that are going to need to be updated. Certainly, you heard about the time it takes to rebuild roads. We continue to do that. So we have to move some of those debts as a municipal government from one area to the other, but to actually put our entire debt capacity into a water situation, while we could do it, we then would not be able to do anything else in our community. So we have to be able to be flexible.

Mr. Brian Saunderson: And so it's fair to say then that by removing water and waste water infrastructure, you then will be able to spend money on other projects that will help your communities thrive.

Mr. Doug Measures: Absolutely, and that's how we can finance it too because we can finance it directly to our projects in our community.

Mr. Brian Saunderson: And just for a sense of relativity, is it fair to say that your communities' annual budgets are about \$80 million in operating costs?

Mr. Doug Measures: I think ours would be less than that, but yes, it's in that—

Mr. Keith Bell: Ours is much less than that, yes.

Mr. Brian Saunderson: And we heard testimony earlier today that the county has an operating budget of about three quarters of a billion dollars, yes?

Mr. Doug Measures: Yes, that's a fair number.

Mr. Brian Saunderson: So the county's ability to handle these water and waste water projects would be significantly more than yours.

Mr. Doug Measures: Yes, they also deal with a lot of other issues as well. As I mentioned, our local municipal government deals with infrastructure, road works and so on. The county also has those, but I would suggest to you that, certainly, the county can manage it better and look after it better as far as the financing for it because they can draw upon the resources of the entire county.

Mr. Brian Saunderson: In my recollection, in the eight years I was on county, we had the highest rating on Standard and Poor's across the province and really, the impediment for us was the financial situation of the province. So the county is quite solid, yes?

Mr. Doug Measures: Yes.

Mr. Brian Saunderson: And just as well to go on the growth—and you've talked, Deputy Mayor, in your comments about the importance of generating not just housing but also generating jobs. And so, is it fair to say that the water infrastructure barriers are also impacting your communities' ability to attract businesses to grow your economies?

Mr. Keith Bell: Absolutely. I think that we have land in our commercial-industrial area that could be utilized. People are sitting on those lands because, right now, I think there are a lot of hurdles for them. I think that that would definitely be the number one reason that's stalling those opportunities.

Mr. Brian Saunderson: And so then to grow your communities sustainably and help them thrive, it's not just about housing, although that's a very big initiative for the province, it's also about attracting businesses to grow your economies.

Mr. Keith Bell: Correct.

Mr. Brian Saunderson: And as you know, the province has enacted the Building Faster Fund, and 10% of that, so \$120 million has been set aside for municipalities that don't have a housing target. You gentlemen both want to grow your communities in a very significant way and so if you had access to the infrastructure funding or model to get you that, would your communities be eligible or be able to apply for the Building Faster Fund to help your communities?

Mr. Keith Bell: Yes.

Mr. Doug Measures: It's my recollection that we would be eligible for it. I think that the terms of that program certainly look for new housing grows and they also look for areas that have recreation around those new housing grows as well—and transit, my community does have a transit system. It's a fledgling system but it does work. And so yes, all of those aspects come into play, and yes, I agree with you.

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

Mr. Brian Saunderson: I'll cede my time to the next round. Thank you very much, Madam Chair.

The Chair (Ms. Laurie Scott): Thank you very much. We'll go to the second round. MPP Burch. If you want to start the second round of seven and a half minutes, please.

Mr. Jeff Burch: Similar questions to MPP Saunderson, actually: It's clear that governance changes—as I said earlier today, I'm always interested in listening to people trying to connect governance changes with the need to create immediate housing because the two are not really related. One would take many, many years and the other is an immediate need.

So you've already identified waste water and water infrastructure as something that's impeding the ability to create housing, and we hear that everywhere we go. What other things could this committee recommend that would spur the construction of housing, particularly attainable and affordable housing, now? I'll go to each of you; perhaps Mayor Bell first.

1340

Mr. Keith Bell: Sure, I'd love to. I think some of the things that we could definitely benefit from are larger-scale economic development. With our quarries, with all of the things that we have natural resource-wise to offer the province, I think that we have opportunity to develop. I think sometimes we're just kind of forgotten about. We're thought of as an agricultural area with a lot of quarries. I think we have more than that. Especially with the bypass and the train system there, we have an opportunity for manufacturing, for opportunities like that. I think sometimes if we're considered—and let us do a presentation when vetting opportunities that come to us—I think that would be very beneficial for creating jobs and creating housing opportunities.

Mr. Jeff Burch: Thank you.

Mr. Geddes?

Mr. Terry Geddes: One of the problems with the language in “attainable” and “affordable” is it's never been clearly defined, and it's very difficult to do that. Affordable in Rosedale may be something \$15 million. Affordable in Collingwood now is \$800,000 to \$1 million. Affordable in Nova Scotia might be \$400,000. So we have to come to an understanding of how we're going to look at where we want to place those homes and what the economy is around them, and that's where we need the support of the province to be heavily involved there.

Also, from a development-community perspective—and this is just my own opinion—we need to look at something that entices developers to want to get into that market.

Mr. Jeff Burch: Thank you.

Mayor Measures?

Mr. Doug Measures: I'll tell you what: I would just comment on—back to some of my comments in my opening remarks, and that is that it's about community. You want to be able to have a blend and a mix of housing types that make up a community because it also brings a blend and mix of types of people who want to make their

community a better place and enjoy their community. So we do need to do that.

We have to address how our communities are growing. We can't just grow—you know, the Rosedale subdivisions. We just can't do that. We have to have a blend. So it's finding programs that would enhance some of that, that community pride, tourism initiatives.

I'll be very selfish and advise you that my neighbours, which are Collingwood and Wasaga Beach, do an excellent job at promoting tourism, and yet many of the photographs I see in their promotional material are of the beautiful roads of Clearview township. So we don't promote tourism as strongly as we could. But the reality is that they're misidentifying us. That's Clearview, not Collingwood. The Collingwood Cycling Club uses about two kilometres of road in Collingwood and about 700 kilometres in Clearview.

Mr. Jeff Burch: So is that focus on the community done better at the regional level or the lower-tier level or both?

Mr. Doug Measures: I think, again, this relationship between the upper tier and lower tier needs to be able to move some of the areas that can be managed better to the upper tier. But certainly, community and local tourism needs to be managed locally. You have to have very unique partnerships to create culinary tours or farm tours or cultural music events. Those are very local-driven. They're not driven by the county.

Mr. Jeff Burch: One of the changes that was made after the last round of these hearings was a use-it-or-lose-it policy for the development community. It's been pretty widely supported, although some developers are not so much in favour of it. What any of you like to comment on the effectiveness of that?

Mr. Terry Geddes: I would. As mayor of Collingwood, I used it. We had developers who were sitting on lands for many years and nothing was happening. So with the support of my council, I instructed our CAO to send a letter telling them that they were going to have a timeline placed on the capacity within the water/waste water treatment plant. It worked.

Mr. Jeff Burch: Was that a hard deadline or was that—

Mr. Terry Geddes: It was a hard deadline.

Mr. Jeff Burch: Okay.

Mr. Doug Measures: I would comment on it that many times, our council has heard from our planning department that a developer would like to extend their deadline from their three-year term to a five-year term. To be frank, we have had some pretty robust debates at our council about that. I had several members on our council who absolutely refused to move extending the dates, and I wholly respect them, I do, but I also have to be mindful that the work that goes into actually moving a project forward, frankly—getting a lot of provincial approvals and permits etc. takes a long time.

So I have always supported the ask to move, but I always put the question back on the developer like the former mayor of Collingwood did by putting some heat on them—

Mr. Terry Geddes: He does that regularly.

Mr. Doug Measures: Oh, well, there you go.

Mr. Jeff Burch: Mayor Bell?

Mr. Keith Bell: I think we've had one experience recently where there was a sewage treatment plant that a developer had to move on. He almost lost the EA, which he had spent millions of dollars on, so I think it does work in some cases—some cases, I think that maybe draft plans were so far out that there is no meaning to it at that point.

Mr. Jeff Burch: Thank you.

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

Ms. Mary-Margaret McMahon: I'm going to go to the Terry and Doug show over here.

So, Terry, you were mentioning a bunch of reports or reviews like 2006, 2012 and more recently. Can you explain those a bit more to us?

Mr. Terry Geddes: The IGAP initiative was put together with the co-operation of the province to look at how we could better coordinate service delivery in Simcoe county—I'm trying to keep this brief. It was something that we had a firm belief in. We had a government that came forward and said, "Go ahead and we'll support you in every way," but that's where it ended.

Ms. Mary-Margaret McMahon: So it's sitting on a shelf?

Mr. Terry Geddes: It was put on a shelf.

The visioning strategy of 2012 was very much a document that focused on water and waste water, and the opportunities for municipalities to work, coming together cross-boundary, with the leadership of the province—put on a shelf.

The latest one, I haven't been that involved in, but I know it was a review of our governance structures, and that's something that we've been doing in Simcoe county, like I said, for the last 30 years. So that's where we're at with that.

I think the really important comment I'd like to make there, MPP McMahon, is quite simply, communication has to go both ways, and when commitments are made, they need to be followed through on. I think that that's where the public, at times, might lose trust.

If you turn around and you say, "A is going to happen. You go ahead and get it done," and then when you come back and want to get it done and it doesn't happen, there's a great credibility issue there.

Ms. Mary-Margaret McMahon: So that leads me to my next question: Do you actually have faith that something will come to fruition from this whole exploratory exercise, or is it just an exercise in futility? Do you have faith in us or not?

Mr. Terry Geddes: Do you want to go?

Ms. Mary-Margaret McMahon: Just channel your inner George Michael.

Mr. Doug Measures: I got it. I'll tell you what, I'll speak very personally. Again, in my observations of elected officials and the bureaucrats that serve municipalities for my professional career, I can tell you that they have all demonstrated that they want to serve their

community to the best of their ability. I have to tell you that I have seen some of those abilities be questioned, whether they actually have the motivation to step forward and really follow through on something or whether they can deal with the political chatter that comes from the community when you need to make a decision, whether it be a firm decision or a difficult decision. So sometimes having that ability is not something that every elected official has and/or bureaucratic staff have.

So whether I have faith in what this committee can do? I do because I know that each one of you are in this role as elected officials because you believe in helping this province and helping our community and, frankly, you're going to help me in Clearview because I want to work with you. That's the point. So I think I do have faith it's going to work.

I think the challenge there is whether you can come to decisions and come to realizations and recommendations that can be implemented. If you go too far, too pie in the sky, it won't work. You need to be simple and make it clear, and we can work with you from the small municipalities.

Mr. Terry Geddes: If I can add just a point there too. I remember, as warden going into Oro-Medonte, and we were talking about development, and one of the councillors came in and he said, "In 1910 or 1911"—don't quote me on the exact date—"the Tudhope building burned down." Tudhope was a very large shoe manufacturer in the Orillia area. They built the building back up in six months. His comment to me was, "That would take five years just to get through the process, then you can build a building."
1350

So the futility can exist around that in that we've got to learn how to streamline it, and I think we've got to bring back another word called "trust." Trust people to do what is right. I have great respect for each mayor within our county and the responsibilities that they and their councils take on.

The Chair (Ms. Laurie Scott): Thank you, Mr. Geddes. I'll get the pronunciation right this time.

Mr. Terry Geddes: Thank you.

The Chair (Ms. Laurie Scott): Your time is up. I'm so sorry.

Ms. Mary-Margaret McMahon: Oh, okay. I didn't get to you—

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

Mr. Rick Byers: Thanks, Madam Chair. Thanks for the presentations this afternoon.

I'll maybe start off with Deputy Mayor Bell and CAO Dunn: You mentioned the level-up water rates. I hate to take you back to sweet memories, but what happened over the long period to get to rates that you've mentioned are so high?

Mr. Keith Bell: I think there were a couple of things that added to this formula that got us to this point. There were a couple of years through COVID—they made the decision to freeze all rates to allow for relief for people to get through that period of time. There were some issues

with the system, but we did not see or know how large these errors or these problems were until we dove in, because they just seem to multiply quicker than what we expected. One was a spray field that is kind of an, in my opinion, archaic system, and I think the soils became saturated, quicker than what anybody had expected. For that field to be replaced with a more modern system would add up to that \$7.6 million that we're talking about. So I think the change in system is one.

Number two: We did do some expansion that is currently under an interest-free loan from the taxpayers for expansion to some of the draft plans we have in the Brechin-Lagoon City area. Unfortunately, those developers haven't acted on it, so those are sitting there. That is sitting on the books as well.

As we're coming up to this, the developer who created the Lagoon City area—nothing against him, but there was a lot more development supposed to come with that, and that stalled. That system was never maximized to what it should've been.

So I think those things all added—and, of course, the exuberant increases in price that we've seen over the past five to 10 years have all compounded, and I think that's what has brought us to the point where we are today.

Mr. Rick Byers: Got it. Thank you.

Do you have to—your municipality, you would have urban-ish, town, but also quite rural. I mean, how do you draw the line? I'm on septic, and there's a lot of rural. How do municipalities draw that line to say, "Sorry, it's too expensive to build pipes out there; it doesn't make sense"? How do you make those decisions?

Mr. Keith Bell: I think we have to look at our OP. We look at our official plan and say, "For future development, what are we looking at from a higher level? And what timeline are we going to be looking at this development?" Because the problem is that we have the corridor that, in my opinion, should've been developed when Casino Rama came about, because that entire Atherley corridor is stagnant right now, and not just because of infrastructure costs. That's what delayed it initially. Now, people are concerned because of the declining numbers they've seen at Casino Rama. I think the synergies between the two would help each other, but one has to help the other. I think some developers have said first-hand they're holding off to see if those numbers start to come back. They want to invest, but they also want to see a change in that area.

I think, as time goes on, we're going to see something happen. I know we're working with some developers now, and I know that those numbers—as the GTA becomes more full, everything is overflowing north and it's going to come.

Mr. Rick Byers: Yes. Okay. I appreciate that.

Mayor Measures: First of all, I appreciated your notice that, in the tourism material of other municipalities, Clearview roads are being used, and I do hope you get some promotional fees for that down the road.

Mr. Doug Measures: Right. Thank you so much, Rick.
Laughter.

Mr. Rick Byers: My pleasure.

I noted your comment about water, waste water and its ability to be funded commercially and whatnot and your support of that. I was curious, as you think of the services—and we've had other examples today of the kinds of services that are best in municipality, county etc. Clearly, you think water and waste water is a more regional type of system potentially. How do you draw the line between what's best within the municipality, what's best in the broader county, and are those going to be different region to region in the province?

Mr. Doug Measures: I'll have to ask you, MPP Byers. If your garbage can has never been picked up—have they been left behind? Then you get the phone call to the mayor and you say, "What's going on?" The citizens react.

So back to you, then: This business of sewer and water—citizens don't really get it when it comes to the importance of them because they're underground. You don't hear about them. They see just what's on the surface. So I think those programs that are offered by a municipality, whether it be a youth centre or library services or recreational, arenas and trails and so on, parks, those things that people see—those are the things that should be handled by the local municipality.

I think that the infrastructure issues that are broad-reaching and also potentially environmentally impacting, we want to make sure that they have some protections to them and have some very good, qualified people behind them, with good decision-making as well as good monitoring and maintenance.

Mr. Rick Byers: Got it. I appreciate it.

On the roads—and sounds like you've got a lot of structures in your municipality.

Mr. Doug Measures: We do, yes.

Mr. Rick Byers: That's another one which is—these are major capital projects these days. I know our government has increased OCIF, but clearly—and that, again, would differ region to region, municipality to municipality. OCIF has been increased. Does that get you anywhere or—

Mr. Doug Measures: It does help.

Mr. Rick Byers: Again, is there another process we should be looking at for those structures?

Mr. Doug Measures: If you don't mind me saying, MPP Byers, the OCIF, while it is being increased a little bit for my municipality, just keeps us behind. We're not getting there with enough funding to do all the infrastructure projects that we need to do.

The gas tax is excellent. It's really helping our transit system. We have a single bus service that runs around Stayner, but we can't expand because we wouldn't get enough gas tax to expand. So we're sort of stuck with the services that we have, and OCIF continues. But if we wanted to or if we needed to replace more bridge infrastructure every year, we could be millions and millions and millions behind.

I'll give you a small example. I just signed the contracts on Friday for a project for \$3.8 million. That was approved at our council meeting at \$3.5 million. The cost of the project has gone up. It was approved in our budget. It takes

time to get there, so OCIF will be helping us with that little bit of shortfall.

The Chair (Ms. Laurie Scott): That's about all—
Interjection.

The Chair (Ms. Laurie Scott): We've got about 18 seconds, if you wish.

Mr. Matthew Rae: To the two mayors, your position on the planning authority: county or lower tier?

Mr. Doug Measures: I'm comfortable with the county.

Mr. Keith Bell: County.

Mr. Matthew Rae: Thank you.

The Chair (Ms. Laurie Scott): There, you got it in. And they were all great questions.

Mr. Matthew Rae: I'm efficient.

The Chair (Ms. Laurie Scott): Good job. Thank you very much to all the presenters.

TOWNSHIP OF ESSA

FARSIGHT HOMES

TOWN OF BRADFORD WEST

GWILLIMBURY

The Chair (Ms. Laurie Scott): We'll get the next group to come up: township of Essa, FarSight Homes and town of Bradford West Gwillimbury. Thank you very much for coming here today. If we could start off with the township of Essa. We'll just get you to say your names before you speak for Hansard's purposes. Start when you're ready, up to seven minutes.

1400

Ms. Sandie Macdonald: Good afternoon, Chair and panel. My name is Sandie Macdonald, and I'm the mayor of Essa township. I've been on council for 21 years and I've been a part of the county council for over 15 years. I'm joined here today by our CAO, Michael Mikael, to my left.

Essa township welcomes the standing committee's work to look into ways to improve regional governance. Essa is located in Simcoe county, west of Barrie, and we are an agricultural community. We pride ourselves on where town and country meet. Today we have a population of approximately 23,000, and we will grow to 34,740 by 2051. As you've heard from probably every colleague that is at a lower-tier municipality, we have responsibilities for different services such as water, sewer services, local roads, public libraries, recreational services, fire, police services, land use planning and development.

In recent years, the township of Essa has actively embraced residential development and implemented crucial measures to ensure a steady supply of housing units. Essa consistently plans for future growth and strives to accommodate new residents. Despite not being assigned with a housing target by the Ontario government, the township is committed to addressing the province's housing crisis. It anticipates achieving a growth of 1,717 units by 2031 and has pledged to work diligently towards this forecast to the honourable Minister of Municipal

Affairs and Housing on April 17, 2024, and also has been endorsed by council resolution.

The township has also begun exploring specific affordable housing projects within the community of Angus, approximately 200 units thus far. Essa is on track to meet its housing target of 1,717 units by 2031 and is uniquely positioned to provide the services and infrastructure necessary for our growth. Essa is also focused on elements that are within the township's control contemplated in the progress, official plans, zoning revisions and infrastructure needs.

Infrastructure limitations such as water and waste water are the primary obstacles to housing expansion and are being addressed proactively by the township. To meet the forecasted water and waste water demands, the township has undertaken the following: an infrastructure master plan in 2021, which outlines solutions for water and waste water needs and constraints until 2051. Essa initiated an addendum class EA in 2022, which will be finalized in 2024. Essa is preparing shovel-ready system upgrades and projects targeting 2025 for construction.

The township has also endorsed the submission of a provincial grant application under the Housing-Enabling Water Systems Fund to facilitate expansion and upgrades to the Essa water system, addressing a key barrier to achieving the municipal housing target by 2031. Essa is also working with a local developer group to front-end its water and waste water needs, to support its 2031 housing targets.

The township understands that true community-building is a collaborative effort between all of those involved in the development process, from the creation of policy to its implementation through the application review and, finally, the construction of new homes. The parties include property owners; development professionals; businesses; residents; stakeholders; government agencies such as provincial ministries, school boards and conservation authorities; and township council and staff.

There are elements of the community-building that are complex and may not rest with the township alone, such as other agencies' approval timeline and infrastructure limitations, which requires improvements, expansion and upgrades to unlock development and allow for growth. We would respectfully seek improvements towards the following: the agency and coordination timelines for planning and subdivision approval.

Essa believes that planning and subdivision approvals could be limited to the upper- and lower-tier municipalities. That would help to streamline or to ensure red tape reduction and build homes faster. This has always been a big block and continues to be to this day. With having the envelopes given in, there's a timeline to be met, and it is never met by the agency. This will also expedite the review process for projects and help municipalities to meet housing targets on time. This approach will also result in reducing financial impact on taxpayers and the development community.

The other one is provincial infrastructure funds: ensuring that provincial infrastructure funds and support be avail-

able to all municipalities across Ontario. The \$1.2-billion Building Faster Fund is mainly directed towards the 50 municipalities which are assigned a housing target by the government of Ontario. Though we want to stress that we are very grateful for any of the envelopes that are given by the government, we recognize that the lower tier across the province who are facing growth pressures in infrastructure will maybe create limitations.

The county council capacity to remain unchanged: The Simcoe county council consists of 16 member municipalities, each having a mayor and deputy mayor, totalling 32 representatives. It is important to recognize the role of the county council and the county's committees and to avoid any lack of representation or service delivery shortage that may result from reducing any numbers currently in place. We feel that each mayor and deputy mayor, along with their councils, are the ones that have their feet to the ground and their ears to the ground and know their municipality the best. The current representation of county council is the most efficient representation to the taxpayers and has a positive impact on our communities.

In closing, the township of Essa has demonstrated a proactive approach to fostering residential development while addressing Ontario's housing challenges.

I just want to make mention, we also have many of our own residents that have to use a hotel now. They do not compensate them for compassion or anything. We're not even sure how this is helping the government because these government agencies have to pay for them to be housed somewhere. So we are finding that more and more people are having to turn to this and don't have a home that they can call their own. And there are no rentals. I know that the ARUs were put in place, and the ARUs are a great tool, but the funding goes back to what is affordable. So when the top and the bottom of a house are still \$2,200 or \$1,800 and \$2,300, that is still not what the average person in our community calls affordable.

Essa continues to work diligently to find efficiencies and to partner with all our neighbouring municipalities. The township of Essa fully supports the province's review of the regional governance, and we are confident that it will lead to a stronger future for our community and region—

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

Ms. Sandie Macdonald: Pardon me?

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

Ms. Sandie Macdonald: Okay. I can talk fast.

We just want to say that we are very, very grateful for the education portion that we were delivered to our municipality for two new schools, because, as we said, infrastructure has to be in place to make this successful. Thank you very much.

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

Now, we'll go to FarSight Homes, please. Just state your name before you begin.

Mr. Bob Schickedanz: Yes, absolutely. Good afternoon, MPP Scott and members of the standing committee. My name is Bob Schickedanz. I'm a partner at FarSight Homes. I want to thank each of you for the opportunity to

appear before the standing committee this afternoon to provide some remarks.

I'm a second generation in a family business that spans three generations, started way back in 1951. We're primarily in the residential construction industry focusing on low- and mid-rise residential units, but I also add that we have been historically and continue to be in the construction ownership and management of rental apartment units as well.

During my career, I've had considerable long-standing hands-on experience in the construction industry. I would also like to note that I've recently completed three consecutive terms as the president of the Ontario Home Builders' Association, which represents residential construction and the professional renovation industry in Ontario.

Currently, FarSight has nine active or proposed residential developments in Simcoe county. While I understand this committee is gathering input on regional governments, I will limit my remarks on one major and crucial issue—and this will not come as a surprise—that is infrastructure.

To build homes for growth in this county and beyond, projects need three critical legs of the stool. Obviously, approval entitlements—and I know this government has taken many steps and measures to streamline and approve this complex process. We need a skilled labour force to build the homes we need. With supports like the Skills Development Fund—I know OHBA partook in some of those initiatives to implement a job-ready program—we are seeing an uptick in interest by more people wanting to participate in the trades. So that's a good-news story but lots of work to be done.

Then, finally, I come to my last leg of the stool here; it's infrastructure. If you can't flush the toilet or wash your hands, no homes will be built. If we take any one of those legs away, there will be no homes built.

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So while I acknowledge and support the initiatives that this government has put in place, like the \$400-million Ontario Community Infrastructure Fund, implementation of infrastructure lending through Infrastructure Ontario to support the construction of services we need, unfortunately—and I heard the tail end of the last presentations—there's much more needed.

We all know the costs of providing this infrastructure and that we're talking about the infrastructure that's not very glamorous or gets headlines unless it doesn't work: sewer, water—and dare I say, add hydro infrastructure, because we're stressing the grid, and an aging grid, much more and more. The cost of these components has risen exponentially over the last short period of time; so much so, I think you've heard from many, it's beyond the financial capacity of most municipalities in the county. This is actually common throughout the province. It just goes beyond their borrowing threshold and capacity to implement these projects.

I'd like to offer two thoughts, and this is where regional support and, more than likely, a pivotal role by the prov-

ince to assist with backstopping investments required in infrastructure—to provide a level of expertise. Specifically, if you look at Simcoe county, all the various municipalities that form the county, you have large cities—Barrie, Orillia—and then you have much smaller, more rural-type municipalities like Adjala-Tosorontio and Essa. I'm not trying to point and pick one over the other, but it diverges across the landscape. The question we have to ask ourselves is, each municipality, if they have a sewer system or a water system, needs some level of staff and expertise, and aren't we being, then, repetitive over and over again? We're not getting the efficiency we need out of this. So I think that's an area of focus in terms of how can resources be shared, how can we be more effective and economical, and obviously, methodologies whereby municipalities can have access to funds to build the much-needed infrastructure without stressing them beyond their capacity.

The second point I'd like to make: I believe the time has come to implement a utility in that model to allow private industry to effectively and efficiently design, build, finance, maintain and operate this critical infrastructure. This is an initiative whose time has come, and it would potentially unlock the construction of hundreds of thousands of housing units across the province. With private enterprise—and I'll say this with emphasis: With a proper provincial regulatory oversight and framework, this is the most efficient, cost-effective approach to deliver this much-needed infrastructure quickly. Companies that specialize in this field have access to capital in the bond market. They have engineers and experts in designing and running these systems. This should be the model that is put forward at this particular time.

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

Mr. Bob Schickedanz: Okay. I think, in many aspects, whether in our industry or municipally, it's crucial that we all work as partners to deliver this much-needed infrastructure.

Again, thank you for the time. I appreciate it, and I'd be pleased to answer any questions as they arise.

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

We'll now go to the town of Bradford West Gwillimbury. Please start whenever you're ready.

Mr. James Leduc: Good afternoon, everyone. My name is James Leduc. I'm the mayor of Bradford West Gwillimbury.

I appeared before this standing committee last November and on January 17 to share some information about our municipality and Simcoe county, express our appreciation for your work on this review and encourage the committee to seek improvements towards ensuring:

—there is fair, democratic and proportional representation for all member municipalities;

—structures and practices are in place that deliver efficient decision-making and good governance;

—service area responsibilities are clearly defined, aligned and avoid duplicative or overly cumbersome processes; and

—lower-tier municipalities possess greater autonomy.

Today, I'd like to build on my previous comments to this committee and make some specific requests regarding equitable representation.

As I explained on November 6, each of the county's 16 member municipalities have two representatives, equating to two votes unless a recorded vote is called for, which triggers a weighted-vote system based on eligible voters. This results in 32 voices around the council table attempting to find common ground for a very large area comprised of scores of communities, each with a distinct and diverse set of challenges and aspirations. Meeting the needs of those diverse communities is a challenge under the county's current governance structure. However, it's not just the number of councillors that is of issue. There is a significant disparity within the county between political representation and financial contributions. Just three municipalities—the towns of Bradford West Gwillimbury, Innisfil and New Tecumseth, situated in south Simcoe county—form one of the fastest-growing regions in the county. Together, taxpayers within these three municipalities contribute to 37% of the county tax base but are represented by only 19% of the faces around the council table. That's nearly 40% of the budget represented by less than 20% of council.

The town of Bradford West Gwillimbury took a deep dive into this situation in 2018. We attempted to determine if the taxpayers were receiving fair value for their contributions to the county budgets. Referring to just two examples, we found that, on a cost-per-household basis, Bradford West Gwillimbury taxpayers were paying 19% more for paramedic services and social housing than the county average and 26% more than households within the separated cities of Barrie and Orillia—the same provider, but we are paying more for less.

This disparity is getting worse. Between 2009 and 2024, we estimate that Bradford West Gwillimbury's assessment growth increased by 8.7% annually while the rest of Simcoe county grew at a slower rate of 4.9%. Over that same period, Bradford's contribution to the county more than tripled, from \$8 million to \$25 million annually, and our share of the county tax burden increased from 8.4% to 12%.

I look at this money flowing out and the services that we receive from the county. They do not balance. If this was a business, I'd be looking for other suppliers.

As I noted, this situation is not unique to Bradford. It is a challenge for all high-growth municipalities of south Simcoe county to ensure that the county's investment, program and service delivery meets the needs of the rapidly urbanizing area that is planned to be home to a significant portion of the county's housing and employment growth. These south Simcoe municipalities have progressed, have grown up, and the county's governance structure needs to evolve with us.

On June 18, county council held a workshop to consider other governance approaches that would ideally provide for fairer and more effective decision-making. The key outcome of the meeting was underwhelming. Council

referred an option to a subcommittee for further review. This option would reduce the number of members from 32 to 17, with each municipality represented by its mayor. While the potential reduction in councillors is welcome, representation by population will not be achieved and south Simcoe will continue to contribute 40% of the county's budget with less than 20% of the voice.

County council has struggled with these discussions previously, including as recently as 2022, when a governance review committee was struck to self-reflect on its size and structure. Several options were discussed, but a consensus on anything other than the status quo was not reached. Simcoe county is too special to accept the status quo. We are faced with considerable growth, infrastructure and housing affordability challenges that cannot be solved with our old approaches to governance and service delivery. In order to progress, we need to be progressive.

I ask this committee to be bold in its findings and recommendations. I ask that fair representation and financial balance be established for south Simcoe, either through legislative changes imposed by the provincial government or through clearly articulated directives issued to Simcoe county. Alternatively, I ask that the government facilitate a discussion and arrangements that could lead to Bradford West Gwillimbury becoming a single-tier municipality. These would be bold but positive changes that are overdue.

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As I've stated at our previous meetings, this regional review is critical. Reform to Simcoe county's decades-old governance structure is required to best position this beautiful part of Ontario for success. We look forward to working with your committee and the province to define and implement that opportune structure. That's it.

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

We'll now go to the first round of questions from the official opposition. MPP Burch.

Mr. Jeff Burch: Thank you all for your presentations.

I'll start with Mayor Macdonald. Thanks for your presentation. You mentioned that you were exploring the creation of—I think you said 200 affordable housing units. And I'm just wondering; I'm curious how's that going and how do you define—we've talked a bit today about defining what is affordable, what is attainable and what can the province do to assist, because I know it's very challenging to a smaller municipality to create affordable housing.

Ms. Sandie Macdonald: It definitely is. I'm going to refer to CAO Mikael.

Mr. Michael Mikael: Thanks, Mayor Macdonald.

So in the community of Angus, we have been discussing on average 200 affordable housing—and with that being said, we're hoping it's going to be through a partnership with a developer and some support from the province. So we're still touching base on the high level.

And absolutely, when we identify affordable, it has to be affordable in terms of the price. We're not looking at homes for a million dollars. It could also include some

allowance for seniors to form a part of this. With that being said, we would like just to state that that was already included in our capacity forecasting until 2031.

Mr. Jeff Burch: Okay. Do you use a certain definition for what is affordable, like a percentage of income, or is it just a general sense of what people are paying in your municipality?

Mr. Michael Mikael: We're still defining these terms, and it will be somewhere between what the "affordable housing" county terms of definition would be, plus what we could work with the development community to achieve.

Mr. Jeff Burch: Okay. As a municipal government, do you have ways that you try to incentivize? Do you have programs, community improvement money or anything like that that you try to incentivize private companies to build homes that are affordable if they're not profitable to build?

Mr. Michael Mikael: I don't think we're at this stage yet, because that's our first initiative towards a project like that. However, we're working towards achieving somewhere affordable.

Mr. Jeff Burch: Okay, thanks.

Maybe I'll just explore the same theme with Mr. Schickedanz. I said that right?

Mr. Bob Schickedanz: A hundred per cent—very good.

Mr. Jeff Burch: Good. First of all, is your company in the business of creating affordable or attainable homes? And what's your opinion on—I know, according to market conditions, it's obvious it's really difficult sometimes for companies to make that economical, make a profit building affordable housing. What in your opinion is the proper way to incentivize that to happen?

Mr. Bob Schickedanz: So, MPP Burch, that's a great question. We're not specifically in the affordable housing business. But through our company history that started back in the 1950s, we've taken great pride to provide attainable housing at reasonable prices—"Homes for Families," to coin a phrase.

The unfortunate thing and the challenge today I think that you point out is that there are a lot of high costs baked into the cake, and it's difficult for private industry without some support or incentives to move towards, let's say, more reasonably priced housing. So we look at some large components, and this has been exacerbated during the pandemic time. Labour is expensive. Materials are expensive. So we don't really as an industry expect those prices to come back or reduce. Unfortunately, fees, application fees, development charges for infrastructure—and we acknowledge that development charges are required to pay for infrastructure. Infrastructure, as I talked to and many others have mention, has become expensive. So there are many things that are, like I said, baked in the cake to make it quite expensive to provide housing. The one variable is certainly the land price. It depends when the developer or the builder bought the property, and there might be some opportunities there.

But I think a key focus should be to make sure, with so many unknowns and so many high costs, at the very

least—again, we all need to take a collaborative approach, whether it's proponents like myself, builders like myself, municipalities, upper-tier jurisdictions like the county and the province as well. We've got to work towards creating a level of certainty that projects can move forward in a reasonable time frame, because if that's up in the air, it becomes very difficult for industry to take, I'll call it, the leap of faith and say, "Okay, we're going to go ahead. We're going to invest. We're going to maybe take a haircut here and get it done." That's difficult to do if you don't know when you can put the product on the market. So it's important that we all work together to make sure we create that level of certainty so the investments can be made and we go forward as a group.

Mr. Jeff Burch: And on the other side of the equation, I'm interested to know what your opinion is of the use-it-or-lose-it policy for development. I know that we don't want to unduly stress developers who are legitimately struggling with market conditions, but at the same time, we don't want them sitting on approvals that have cost the municipality a lot of money for decades in some cases. What's your opinion on the use it or lose it?

Mr. Bob Schickedanz: Again, a great question. I'll answer it: It all depends, because it's almost like a case-by-case basis. Whether our industry or myself, I certainly don't support that infrastructure is hived off and sat on for certain landowners to just speculate that a property becomes more valuable over a period of time. So certainly in that context, yes, that capacity or that investment should be given to somebody else who, again, is willing to come to a community to invest, build housing and invest money to grow that community.

Now, there are circumstances whereby, due to unfortunate delays or studies or—especially if you look at large development areas, it depends where you are. If the pipe is coming from the south and you're in the northern section of that development zone, it's going to take a while for things to get to you. So I don't think there's any value in then taking things away from those proponents because, essentially, you're just going to have to re-cycle through the system and bog things down to get approvals again.

The Chair (Ms. Laurie Scott): Thank you very much. We're out of time for this round, but we'll move over to the government side. MPP Rae, please go ahead.

Mr. Matthew Rae: Thank you to all the presenters today for your deputations. My question is for—sticking with FarSight Homes. Obviously, costs—you mentioned development charges, but obviously interest rates factor into building costs, whether it's municipalities, but obviously especially for builders on the market. So I was just wondering if you can talk about how the high federal interest rates are hurting home building right now in Ontario.

Mr. Bob Schickedanz: Well, it certainly limits a fair amount those that can afford to buy a home. Like I just mentioned, there's a lot of high costs baked into the cake. There may be, under certain circumstances, to reduce the price of homes, but it's very, very challenging. Wages aren't rising, and so there's a limit to how much individ-

uals and families and retirees can afford to spend on housing. It goes into the calculation, and the calculation drops out how much one can afford, and the higher the interest rate, the less people can afford it. So it definitely impacts the ability to buy homes.

Mr. Matthew Rae: Thank you. My next question—again sticking with you, Robert, and then I will move to the other two presenters—is around planning authority in Simcoe county. In your own experience, obviously as a builder, I'd be interested to know what are your thoughts around devolving the planning authority from Simcoe to the lower tiers.

Mr. Bob Schickedanz: I think Simcoe may, in my opinion, play a role at the high-level planning, but it's critical that a lot of the planning—what I call nuts-and-bolts decisions—filter down to the local level. So I think, predominantly, that that's where it should rest, but obviously with some input from the greater context.

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Mr. Matthew Rae: Mayor Leduc?

Mr. James Leduc: The same question?

Mr. Matthew Rae: Sorry. Yes, same question.

Mr. James Leduc: We would love to see the planning down at our level. It impacts us. I can tell you right now—and I'll be honest with the committee—we are second in the province for longest return for actually putting applications through. It's not something I'm proud of. We are working to change that; we've made some changes within our system. But we want to get down to a quicker planning process, and that would mean that we need to move people out of the way so we can get into getting this done. So we would love to see it at our level.

We're a large municipality. We're an urban municipality. We're at 45,000 population right now, and so we have the ability to do our planning. We've got a lot of infrastructure in the ground already in Bradford that we put in years ago. We spent hundreds of millions of dollars on that.

The housing market is just suffering. I can't meet the targets that the province has put forward to us. I've said to the Premier and others within your government that we just can't meet it because the housing market is not moving. It's not that we're not doing it; I've got 500 permits ready to go today. We've got over 4,000 applications ready to go, but we have 500 permits to be pulled today. I've talked to those builders and they've said straightforwardly they're not pulling them because the market is not there.

But we think the planning should stay right at our level if we could have that at our level.

Mr. Matthew Rae: Thank you.

And Mayor Macdonald?

Ms. Sandie Macdonald: I agree with some of the comments. I believe that the lower municipalities should have control of what's built in their municipality, but I also believe that the county plays a large role. They have the expertise, and I think it streamlines it a little bit, because there's no one-size-fits-all. But I think with their governance over some of it, it's just—we find now that we do

work diligently to have our stuff put back out in our time frame and, the county, we receive their remarks and everything back efficiently.

Then we have agencies that have to have their part in it, and they have a timeline that nobody knows where they found it, and not only that; they have envelopes. So the application comes in, and they say, "We would like to see A, B, C." Okay. Whoever is doing it, whether a developer or just a resident, comes back, and they say, "Here you go." They read it. "No, we want C, D, E, or E, F, G, H, I"—it just goes on and on. We're waiting for things for not months; we're waiting for them into the years and into two years.

What that does is it will maybe limit the developers that would even want to come to work with us, thinking that it's our fault that it's not being passed. I believe that it does need to become more down to there, and also to the county. I believe that the county needs to play a part, not meaning taking it over or anything, but working the way that we do best with the county. The county has a lot to offer, and the municipalities all take advantage of that in a good way. So I think that they need to be at the table, but I think that we need to streamline it.

Mr. Matthew Rae: I defer the remaining time to MPP Smith. Thank you, everyone.

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

Mr. Dave Smith: I'm going to come back to Mayor Macdonald for a second, because you made an interesting point there where someone comes forward with a building plan and comments come back from the planning department or the building department that say, "Change A, B and C," and then they make those changes and put that application back in, and these guys come back again and say, "Oh, by the way, you need to change D, E and F," and so on. Would you, then, be supportive of a concept where you have one opportunity to make comment on that plan, and when a new revision comes in to you based on those comments, the only area that the building department or the planning department can further comment on is those specific changes that you made? Would you be supportive of something like that so that they don't come back and say, "Well, we really needed six months to decide on this whole thing, so we're going to comment on the first three things, and that'll buy us time so we can come back and comment on something else later on"?

Ms. Sandie Macdonald: It's probably twofold. I do believe that when you're giving direction to any application that comes in on your desk, the right information should go out: "This is what we expect from you." And then, when it changes multiple times from another agency—so it's not from the township and it's not through the county. I just want to make that clear.

So if there's an agency that does it—for whatever reason, they decide that they want to have more studies done; they want to have all these different things—why wasn't that addressed initially? To me, it becomes like, "Is this job creation? Is this a money-making thing?" Because that's the things our residents and our developers are

saying to us: “This is just a money grab.” And we said, “Well, you’ve done everything that we asked.”

And so then we start to have to get into it with our MPP and with the government to be able to address these issues, and it gets bigger and bigger. So I just believe that if there’s less of that, then this will be a timely thing. You’ll meet your numbers, and we’ll definitely be able to be a part of that and have it done in a timely fashion.

The Chair (Ms. Laurie Scott): Thank you very much. That’s the end of this round.

MPP Burch, please go ahead.

Mr. Jeff Burch: Mayor Leduc, I’ve heard your complaint about proportional representation at the county a number of times at AMO and in our hearings, so I just wanted to touch on that a little bit. It always reminds me of when I was a councillor in St. Catharines and we had the same complaint at the Niagara region. There’s usually an issue that kind of pushes that to the forefront. For us, it was the relocation of the regional police service out of our downtown. That’s kind of what sparked it. Is there a specific irritant or issue that has kind of pushed this to the forefront, getting people upset or angry?

Mr. James Leduc: With us, it’s just the same old, same old. I mean, I’ve been on county council now for—this will be my third term there. We’ve talked about regional governance review over the last few terms. I think the group ahead of us said that they’ve been dealing with it for 30 years.

It’s the same structure. It can’t be the same structure. When the county was designed, it was a bunch of rural municipalities. A lot of us are growing up to be urbanized centres. We have bigger growth needs, and you have to have a regional system that works. To us, it’s straight-forward. We pay a lot of money, we don’t have the return coming back, and so that’s what’s really sparked it. In the end, we still think the county is something that we need to have, but we want to have a proper say in that, and I think it’s all about the governance structure.

It was said earlier about infrastructure that we don’t have the funding for infrastructure. Well, the governance dictates the infrastructure, right? Your governance—you make the policies; you make the changes. We understand there’s a funding issue there, but we still can make the decisions, and that’s not happening at the county. We’re not making those right decisions to get these things done.

Mr. Jeff Burch: You used the word “impose.” I’m always a little careful when I hear—are you in favour of the province imposing a change? Is that just frustration that you haven’t been able to get results locally?

Mr. James Leduc: It’s an absolute frustration from going through the process many times. I sat on the regional government review in the past term, and we didn’t make any changes. It seems to be that it’s always running smooth—and don’t get me wrong; it runs great. There are moments when it runs great, but there are times we need to make some change and make some adjustments, and we’re not doing that.

When it comes to doing governance structure, that’s a difficult one for anybody, because who wants to vote to

lose their job? Nobody wants to vote that. We get right close to it, and all of a sudden, you go to the final vote and they all change. It’s difficult. I know we all want to get re-elected at times, but I’m here today to tell that you it’s not about re-election. It’s about making the right decisions.

What your government did in Toronto has worked. You’ve downsized the council from 42 to 25. It has worked. That’s what needs to be done. In certain areas, we have to change our governance structure. You can’t have the status quo forever. You need to change with times. This is where I’m at with changing at the county level.

Mr. Jeff Burch: Thanks.

My other question, back to Bob: Something you said interested me. You talked about the huge infrastructure with water/waste water. I’m not sure if you want to comment on how far behind we are with that, but you referred to the electrification of the grid and how that’s going to be an issue possibly similar to that, where we’re just so far behind on the infrastructure. Are you seeing that in your business? And is it something that you think the government needs to pay more attention to?

Mr. Bob Schickedanz: We’re seeing it inasmuch as part of the design work we do with the new communities, trying to implement new initiatives, provide charging stations for cars and more electrification of the homes—we’re a certified net-zero builder. It’s become obvious that, whether through local hydro authorities or Hydro One, that the system, in general, isn’t designed to support the loads that could be anticipated, and this is not just new construction and new communities, but if our society is moving towards electric cars, and they’re more predominant in all neighbourhoods, well, there’s not enough infrastructure in those neighbourhoods to support those cars.

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So, yes, it’s one of those things that the lights are working fine, I can power up my cellphone and the television set, the computer and everything, until they start flickering and not working. When that happens, I mean, I’m not an expert in the field, but the fix isn’t usually very easy, and it takes a while, like many of these infrastructure projects to implement. So I think it’s worth a focus.

Mr. Jeff Burch: Back on the water/waste water: You talked about different models—the utility model, we’ve talked a little bit about that today, but the actual amount of investment that’s needed—just changing the model is one thing—is that not something that at some point needs to be a large government investment to help municipalities with that so that builders can—

Mr. Bob Schickedanz: That’s one approach, but maybe there should be multiple approaches. That’s one approach, to have the government’s support and backstop the monies needed to build this infrastructure.

The other angle to that is, as I mentioned, a utility model. For instance, the city of Edmonton owns a company called EPCOR. They do the power and light division, but they have a division that does waste water infrastructure and water projects, not only in the city of Edmonton but right across the continent.

They do projects in Phoenix, in California, in British Columbia, and their business is to provide either water systems or waste water systems or a combination of both, and they have the expertise to deliver that quickly and effectively and efficiently, and they have resources to raise the capital to do that.

As I said, they go in the bond market, they raise the capital and do that. Now the—

Mr. Jeff Burch: Have some of those been successful though? Because I know that California was a huge failure when they tried that model, but have there been successes with it in other areas?

Mr. Bob Schickedanz: To my knowledge, again, I'm not an expert in the field—yes, very successful, and they're not the only operators in that space.

Mr. Jeff Burch: Thank you.

The Chair (Ms. Laurie Scott): We'll go to the government side, and it will be MPP Kanapathi, if you want to begin, please.

Mr. Logan Kanapathi: Thank you for the presentation and for your passion and work to build more houses in Ontario.

I'll start off with Robert. I know you're a York region guy. You mentioned building houses is becoming more expensive: wages aren't increases; DCs, development charges are going up, and even building houses and wanting buyers—we are in an affordability crisis.

Could you elaborate—and you are the right person to ask, as the former president of the home builders' association—on how we can bring more housing supply in an affordable way to the average Ontarian?

Mr. Bob Schickedanz: So, you're right. As I mentioned before, in the previous question, there's a lot of high cost baked in the cake. So there's not a lot of room to manoeuvre in terms of changing the basic input costs to homes. Yes, with the land there might be some opportunity, depending on when the builder had bought the property, but certainly, to create the level of certainty when investments get made, is a really big factor in terms of whether myself or other colleagues in the industry go forward with projects quickly.

If they knew they can make application, get through the system and start building in 18 months, that's a great benefit, rather than sitting perhaps five, six, seven years, working through a system.

Now, I know I may be exaggerating a little bit, but creating that level of certainty not only for the builder, but it enables the builder—one thing we're not talking about during this critical time right now is that we're a very capital-intensive industry. Virtually no builder or developer builds out of their own pocket. They have to go to a lending institution, usually a bank, to get the money to do it, and they're being very stingy.

So they look at the metrics and they go through the checklist, and if there's something missing in the checklist, it isn't—this goes back to the use-it-or-lose-it question as well, that if we don't check off all the boxes, we're not going to get the money and nothing is getting built. So, create that level of certainty, certainly in terms

of entitlement. We talked about getting infrastructure in place, so it truly is shovel ready. It's very beneficial.

Ultimately, whether myself or others as a builder can gnash our teeth and say, "You know, we're just going to go ahead. We're just going to get it done. Yes, we're not going to make as much as we projected or whatever the case may be, but at least we know we can start and get to the other end and that there's that level of certainty." So that's quite important in the equation.

Mr. Logan Kanapathi: What are some current challenges in building new affordable housing in two-tiered municipalities? Do you find any challenges with the two-tiered municipalities?

Mr. Bob Schickedanz: I think it's very important that while the county, in the case of Simcoe county, may provide some higher level order of guidance, the problem really comes when there's overlap and the upper tier and the lower tier are reviewing the same thing and reviewing the same issues and not agreeing on this issue. That becomes very counterproductive. I'm not trying to pick on the county or local municipalities necessarily, but any time that there's a high degree of overlap and confusion—I hate to say it—it lends itself to the process just getting stopped and everyone trying to figure out, "Okay, where's ground zero? How do we navigate through this?"

It should be that every commenting agency—and I believe quite strongly that the bulk of the planning responsibilities should be a local responsibility, and then the supporting cast know what their roles and responsibilities are, and it's done efficiently and effectively coordinated at the local level.

Mr. Logan Kanapathi: I will hand it over to MPP Saunderson.

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

Mr. Brian Saunderson: How much time do I have?

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

Mr. Brian Saunderson: Two and a half minutes. I'm going to ask for a bit of indulgence from you. I don't have a lot of time, but first of all, thank you very much, panel, and if you can keep your answers fairly brief for me.

I'm going to start off with you, Mr. Schickedanz, since you're in the building sector and you're one of our first building sector witnesses today. Quickly, you told us—I think I got this right—that your company builds and manages purpose-built rentals. Is that correct?

Mr. Bob Schickedanz: That is correct.

Mr. Brian Saunderson: So the 25% reduction in DCs to help get rentals through, are you seeing that as a bonus? Is that helping you in that sector?

Mr. Bob Schickedanz: Full disclosure: The last purpose-built rental building that we built in Ontario was back in 1988, and—

Mr. Brian Saunderson: And are you thinking of getting back in that market?

Mr. Rob Schickedanz: In fact, we left the country to build in another jurisdiction, the United States, because the challenge with purpose-built rental is that the math is very

difficult. So the point is, yes, reductions in interest rates or the crediting of GST is all helpful, but recently, over the last little while, the benefit of the HST credits was gobbled up by the increase in interest rates.

Dare I say, with the experience I've had in rental housing, it's a great business. I wish to do more investments in it because it's a great business to be in. It's stable. It's a good business, but it's very challenging to make the math work.

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As I just mentioned in my previous answers, it's also important to get a level of certainty that the rules don't change in terms of controls over the rents and things like that. We're talking about very substantial and long-term investments where the profit margins are very, very skinny. Who's going to stick their neck out to know that if the rules change tomorrow or a couple of years from now, it just wipes everything out? It doesn't foster a lot of enthusiasm to get into that space in a meaningful way.

Mr. Brian Saunderson: Okay, I appreciate that.

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

Mr. Brian Saunderson: I was going to ask you about front-end loading for infrastructure. Do you see that as being helpful?

Mr. Bob Schickedanz: In terms of developers—

Mr. Brian Saunderson: Developers getting them as part of the skin in the game in terms of municipalities having to put all the infrastructure in the ground.

Mr. Bob Schickedanz: As long as the math can work out, because some of those price tags are enormous—those cheques to be cut.

Mr. Brian Saunderson: I appreciate that quick answer.

The Chair (Ms. Laurie Scott): We went into overtime there.

Thank you very much, everybody, for your presentations.

GEORGIAN TRIANGLE
DEVELOPMENT INSTITUTE
TOWN OF INNISFIL
TOWN OF WASAGA BEACH

The Chair (Ms. Laurie Scott): I'll ask Georgian Triangle Development Institute, town of Innisfil and town of Wasaga Beach to come on up.

Georgian Triangle Development Institute, when you're ready, you have up to seven minutes, and the lovely people behind me will turn your microphone on.

Mr. Ken Hale: Thank you very much for this opportunity today. My name is Ken Hale. I am vice-president of the Georgian Triangle Development Institute. We are in the Georgian triangle area, which is the Town of the Blue Mountains, Wasaga Beach, the town of Collingwood, and Clearview township.

Our organization is dedicated to promoting sustainable development and fostering regional co-operation within the Georgian triangle. Founded over 30 years ago, GTDI

champions comprehensive regional planning to enhance our community dynamics.

Our foundation and mission: We embody the vision of using regional growth centres as pivotal social and economic forces. This philosophy was initiated by one of our esteemed founding members, General Richard Rohmer, who was a former adviser to Premier John Robarts. His Design for Development policy has been a guiding principle for our organization and the provincial approach to development.

Leadership and legacy: General Rohmer's contributions have emphasized the alignment of growth initiatives with regional rather than municipal boundaries, advocating for a coherent strategy that spans across multiple jurisdictions.

Our influence on local governance: GTDI collaborates closely with local municipalities, leveraging our extensive corporate membership from development, building and consulting sectors to advocate for regional strategies. This collaboration enhances policy-making and infrastructure development in the south Georgian Bay.

Today, I'd like to explore the potential benefits of considering a regional approach to managing our infrastructure, such as water and waste water, which is currently handled by individual municipalities.

Our discussion begins with a fundamental observation: Effective water management often aligns more naturally with watershed boundaries than with municipal boundaries. This perspective is not about immediate change, but about understanding how a regional approach similar to that used by conservation authorities might offer sustainable management solutions.

The challenges of municipal-based management: With each town managing its own infrastructure, we encounter numerous challenges, including duplicated efforts and resource inefficiencies. This presentation does not aim to critique, but to question whether a unified regional strategy could address the inefficiencies more effectively, particularly for our smaller towns struggling with technical and financial demands.

Exploring the benefits of regional governance: We're here to explore how regional governments could potentially harness economies of scale to reduce costs and improve strategic planning. This inquiry involves considering whether centralized oversight, perhaps under a body like the county of Simcoe, might better align infrastructure development with comprehensive growth objectives of our region.

Role of county bodies like the county of Simcoe: As we contemplate the role of the county of Simcoe in a potential regional governance model, we see it not just as a coordinator but possibly as a strategic planner. This would involve working closely with towns to ensure that the regional infrastructure planning supports local official plans and growth targets. Our goal today is to understand the feasibility and implications of such a model.

Integrated planning: How might collaborative planning integrate local needs with broader regional infrastructure goals?

Regulatory alignment: Could a unified approach streamline compliance with regulatory frameworks, enhancing project efficiencies?

Resource-sharing: Is there potential for optimizing investment through shared services across municipalities?

Sustainability goals: How might we align infrastructure development with sustainability goals of individual towns?

Conclusion: In closing, the Georgian Triangle Development Institute is interested in fostering a dialogue about the potential for transitioning to a regional governance model for infrastructure such as water and waste water. We are advocating for inviting all stakeholders to join us in exploring this possibility. Such an investigation could ensure a sustainable and resilient future for our community. Thank you for your attention, and I look forward to any comments.

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

We'll now go to the town of Innisfil. Please go ahead.

Ms. Lynn Dollin: Thank you very much, Chair Scott and members of the committee. My name is Lynn Dollin and I'm grateful to have the opportunity to be here today and for you to spend this time with us on such a glorious day.

I've served on municipal council since 1994. I'm currently the mayor and I've held that position for six years. I had the privilege of previously serving as the president of AMO and I currently sit as chair of the small urban caucus of AMO, and I also served a term as deputy warden of Simcoe county, prior to passing the baton to our very able current deputy warden, who is here with us today.

I would also like to introduce our CAO, Oliver Jerschow. Oliver is originally trained as an urban planner, and he worked for the province of Ontario for 13 years prior to coming to the town. So I hope that together we can serve as a valuable resource to your committee.

The town of Innisfil did previously make a written submission to this committee in November of last year and my remarks today will build on that submission, hopefully.

Let me start by saying that we're mindful of the request of Minister Calandra that we've heard a few times today made to you to find ways to get more homes built more quickly. That is the goal that we also embrace. The town of Innisfil is a growth-friendly municipality. Innisfil was asked to sign a provincial target and we accepted the challenge and I'm very pleased to say that in 2023 we achieved 160% of our target for the year.

From our experience, we know that one of the key challenges in getting more houses built is ensuring the necessary infrastructure to support housing is there first and I know you've heard a lot about that today.

Years ago, we made investments in water and waste water capacity that have facilitated our growth today. And in 2015, we made the bold move to create a municipal services corporation called InnServices to own, operate and invest in water and waste water systems, and I believe

that was a good decision that continues to benefit our municipality and others today.

Let me demonstrate why. InnServices consistently achieves the highest standards of safety and quality for both water and waste water, and that always has to come first. And InnServices has, for years, been providing a significant amount of water to our neighbouring municipality of Bradford West Gwillimbury—about 60%—proving that you don't have to adjust boundaries to achieve cross-border servicing solutions.

In May of this year, both of our councils passed recommendations to explore further collaboration in terms of water services in the southern part of Simcoe county. It's a model that's working for us and it suits our part of Simcoe county and we're open to discussing how that model could also be applied elsewhere.

1500

Both the town and InnServices works closely with the development community to understand and address future infrastructure needs that they may have. We created a developer liaison group, and they meet quarterly, to discuss planning and infrastructure issues as they arise, any pinch points that we find in our system. And we look forward to continuous improvement every time one of our developer partners comes up with a way that we can improve.

We're doing both the land use and infrastructure master plan work to get ready for the next generation of housing growth, and we're working closely with both the province, developers and our partners to finance and implement those projects. There's no denying that infrastructure to support housing is expensive. And I believe that the provincial and federal governments both need to play a key role in funding these generational infrastructure investments.

Years ago, when we first built ours, it was one third, one third, one third—and that worked well. I think this committee also needs to recognize that Indigenous communities are becoming increasingly involved in the planning and delivery of infrastructure. For instance, we postponed the tendering of our waste water treatment plant expansion by almost two years in order to address concerns by a local First Nation. I think that was the right thing to do, and I'm very pleased to see that we're still good friends and we developed a successful outcome. But if we're going to build infrastructure more quickly, we need the province to provide more clarity and guidance on how municipalities are expected to satisfy First Nations' consultation requirements.

I believe that collaboration and coordination across a region like Simcoe county makes sense. We are a large and diverse region with important differences from the built-up regions in the GTA, like York, Peel and Durham. We value the county's role in delivering regional services, like supportive housing and long-term care. In Simcoe, water and waste water is currently managed at the lower-tier level. And as I mentioned earlier, in Innisfil, we work with our neighbours to find solutions that work for all. In Innisfil, we have the ability and the desire to manage our

planning and infrastructure locally. But I also feel that we benefit from regional collaboration on growth management, and our current structure within the county facilitates that.

While they appreciate the work this committee is doing to invest in accelerating housing delivery, I would like to close by emphasizing the importance of certainty to everyone involved in the building and growing our communities, whether that's developers, municipalities or even homebuyers. In the town of Innisfil, we're working hard to get it done and create the conditions for more new homes to be built. Significant reforms to Ontario's planning and municipal finance rules have already been made over the last few years, and we are doing our very best to adapt to those changes. The province could most help us succeed at this point by providing clarity and certainty about our various roles and responsibilities and also making investments in the infrastructure that our growing communities require.

Thank you again for the chance to speak to you today, and we look forward to answering the committee's questions.

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

Now the town of Wasaga Beach, please, you can start when you're ready.

Mr. Gerry Marshall: Thank you very much. My name is Gerry Marshall, and I'm the deputy CAO of Wasaga Beach. I certainly thank you for the opportunity to speak here today.

The town of Wasaga Beach supports regional collaboration and partnerships. We do so as we recognize that with inflation and growth pressures, we have little room to further raise property taxes and also having not as of yet to have been defined as the growth area with set housing targets, we must manage with less infrastructure funding from the province and others.

As one of Ontario's fastest-growing municipalities with a population of 25,000, which is expected to double over the next 30 years, we know that partnerships matter. In fact, we believe strongly that by working together, we can do more for less oftentimes with better outcomes. The town of Wasaga Beach doesn't just collaborate, we work with our fellow municipalities, we partner with school boards, universities, colleges and the private sector to make things happen. One example is our new \$60-million twin-pad arena and library that was borne on the back 100% by the residents of Wasaga Beach.

This past May, we welcomed former Minister of Education Stephen Lecce to Wasaga Beach. The minister announced that we had successfully leveraged the \$60-million infrastructure that our residents paid for with an investment by the province of \$57.7 million for a new high school on a hub. This investment will see new high school and elementary school campus and community theatre come to life all on the same site. Working together with the province, the school board, local developers, the town has managed to leverage almost dollar-for-dollar our \$60-million investment to a \$120-million opportunity.

Regional partnerships are how we deal with a shortage of family physicians, access to primary health care issues. We are collaborating with neighbouring municipalities on a regional approach to attracting and retaining family physicians, and we are investing in the actual infrastructure needed to deliver these critical services.

We fund and operate a state-of-the-art medical centre and after-hours clinic to support health care services in our community. As a result of this investment, we were able to partner with South Georgian Bay Ontario Health Team to attract an investment with the province of another \$880,000. This provincial investment will expand health care services and assist some 3,400 people with access to medical professionals in our region.

The town of Wasaga Beach also supports a regional approach to promoting and growing tourism. Currently, we are forming partnerships and taking action to redevelop our main beach area and downtown. This undertaking will transform our local tax base for the long term and drive higher-value-added tourism across both the region and the province. We'll see an increase in municipal and provincial tax revenues as a result, the creation of good-paying jobs, and our region will become an even greater destination for people and investment.

We believe the town and province collaborating together and working in partnership will allow us to re-imagine Wasaga Beach Provincial Park. This is the most highly visited day-use provincial park in all of Ontario, and it is the only provincial park that is fully integrated within a small urban municipality. A re-imagined park will ignite regional tourism and unlock some of the extensive land holdings that the Ontario government has in the town of Wasaga Beach.

The province of Ontario owns 25% of the land within our urban boundaries. Much of these lands are fully serviced and ready to be developed. Unlocking these lands will create much-needed housing and will assist the province in meeting the housing demands of our region's growing population.

The town of Wasaga Beach, though, has come here today to demonstrate our strong track record, to demonstrate our support for regional partnerships and a belief in a regional approach, and to demonstrate how our previous approaches have resulted in mutually beneficial outcomes. We are here to express our support for regional collaboration and provincial funding.

We recognize that water and waste water challenges exist for some of our neighbouring municipalities. However, we do want to assure you that the town of Wasaga Beach has their own house in order. For decades, the town of Wasaga Beach has invested hundreds of millions of dollars in services in essential municipal infrastructure, including our water and waste water facilities. As a result, the town of Wasaga Beach offers one of the lowest water and waste water fees per household in the county of Simcoe. Our infrastructure is in great shape. We're at 50% capacity and have plenty of room for growth. Our reserves are built up and are sufficient to support this growth and our future needs.

We are concerned, however, that regional uploading of water and waste water infrastructure will have an unintended consequence of penalizing the town of Wasaga Beach for doing the right thing, for making the hard choices, for investing in water and waste water infrastructure while others have not. We believe that any regional uploading scenario must compensate and account for our significant past investments. Under no scenario would we support creating an upper-tier system that will end up being more expensive for our municipality or our residents.

Ontario is growing. Wasaga Beach is growing. To support growth, Wasaga Beach is committed to doing everything we can to help the province build 1.5 million homes by 2031.

We're also concerned that regional uploading of water and waste water will mean Wasaga Beach will have to deal with infrastructure caps—caps that will limit our ability to grow fast and to build more homes faster. We propose that a reasonable part of any regional solution should include the province assigning housing targets to our municipalities. We are an attractive growth area—and area that's seen by many to be affordable. It is our desire to be assigned housing targets complete with infrastructure investments that will help us grow even faster.

The town of Wasaga Beach looks forward to working together to advance a regional approach that considers all of this.

Thank you for your time today.

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

We'll now start with the official opposition. MPP Burch, if you want to begin.

Mr. Jeff Burch: Thank you all for your presentations.

I'll start with the town of Wasaga Beach. Thank you. You're in a similar situation as the small city I'm from, Thorold, in Niagara—roughly the same population. It's the eighth-fastest-growing municipality in Canada, but no housing targets. It's not a growth area. So I wondered if you want to talk a little more about that and what's required, maybe, to bring more fairness to that process, because municipalities that are punching way above their weight in terms of creating housing, there should some kind of incentive and the same kind of rewards that other municipalities have.

1510

Mr. Gerry Marshall: Thank you for that question. Yes, certainly, we'd be putting our hand up to get housing targets. We've been asking for that for a while. We noticed other municipalities have declined the opportunity. We're the little mouse in the back going, "Pick me, pick me." We really do want to get involved. We think we have a great community for it.

We think with the provincial landholdings that are along some significant pathways that a relationship between the province and the town will result in homes being built much quicker than they can in most other municipalities. Like I said, 25% of the landholdings in Wasaga

Beach are owned by the province, and much of that—a great deal of that—is ready for development.

Mr. Jeff Burch: With those provincial lands, where are you with dealing with the province to make use of those lands? Are there environmental considerations and other things that are holding that up, or is it just a matter of working with the province?

Mr. Gerry Marshall: No, working through the province and with our MPP, Brian Saunderson. Brian has introduced us. We're having conversations. We hope to meet with MECP shortly. We have delegations at AMO and at ROMA. So we started the conversation. The conversation has been well received, engaging, but it's a process that we need to go through. We'd like to go through it quicker, as everybody else would, but we're patiently going there. We'll work with our MPP to continue those conversations to a successful outcome.

Mr. Jeff Burch: It's a beautiful part of the province and a lot of tourism. As tourism is coming back, we've heard from a lot of folks that they have challenges, especially during peak seasons, with housing, because you have a greater need during those times for housing. That creates transportation issues and other issues. How is Wasaga Beach dealing with those issues?

Mr. Gerry Marshall: We do have plans to expand and grow. That new twin-pad arena that I mentioned in my presentation freed up 25 acres of land that we're looking at. So how can that help with affordable housing, workforce housing, attainable housing? We're looking at those models.

We're trying to understand and look at development a little bit differently in terms of opportunities. We do see the building code sometimes as structured such that if you're a car dealership—if you're Ford, you have your high-end vehicles, your mid-range vehicles and your low-end vehicles. Unfortunately, the building code is all about luxury homes, and nobody can reach that rung right now. That price point is too high. So we're trying to find ways to bring the rungs down closer to affordability and closer to our communities. We're trying to look at land leases and opportunities. What makes a difference to drive homes into the municipality that can really make a difference?

At some point in time—and our MPP probably hasn't heard this from me yet, but we do want to have a chat about the building code. I did have a chat with Robert Flack when Robert came to visit as well, so I think those conversations there—we're trying to be creative, and I think creativity matters.

Mr. Jeff Burch: Okay. Thank you.

How much time do I have left, Chair?

The Chair (Ms. Laurie Scott): You have three and a half minutes.

Mr. Jeff Burch: Great.

Mayor Dollin, you talked a lot about water/waste water and the challenges. You had mentioned you're at 160% of the goal for housing. Is that kind of growth sustainable with the infrastructure you have now? What do you need for the future to sustain that kind of growth?

Ms. Lynn Dollin: Thank you for your question. Through you, Madam Chair, we were one of the three municipalities in Simcoe county to ask to sign the growth target, understanding that we will be over 50,000 by 2051. We're at 45,000 now.

To answer your question more directly, we have all seen the housing market slow down over this past year, and Innisfil is no exception. Our numbers are down from where they were last year. We won't be getting 160% of our target this year.

But I'm pleased to say that we are still building new homes. Our planning department is as busy as ever with applications for new homes in all parts of our town. We're working on a transit-orientated community around a GO train station that we've been working on for many years. We're working on moving that forward along with a large development with Parkbridge and Mattamy Homes which has got some accessory dwellings attached to them, and some of it land lease, which helps us with that attainable piece. So we're continuing to work as quickly as we can, but I think we're going to have to temper our expectations from last year.

Mr. Jeff Burch: We've talked a little bit today about the lack of a definition of what attainable or affordable is. Do you have one that you use as a municipality? How do you prioritize making sure that a certain amount of housing is attainable or affordable?

Ms. Lynn Dollin: Typically, we would go with the provincial definition of "affordable," which is 30% spent on housing, but as far as "attainable" is concerned, we just work at making sure we have a variety of product. Typically, Innisfil has always been single-family-home dwellings with some townhouses, and now we're looking at more condos, more accessory units. We've already approved three dwellings per lot, so we're working on providing a variety of assortment, which hopefully will help us with the "attainable" piece.

Mr. Jeff Burch: Okay. Back on the infrastructure piece with the water/waste water: You had mentioned that there does have to be support from all levels of government moving forward if there's such a large deficit, especially in terms of water/waste water, and you mentioned the one third, one third, one third. Is that a kind of model that you think would serve us well, and is that—back 10 to 15 years ago during the stimulus funding—kind of what you're talking about?

Ms. Lynn Dollin: Yes. Just from example in my time on council—it was in the late 1980s, I believe, that we did our waste water plant, but it was in my time on council that we did our water treatment plant, and the "one third, one third, one third" model got it done. With the prices the way they are today, our expansion on our waste water treatment plant now is more than double what our original engineer estimate was, so these are the types of prices everyone is seeing, and someone has to pay for that.

Mr. Jeff Burch: My time is almost up, Chair.

The Chair (Ms. Laurie Scott): Five seconds left, so you did a good job.

Over to the government side. MPP Byers, please.

Mr. Rick Byers: Thank you for the presentations this afternoon. I want to carry on with the town of Innisfil discussion, if I could, and understand a little bit more about InnServices. Did you say it was started in 2015? Is that right? And is this municipal services corporation 100% owned by Innisfil? And just a little more: I was curious about the funding model. Do you go to third-party funding or is it municipal funding that supports it?

Ms. Lynn Dollin: It was started in 2015, and one of the reasons we originally started it was so that we could make investments in water and waste water infrastructure, not having to worry about the borrowing capacity of the town of Innisfil, and also to get expertise on that board and to—what I like to call—take the politics out of the pipes: Let's do this where it's most effective where it makes the most sense, maybe not politically, but engineering-wise. Let's do this the way it should be done, and let's have those experts design that, knowing that you've got that backstop as the council, which is the 100% shareholder of that corporation.

Mr. Rick Byers: Very interesting. Were you the first in Ontario to do one of these, or are there others around? Do you know? We haven't heard much about that.

Ms. Lynn Dollin: I think there were others, but I think in true innovative Innisfil, we were one of the first.

Mr. Rick Byers: Well, very good.

The funding, as well: You've talked and the one third, one third, one third. Obviously the municipality keeps the rates for water/waste water, so is it fair to say it has been a good financial investment for the town, as well, over the years since then?

Ms. Lynn Dollin: I think it's a fair model. I think that it should be a totally user-paid system. I think people on municipal water and waste water should pay for it and not be subsidized by the person who is paying a tax bill and also has to put in a septic system and put in their own well. To me, water and waste water systems always should be fully user-paid. They should pay a fair cost for that water that will allow you to pay for the interest on the capital and pay for the maintenance and the operation of that facility; making sure that they're getting potable, clean, safe drinking water; and then also putting money into reserve to make sure that that system can be kept up. It should be paid for by the people who are on that system.

Mr. Rick Byers: But it sounds like your corporation has done that over the last nine years.

Ms. Lynn Dollin: Yes.

Mr. Rick Byers: Got it. Excellent. As the corporation looks at the current market—prices have gone up, all that we know—is the assessment that the current rates for water/waste water will not fully pay for new infrastructure today? How are they sizing the economics, if you will?

1520

Ms. Lynn Dollin: Right. I'm going to pass this one over to CAO Jerschow. Actually, CAO Jerschow is also the chair of InnServices, so he's the proper person to answer that one.

Mr. Oliver Jerschow: Thank you, Mayor Dollin.

Thank you for the question. When the corporation was created in 2015, all the assets, all the employees, moved out of the town and into that corporation, so it is financially independent. In order to set up that corporation, the town had to conduct a business study. One of the key reasons that was assessed at the time was the ability to finance infrastructure; was the ability to take on debt independently of the town. And what has happened is that it's not just rates, but also development charges—we found a way to structure development charges so that they're administered by the town, but they benefit InnServices, which means that it has a funding source for some of those big capital requirements.

We are beginning to ramp up from an infrastructure investment perspective. Rates are contributing to that, but DCs, as well. We're also looking to any grant funding opportunities that we can access, so we have applied to the Housing-Enabling Water Systems Fund, for example. So we're putting the pieces together, but we believe the corporation can act independently.

Mr. Rick Byers: Wow, interesting model.

Just to be clear: Some DCs are also contributing to revenue for InnServices; correct?

Mr. Oliver Jerschow: Correct.

Mr. Rick Byers: Wow, interesting.

I'll pass it over to MPP Rae.

The Chair (Ms. Laurie Scott): MPP Rae, please go ahead.

Mr. Matthew Rae: How much time?

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

Mr. Matthew Rae: Three minutes? Wow, lots of time.

Mr. Rick Byers: I can carry on if you want.

Mr. Matthew Rae: No, it's fine.

To Lynn and Oliver, just on that same sort of line of questioning as MPP Byers—similar to him, I find it very fascinating.

You mentioned that you have essentially three funding sources: the grants, the current rates and the DCs, the way you have set it up.

I don't know how much you came to the province for the housing-enabling infrastructure. How much more would that be if you didn't have the municipal service corporation—if you know that off the top of your head, Oliver?

Mr. Oliver Jerschow: If you're thinking about municipal service corporations, I'd say there are three pillars to really look at. One is governance; one is operations; and one is financial. I think the key is to understand what problem you're trying to solve with that corporation. Whether it's owned by a town, owned by an MSC, the cost of the infrastructure itself doesn't necessarily change, but its ability to finance might be different. As Mayor Dollin mentioned, we do have servicing arrangements with our neighbours in Bradford West Gwillimbury. There's a financial agreement behind that that put funding towards capital expansions in the past. So I think the corporation can access all those different tools, and because it's off the books from the municipality, you can create your own pro

forma and assess how to pay for the infrastructure you need.

We're updating right now, for example, a master servicing plan for Innisfil where we're looking at, in the future, what are those growth requirements, in addition to a financial model to say, what would a sustainable level of debt be, for example, so that we can make those infrastructure investments in the big capital and pay it off over time?

I'm not sure if I answered your question exactly.

Mr. Matthew Rae: Yes, a little bit. I was just wondering, because, obviously, you literally have a town next door that doesn't have a—it sounds like you did some great decisions many, many years ago in Wasaga Beach, but then literally in juxtaposition, you have Innisfil that does have InnServices and different models.

Thank you for all those answers on that.

My other question that I've been asking today, for the two mayors currently at the table—I guess we'll start with the town of Wasaga Beach: What are your thoughts on the potential devolving of the planning authority from Simcoe county to the lower tiers? Do you support it or not? Do you think it would be beneficial to getting homes built?

Mr. Gerry Marshall: I think Mr. Schickedanz hit the nail on the head. We'd like to see more down at the municipal level, but it's really about the overlap, when you have two organizations looking at the same opportunities. I think, from Wasaga Beach, certainly planning at the local level makes sense to us, and the county, weighing in with their way, and input from the NVCA—the Nottawasaga conservation authority—makes sense to us.

Interruption.

The Chair (Ms. Laurie Scott): I'm afraid that was the alarm.

MPP Burch, do you have any more questions?

Mr. Jeff Burch: Back to Mayor Dollin: I wanted to ask you about a comment that you made in your presentation. Something we've been hearing about from a lot of municipalities as we travel around is the whole issue of certainty. We hear that from businesses, but we hear it from municipalities, as well—sometimes the way that decisions come down from the province, and the understanding that it takes time to implement those decisions and implementing them has consequences. I just thought you might like to expand on that, because it is a popular theme we've been hearing over the last couple of years when it comes to how the provincial government requires municipalities to follow through on their edicts.

Ms. Lynn Dollin: Thank you for the opportunity, MPP Burch. I'll use a personal example. In about 2008, the city of Barrie was looking at annexing some land in the north part of Innisfil, so basically paralyzing our municipality for two years. We couldn't hire employees because we didn't know if we were going to exist. Do you want to invest in that park? Do you want to want to fix that road? Because you don't know if that road is going to be given to your other municipality, so you don't do that work. Everything kind of just crawls to a halt, and it takes all the air out of the room. So it becomes all about that.

In 2009, the Barrie-Innisfil act was passed, and on January 1, 2010, I forget how many hectares of Innisfil land went to the city of Barrie, in January 2010. They're just now putting up model homes, in 2024, so it took 14 years, not to mention the two or three years prior to that that we weren't doing anything, because we didn't know what was going to happen. So it took all that time for housing to get built. That kind of uncertainty really doesn't help the cause of making things happen any faster; in fact, I would say it slows it down significantly.

Mr. Jeff Burch: Right. Okay.

And perhaps, town of Wasaga Beach, the same question: the whole issue of certainty and knowing what the future holds, so that the municipality can plan for the future.

Mr. Gerry Marshall: In terms of that, certainly, when we look at our municipality, we plan many years out, as most do, so we're looking out at that 30-year horizon right now, to 2050. So we look at our municipality and we're trying to plan it out. We're trying to reconfigure it a bit, as well, as we go through what it's got to look like. So we go ahead and we look at all the data in front of us, and certainly manage that cash flow so we see what the opportunities are, where the costs are coming and how we manage those costs in advance. And again, we look at all of that.

In terms of the "one third, one third, one third" funding, that certainly is a supported model, but I've been with municipalities where that model didn't quite turn out the way we'd hoped it would be. I just want to share with the committee that, for instance, that if you have a \$12-million project, that's what you apply for from the federal and provincial governments and everybody's in for \$4 million each. But if that project comes in at \$20 million, the province and the feds are still in for \$4 million, and the municipality takes the rest on the chin. With this day of cost-estimating and things coming in at the most, one of the major challenges facing most municipalities is going from the estimate to the reality of that RFP result. That delta sometimes is staggering, and it does hurt. So, planning for the unexpected, I guess, is what I'm saying we need to do as well.

Mr. Jeff Burch: Okay. Thanks very much.

That's all the questions I have, Chair.

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

Over to the government side, please. MPP Rae, go for it.

Mr. Matthew Rae: To the town of Innisfil, just my question before I was cut off: Your thoughts, Lynn, on the potential devolving of planning authority from Simcoe county to Innisfil or other lower tiers?

Ms. Lynn Dollin: Thank you for the question, through the Chair to you, MPP Rae. I've heard a lot today about how one size does not fit all, and there are member municipalities in Simcoe county that rely very heavily on the planning department at Simcoe county. We have the bench strength to be able to do the planning work we need to do on our own, so we don't rely on the county for that, but we

do really value the county's role in regional coordination, and there are some places that really benefit the county. You don't want a road in Wasaga Beach being built here and a road in Collingwood being built here, and they don't come out at the same spot. Regional collaboration is really important for that.

And then we also have adopted a lot of innovative ways. We've got a community planning permitting system on our shoreline that we're now going to—because those are some of our trickier applications. We have also moved to approvals—even before Bill 31, we delegated authority for site plan to the lower tier, so we're trying to move things quicker along that way as well.

But as far as the county is concerned, we do find a need for some regional coordination, while taking a really good look at any redundancies or overlap.

Mr. Matthew Rae: Thank you.

I defer the remaining time to MPP Saunderson.

1530

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

Mr. Brian Saunderson: Thank you very much, Madam Chair. I'm waiting for the light.

Anyway, I want to thank all of our presenters this afternoon. You also represent a very important—

Interjections.

Mr. Brian Saunderson: There I am. I can talk to the right mike—a very important role in Simcoe county. As well, you each have tales to tell about involvement with the private sector or outside-the-box-thinking, I think, from a municipal perspective.

My first question is going to go to Mr. Hale, chair of the GTDI, which has been a big contributor in Collingwood and the surrounding area for development and development applications. You talked about a model of uploading water and waste water potentially to the county or to a municipal services corporation such as we've just heard about from Innisfil. So my question, then, to you is along the line of the planning role. I think you're quite familiar with the planning role that the county plays. So from your experience and the experience of your members, what would your comment be to the idea of putting full planning authority down to the local municipality and not involving the county?

Mr. Ken Hale: The current system works well, but I also agree with Mayor Dollin that maybe one size doesn't fit all. In our area, in the Collingwood area specifically and the surrounding municipalities, we sit on the county border with Grey and Town of the Blue Mountains, so we have dynamics of working with two counties in that area on cross-boundary issues such as transportation, water and waste water and those issues.

I think that right now, for example, the town of Collingwood official plan goes up for county for final ratification. I think that the local municipalities should have a firm control over their official plans and their destinies with guidance from the county and from the provincial government, certainly. But the problems we run into are more in the interface of when infrastructure meets

the building out of those official plans. So I think it's a matter of coordination on different specific issues.

I think certainly that the planning matters for the locals who are living there are of utmost importance. Certainly, the local municipalities have a huge role to play in those and should be providing real guidance to the province and the county on those things. But as far as the implementation of infrastructure, it's cross-jurisdictional; it's cross-county lines in our region. I really think there needs to be a regional approach to these smaller municipalities. We're not single-tier. I hope that answers your question.

Mr. Brian Saunderson: It does, and it gives me a nice segue into my next question. So if the province was to look at pursuing uploading large infrastructure projects, primarily water and waste water, to the county or to a larger service delivery corporation, does that not also enhance the need of regional supervision on larger projects? Mayor Dollin commented about a road in Wasaga not aligning with a road in Collingwood, and I would imagine the same concerns would happen in linear infrastructure even though they're below the ground.

Mr. Ken Hale: Yes. I mean, a recent example from not too long ago was that to get a transportation route from Wasaga to Town of the Blue Mountains or to Meaford I believe took five different municipal councils and two different regional counties to approve it. Something that everybody knew was a simple solution and was one bus route could have been resolved with more of a regional approach.

I think if you extrapolate that out into your water and your waste water infrastructure, we're facing right now—we recently completed the water treatment plant that will service the central region of Ontario for quite some long time with input from all the surrounding municipalities. But as soon as that's built, we're going to be dealing with waste water.

The issue from the private sector, which is really what our organization represents, is for example, DCs do fund and development is happy to pay for development. But DCs are payable at the time of building permits, often. When you're getting in and you're getting approved for an 800-unit subdivision or a 400-unit subdivision, that infrastructure that is needed to support that, you needed to start it five years, 10 years before you actually get to a building permit. So we get local planning solutions and moving forward and the approvals for that, but then you get to a point where, okay, well, the infrastructure for that is 10 years away.

A regional approach to that could look at amalgamating resources in our area—and again, I'm speaking to our area. We're not a single-tier. The municipalities in our area maybe aren't as advanced as some of the other municipalities, but that sort of coordinated regional approach would certainly benefit to getting things done in a more certain timeline.

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

Mr. Brian Saunderson: Thank you for that answer.

The Chair (Ms. Laurie Scott): Okay, thank you very much to the presenters. That's the end of the questioning in this round.

MACPHERSON BUILDERS

TOWN OF THE BLUE MOUNTAINS

The Chair (Ms. Laurie Scott): We'll do the last group. Virtually, we have MacPherson Builders Ltd., and then, in person, we have the Town of the Blue Mountains. Thanks, everyone, for coming.

[*Inaudible*] up to seven minutes for their presentation, and if it's okay with Russell, we'll start with you, virtually, first up. So whenever you're ready, just state your name and the clock begins.

Mr. Russell Higgins: Great, thank you very much. Thank you for having me today. My name is Russell Higgins. I'm the president and a principal of MacPherson Builders Ltd. We're based in Toronto—in Etobicoke, actually. I've been building subdivisions and home-building for 35 years in the province of Ontario. We are both a land developer and builder. We build low-rise and mid-rise projects, and we've worked in multiple towns across the province.

We are a Tarion-registered builder with zero chargeable conciliations in the last 10 years. Now, that may change in by the end of today, one never knows, but as of now, we have a perfect record with HCRA and Tarion.

We've built in communities such as Erin, St. Thomas, Fergus, Lindsay, Blue Mountains, Collingwood, Stayner, Ingersoll and Seaforth, among some of the places we've built. So as you can tell, although we're based in Toronto, we've been focused on smaller centres throughout the province.

I'm here today to speak about infrastructure. Just catching—I've been on this for all of five minutes on this call and I've already heard things that we're aligned with, particularly Mr. Hale's comments. Our thesis is—and specifically, I'm just going to limit my remarks to sewer and water main infrastructure. The thesis I have for you today is that sewer and water need to be managed on a regional basis, and I'm going to give three examples stretching over the 35 years where we've come across this. Mindful of the seven-minute time, I'll be brief.

In the early 1990s, we acquired a site in the township of Erin, abutting the town of Erin. It was a 43-lot subdivision, a state lot subdivision, which abutted the municipal boundary of the town of Erin. The town and the township at that time were two separate municipalities with two separate councils.

We needed water; we needed piped water. There was a pipe about a couple of a hundred metres from our property, but it was located within the town or the village of Erin. The village, for political reasons, didn't want to extend its water outside its municipal boundary. What we ended up doing was building a stand-alone water system with two well points, a well house, at-grade storage, and running pipes through our subdivision, completely independent of

the village's system. It was redundant in the sense that it wasn't the best location for well points, but they were adequate for our needs. And we ended up spending a fair bit of money building this system.

At the end of the day, the two municipalities were merged into one town of Erin, a number of years later, and it was for naught in a way. That money that we'd spent there could have been much more effectively deployed elsewhere in the system, in the town of Erin. The take-away from this one was the timing, though. This occurred in the mid-1990s. And while we were operating the system independently, it was taken over by the town on a day-to-day basis. We paid for it. They had a gentleman who worked for the township of Erin who managed the system. That fellow retired and a relative of his took over the system, and what happened—we found out over a couple of months when we didn't get reporting from this fellow who worked for the township of Erin but paid for by us—was he wasn't testing the water on a regular basis because he was not qualified to do it.

1540

And what is sort of terrifying to us to this day is that, but for luck, Erin could have been Walkerton. Because Walkerton happened almost exactly five years after we built that system, and my understanding of the Walkerton problem is it was the same problem we had encountered. And what we put that down to was we didn't have experienced municipal staff looking after the system at the time. It was a very small municipality with not that much in the way of resources to monitor a water system.

Flipping to the town of Lindsay, again in the mid-1990s: Again, we acquired a large parcel which straddled the boundary of the town of Lindsay and the then-township of Ops, which, at the time, were two separate municipalities. Something called the northwest trunk sanitary sewer needed to get built to service the northwest end of Lindsay. But, unfortunately, the sewer went from the existing Lindsay sewage treatment plant under the Scugog River, through the town, through Ops township and then back into the town. Five years of political wrangling ensued on inter-municipal agreements, which never happened, and what ultimately happened was there was a partial annexation of Ops by Lindsay. Even then, it didn't get done and it wasn't until all of the municipalities in what was then the county of Victoria, became the city of Kawartha Lakes, did it start to move ahead. The sewer ultimately got built about 10 years ago after 20 years of inter-municipal wrangling and shuffling and so on and so forth, and ended up in the same place it was originally planned all along. So that is another example of political decisions affecting what's a fairly straightforward servicing solution.

The last example I'll give is in our own county of Simcoe. We're currently building in Collingwood, Stayner and in the Town of the Blue Mountains. As everyone is aware, there are 16 municipalities in the county where everyone I'm sure at the table is familiar with the bevy of inter-municipal agreements that exist not the least of which is the agreements on the big pipe, which I don't

think anyone has figured out exactly how they work after 20 years or so. Some of the municipalities in Simcoe county have their own staff. Some have third-party development, consultants. It's a hodgepodge. Some are better than others quite frankly.

The problem as we see it is structural. After 30 years in the business—I'm the son and the sibling of civil engineers. Although I'm not an engineer myself, I grew up in the business. The problem is clear to us, and that is that the solution needs to be a technical one. All these solutions, they should not be affected by political boundaries. They should follow good engineering practices that are efficient and build the infrastructure in the most efficient way possible, and if I had my druthers—

The Chair (Ms. Laurie Scott): I'm afraid your time is up.

Mr. Russell Higgins: Okay. One more sentence?

The Chair (Ms. Laurie Scott): Okay, one more sentence.

Mr. Russell Higgins: —I would have Simcoe county take it over.

The Chair (Ms. Laurie Scott): Okay. I think we got the gist of that then. All right. Thank you.

Now, we'll go to the Town of the Blue Mountains.

Ms. Andrea Matrosovs: Excellent. Thank you very much, Madam Chair and members of the committee. My name is Andrea Matrosovs. I'm the mayor of the Town of the Blue Mountains, and I'm here with CAO Shawn Everitt. We are here as members of the South Georgian Bay Regional Mayors and CAOs Forum, and you've heard a lot about that today. We are one of the representatives from the Grey county side of things. So we are also the last little piece of Grey county that sits within the riding of Simcoe-Grey. So Mr. Saunderson has understood our needs and walks with us as he continues in the role that he now holds.

I'm also a member of the Great Lakes and St. Lawrence Cities Initiative, and we are 260-plus members binationally, multinationally, because we have First Nations members as well. I've been appointed the Ontario co-chair for the new mayor's commission on water equity. So we will be coming to you, hoping to engage you at the table as well as the federal level to talk further about the infrastructure needs, because it is about safe drinking water and it's also about safe waste water management practices as well. We are all hearing today that this is going to be an ongoing concern that we have, and we look forward to that discussion when it comes time for us to build in that dialogue.

So it is about (1) safe water and waste water infrastructure, and (2) to build more houses. We don't have a problem here in the Town of the Blue Mountains, as you're probably hearing, in attracting building. The challenge I'll get to about the businesses is linked to the housing. We don't have a problem with that, because it is an area that everyone is trying to come to. However, we do have a big problem with this, and we continue to be the second-fastest-growing municipality in Canada.

Our challenge is in that mix. We don't have the mix of housing that we need to meet the crucial needs of our

communities, to make them sustainable communities. I've heard that from Mayor Dollin and I've heard it from Mayor Measures, as well as the warden of Simcoe county.

To be sustainable, my mantra has always been that we need to build the community for all ages and stages of life. The solution is not more 3,500-square-foot houses over \$2 million. That is not going to meet the needs that we have for the economic development. We need to focus more on the workforce housing and work together with the province on what kind of tools we can do to encourage that kind of mix. This is what we'd like to continue the dialogue on.

We have some excellent examples that are starting to come out of the gate, looking at it differently. Actually, Mr. Higgins and MacPherson homes are one of our champions that are willing to work with our lower tier, work with us here at the town level, to say, "How can we make that work? How can we build out something that will be sustainable for the community?"

Mayor Measures referred to the legislative tools, and of course we've heard about the need for funding partnership, like Mayor Dollin said about the funding for the infrastructure. We cannot do it alone. We do need to work in collaboration with the upper tier as well as with the provincial level. I do believe that there is a case for the upper tier to continue to work, and I'll get into how that is of great value to us as well.

But that is the kind of provincial clout that we could use some help on: If there's a tool, if there are mechanisms you can help us put into place so that when building does come, it's the right kind of housing. So if we can work together on coming up with ways in which we can say, "Yes, this is awesome"—we have Mr. Hale's organization; they want to build here, but we want to make sure that we're building the right kind of combination. I think this is where the province could really be supportive in that whole stratification of the lower tier, upper tier and provincial level.

The province also assists in crossing boundaries, as well. Just like the counties do, we're able to look—our county has nine municipalities and we're able to look on a county scale and say, "What are the needs? What are the economic needs? What are the housing needs? What are the deep social needs? How do we work together on that?"

The province is excellent for that ability to look at the bigger picture too, within the structure of yourselves as well. We had a great example when CAO Everitt here was able to organize, for the first time ever, two of your divisions at the Ministry of Transportation getting on the bus together and meeting each other for the first time to talk about the interconnectivity that we need of the transportation between Simcoe county's side and Grey county's side of south Georgian Bay. It's the reason why our mayors' and CAOs forum will continue to come to the government with delegations together, as six municipalities, saying, "We're the boots on the ground. We can help solve the problem together with the province."

Our upper tier is a critical mass. It is the critical mass that we need, because we are a smaller community, so

together, we have a stronger ability to solve problems. Grey county, for example, has a growing transportation system. Routes 3 and 4 will get you between Owen Sound and the end of the Town of the Blue Mountains. We do, actually, have Grey county transit in the Town of the Blue Mountains.

What we have done to elevate that and make it even more realistic for what people need is that once you make use of the Grey county transit, then we work with Collingwood CollTrans. We work with the Town of the Blue Mountains, the Blue Mountain Resort itself and the Blue Mountain Village Association that is associated with all of the houses that are there around the resort. It's that partnership that has been able to enhance crossing that Simcoe county line and been able to connect people between the town of Collingwood and the base of the mountain.

Our EMS services, daycare and deep needs for affordable housing as well as our social services all, again, come from the strength of the upper tier, and that is crucial for us to be able to support all the new families that we want to come and live in the new homes that we want to build. So again, we desperately need that kind of sustainable community for existing residents and the existing infrastructure, what the CAO will talk about shortly, as well as the new homes we would like to welcome to our community.

1550

The concluding remark I'd like to make is that Mr. Saunderson's comment about how every home that's built needs to connect to economic development is absolutely crucial. It is devastating for us to hear that there is a business in town that could do a third shift of more jobs, but they can't do that because they can't find people who can afford to live in our area because they can't find the right mix of housing. That's the kind of example we'd like to eradicate in partnership.

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

We'll now go to questions and answers. MPP Burch, do you want to start us off?

Mr. Jeff Burch: Sure. I'll start off with Mr. Higgins.

You had three examples of why water and waste water needs to be managed regionally. I don't think you finished your story about Simcoe, so I thought I'd give you an opportunity to finish your thoughts on that.

Mr. Russell Higgins: Yes, the only other thing I wanted to add was that you need a large professional staff to do this. Some places just don't have the scale, as the mayor of the Blue Mountains just indicated. There are things that have to be done at a higher level, such as that county level, to get these things done. You need a bunch of engineers on staff to get this done, a bunch of CETs, technicians and others, and a smaller municipality with a small tax base just can't afford that.

So the result is, they end up farming it out to third-party consultants, which is never a good solution simply because you then have the person paying for the consultant, often

the developer, is not the client, which is the municipality. There are just built-in inefficiencies in that model.

As developers, we would always rather deal directly with staff at a municipality than a third party. We'd like a municipality with the professional staff onside, in their offices, that we could deal with. Now, that also could be done through a municipal services corporation—but just a large entity that has the big picture in hand.

Mr. Jeff Burch: So it's both economies of scale and having more of a one point of contact for your development.

Mr. Russell Higgins: Exactly.

Mr. Jeff Burch: Okay. Thank you very much for that.

To the Town of the Blue Mountains: Thank you, Mayor, for your presentation. I wanted to touch on—you talked about safety a little bit. What would your concerns be moving forward with the current way that waste water and water infrastructure is funded and rolls out when it comes to safety?

Ms. Andrea Matrosovs: I'll do a quick answer and then I'd like to turn it over to the CAO.

When we talk about safe drinking water, for when we need to ensure that, we also need to make sure that where we build our homes is not going to be an area that's going to end up being detrimental or that's built in the wrong spot. So we want safety in terms of where our homes are built to make sure that they're protected from weather change events, for example. So, there's that aspect.

And then with the waste water, absolutely. If there is too much I&I happening, if there is too much leaking happening, if we're having to repair 19 different leaks in one particular aging piece of infrastructure, that could be a detriment to the environment and that could be a detriment, eventually, to our Georgian Bay as well. So this is the kind of intricate framework that we need to make sure that we're checking all of those balances.

But I'd like the CAO to answer in terms of infrastructure.

Mr. Shawn Everitt: Thank you for the opportunity to speak here at the standing committee. I think from a water and waste water—to the mayor's point about safety—one thing that we've been really considering is the need to do the regional approach is absolutely critical. Anecdotally, it would be interesting to see how much duplication of actual infrastructure we're actually putting in, whether it would be too many water plants or too many waste water treatment plants.

I can tell you, in the Blue Mountains right now, we've just completed our east end environmental assessment, which is telling us that we should be building a second water treatment plant, when we're less than a 15-minute drive away from Collingwood. And I look at the costing that Collingwood just went through: It's becoming a norm that 30% plus-or-minus in the engineering for construction of a water plant is becoming the acceptable norm. When you're talking about a \$66-million project for our water treatment plant that we're looking at, 30% plus-or-minus, I've yet to see it go minus. It's always the plus.

So, from a safety perspective, I think you start looking at the duplication of even staffing. Town of the Blue Mountains has a significant number of employees for water and waste water; Collingwood does the same thing; Meaford does the same thing. We start to look at what's our redundancy plan. Making sure that all of those areas are looked after I think will increase the level of safety, because if you start looking at the reduction of actual infrastructure and number of plants for both water and waste water, I think that would have a huge benefit.

Mr. Jeff Burch: Does the region also have an important role to play when it comes to looking at that infrastructure both environmentally and in terms of preservation of farmland as well?

Mr. Shawn Everitt: Absolutely. What you'll hear from the Blue Mountains, I believe, is just very much from a regional approach. There are so many benefits of looking at it from that region. Take away the municipal boundaries and, quite frankly, the county boundaries when you're dealing with the specific areas. At the end of the day, we're all impacting each other, so that regional approach I think would be hugely helpful.

Mr. Jeff Burch: Thank you.

Mayor, you talked about the mix of housing that's needed. That's something obviously most municipalities struggle with. So what is needed from the province specifically to—I mean, it's difficult to incentivize developers to build that affordable or attainable housing. What kind of assistance do you need to try to attract that kind of investment?

Ms. Andrea Matrosovs: Thank you for the question. Certainly, we did hear unfortunately that Mr. Schickedanz, when he was presenting, said even some of the existing rental enticements haven't quite worked, so we need to go further on that. We really need rentals in the area. We heard that from Mayor Hamlin as well. Unfortunately, a number of our units that would be potential rentals end up being short-term accommodation which is not meeting the needs of the workforce and what we need to do for all ages and stages trying to live there. I don't have that. If I had the golden ticket for that, we would all be celebrating right now. But that is rental housing, but it's also a mix of ownership housing, too. If every development going forward, when it came to build those single 3,500-square-foot homes for \$2 million, also had a component where they were contributing toward townhomes or something on a smaller scale, that would help.

Above and beyond the attainable housing, the actual 80% of market value, just the more that's out there in the market, the lower the costs will come for both renting and owning.

Mr. Jeff Burch: So, in a lot of tourism areas, the transportation struggles that municipalities have to do with people—they work in a different area than they live because of the price of the housing.

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

Mr. Jeff Burch: Is that a pretty big issue in your area as well?

Ms. Andrea Matrosov: We do need more public transportation, but I really also want to—all of us know that people who are working in the kinds of income brackets that we're talking about have two vehicles, and they're driving to their jobs. They're young professionals. They need a place to live close enough to their job so that they stay working in our area and help us with economic development.

Mr. Jeff Burch: Thank you.

The Chair (Ms. Laurie Scott): Thanks very much. MPP Saunderson for the government side, please.

Mr. Brian Saunderson: Thank you both for attending today. You're last, but we also save the best for last here, so congratulations.

I'm going to start my questioning with you, Mr. Higgins. As an active builder in Simcoe county, without really naming municipalities, have you noticed a difference in the bandwidth of the different planning departments in your dealings with the separate municipalities?

Mr. Russell Higgins: Most certainly. I mean, it quite often is just simply a function of size—bigger municipality, bigger tax base, bigger ability to hire more professional staff. It's really as simple as that. I'd say it's almost a linear equation.

Mr. Brian Saunderson: We've certainly heard from many today that it's not a one-size-fits-all solution that we're looking for here. I'm wondering if you could comment—if in those circumstances where there was less bandwidth with a particular municipality, did the county kind of backfill? Was the county of assistance in helping to overcome any issues there?

Mr. Russell Higgins: Strictly on the planning side?

Mr. Brian Saunderson: Yes.

Mr. Russell Higgins: Planning is a bit of a different animal. If you're talking about processing of plans of subdivision, I think that's something that the lower-tier municipalities can do themselves. If you're talking about more master planning exercises such as secondary planning or official planning, then yes, I think assistance at that level would be helpful to them.

1600

Mr. Brian Saunderson: Okay, and that's a good segue into my next question, because you were quite clear in your submissions that you would have Simcoe county take over this large infrastructure project's water and waste water.

Mr. Russell Higgins: Yes, that's correct.

Mr. Brian Saunderson: And that's based not only on your past experiences, because you outlined quite a few for us, but also on your current experiences. And you think, moving forward, there are cost efficiencies, consistencies, certainty, which we've heard about today as well, in having the upper tier handle these large infrastructure projects.

Mr. Russell Higgins: Yes, the problem becomes—and I think every speaker I've heard in the short time I've been on here has alluded to it—where a pipe goes needs to be an engineering decision, not a political decision. And having over one body looking over it, one professional

body of engineers or what have you looking where the pipe should go, and as CAO Everitt said, not duplicating systems, that you're better off building one that's 150% the size of two—it might do the job. It's just a matter of cost efficiency.

And it's other little things. As you say, there are specific instances where you may need some local solutions, some local well points doing—because it's the quickest, easiest and will bring housing on the fastest, but that decision should be made by the upper-tier municipality, not by the lower-tier municipality acting in its own interest of just its stakeholders. It really has to be looked at on a regional basis.

Mr. Brian Saunderson: And it's interesting to me, in Simcoe county, we've seen some of this large-infrastructure-project-sharing happen organically. Collingwood has been supplying water to New Tecumseth since the late 1990s. Innisfil is providing water to Bradford West Gwillimbury. Clearview township is sending sewage down to Wasaga Beach. So these things all happen organically, and I think it's happening because of cost efficiencies and stretching the tax dollar.

These large infrastructure—well, any piece of infrastructure is actually owned by the taxpayer; it doesn't matter what level of government controls it, it's a public asset. So, in your opinion, it makes sense, then. This is just continuing the evolution to regionalize the planning of these large infrastructure projects to stretch the tax dollar.

Mr. Russell Higgins: Yes, and I think what you're—I don't want to put words in your mouth, but I think what you're saying is smart minds around the table eventually get to the correct solution, as with Stayner sewage going to Wasaga and Collingwood water going to New Tecumseth. The problem is time. When you have to hash out municipal agreements between municipalities, to be quite blunt, with their own political agendas, it drags it out and it becomes difficult, and there's a lot of horse trading.

It would be better if there were someone—and the county government is a government of the local, lower-tier municipalities at the end of the day, so it's not as if it's being imposed from above. But you need an arbitrator who says, "No, guys, this is the way you should do it because it's the best solution for all," and look at the whole picture.

So it would speed things up and these—rather than having these inter-municipal agreements, it would be a county agreement, with the co-operation and the input of all of the lower-tier municipalities whose members sit on county council.

Mr. Brian Saunderson: And as the county motto, it's "For the greater good."

So that segues me into my next question, because the county does have a planning role, and that's been part of the discussion today. In your mind, does it make sense to remove the county's planning role, if you're going to upload these large regional infrastructure projects that are going to require a great deal of planning?

Mr. Russell Higgins: "Yes" is the short answer. The longer answer is, the only difficulty I see with that is the smallest municipalities, when they have to undertake these

large studies, it can be a bit overwhelming for staff. We've seen it. It becomes a time suck for the staff in the lower-tier municipalities, spending all their time on these huge exercises because they only have a limited amount of resources. So they end up farming it out, but even if they give it out to a consulting firm, that firm has to be supervised by the staff at the municipality.

So there might be a role for the county on some of these larger planning exercises, but I think on a day-to-day basis, local planning staff can—it's easier for us to deal with the local planner at the local municipality—say, in a Clearview—than it is to deal on three different files with three different people at a larger municipality, if that makes any sense.

Mr. Brian Saunderson: Okay. Thank you, Mr. Higgins.

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

Mr. Brian Saunderson: Sixty seconds, okay.

I just have a quick question for you: If you were to lift some of these large infrastructure projects from the municipality to the region—for you, it's Grey county and Simcoe county—do you see any reason to play with county boundaries, or can there be cost-sharing interaction, municipal agreements, that would arrange for that to happen?

Ms. Andrea Matrosovs: Thank you. The quick answer is that I don't think there's a need to do any restructuring; there's a need to look at the greatest efficiency. So if we were to upload the infrastructure, but also upload a lot of the planning that could be done—because there's a lot of commonality amongst the nine municipalities, for example, that could be at the county level, and then we can tweak it with our own individual official plans—I think that's the way to do it: to look at the workload and how to reorganize the workload, not the actual structure.

Mr. Brian Saunderson: Okay. Thank you.

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

MPP Burch?

Mr. Jeff Burch: Both very straightforward presentations—thank you for that. I only have one question left for the Town of the Blue Mountains, and that is: When we go back to the Legislature in the fall, what is the one thing that you would like to see from the government that would help you first of all make the planning regime more efficient, which we've talked about, but also the other goal of this committee, which is to look at how to build more homes faster? What's something the provincial government could do that would really help?

Mr. Shawn Everitt: Thank you very much for the question. Be bold. I think one of the things that we've been really trying to do recently at both ROMA and AMO delegations, is to try to bring innovation and creativity. I think there's some work that we can do with the building code. I think there are ways of incentivizing smaller homes. I think the use of municipal community improvement plans and providing funding to those developers who want to do attainable housing by being able to dip into a municipality's community improvement plan—that may mean having other developers who don't want to opt for

the attainable housing to actually fund the community improvement plan. I think that's big.

I think the other thing—this is what we talked about with the Ministry of Infrastructure—was taking a note from the AHSIP project for the broadband Internet, looking at the potential of pre-qualifying engineering firms and construction firms, so we get guaranteed pricing, but you also end up with contractors that are really good, that know the process.

The problem with a municipality is that we are getting hit with really high pricing at construction. I was just recently talking to a few developers, and as a tabletop exercise, they were saying, “If we did that water plant, it would be about 25% to 30% less,” because as a municipality, we are getting nailed at the tendering process.

So trying to look at the pre-qualification of bidders, I think, would be huge for municipalities. And there, again, I think making sure that if there is ever any application being submitted to either the province or the federal government—there should be a check-box that says, “Have you actually looked at the potential of a regional approach?” And if you didn't, you go at the end of the pile. We need to have the level of pressure. From a staff perspective, it is there; we want to look at regional. And I think it's by going through the application processes and forcing the issue to say, “Have you looked at that regional opportunity?” And if you have, then maybe you automatically get to the next round.

Mr. Jeff Burch: And I assume that would also help with the issue we've heard over and over again about how in the time from when a municipality approves a project to the time that you have to pay for it, it increases by 20% or 30% in some cases. I assume that would help address that.

Mr. Shawn Everitt: It would. I would say from a political level, as well, putting the pressures on at a political level locally to actually push projects to get them done—we've got an issue right now where it's taking us 10, 12 years to actually get construction projects done to replace old infrastructure.

I think Mayor Measures had nailed it: You really have to start looking at how we get rid of the NIMBYism, because the NIMBYism is what's really holding us up on construction projects. So again, that boldness, figuring out how to eliminate or lessen the NIMBYism, from the staff perspective, would be hugely welcomed.

Mr. Jeff Burch: The use-it-or-lose-it policy that was brought in, which was supported by both the government and the opposition: Is that something that you think would be useful in terms of—not penalizing developers, but at least for projects that have already used up municipal resources by going through the pipeline, that they have to move on them in a reasonable period of time?

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Mr. Shawn Everitt: Yes, I think the use-it-or-lose-it is necessary—putting sunset clauses and putting the enforcements there where, if you haven't moved on a project, you lose that allocation.

In the Town of the Blue Mountains, we're looking at implementing a new allocation policy for a number of

reasons, but we have some developments that have been on the books for quite some time, that are sitting on that allocation that other developers are going to need in the real near future.

Mr. Jeff Burch: Thank you.

I'll ask Mr. Higgins if he has any comments on those two questions, as well.

Mr. Russell Higgins: With respect to the last one first, we don't have a problem on use-it-or-lose-it or sunset clauses in general.

A lot of the problem from the development end, though, is that quite often we get delayed through no fault of our own. I realize that this is not a discussion of bureaucracy today, but it's probably the biggest single hurdle we face in the development industry—multi-level, overlapping jurisdictions; getting answers out of certain buckets of certain government ministries in a timely fashion. That's probably the biggest driver in terms of delays.

I agree, though, with CAO Everitt, that for someone who just is sitting on their hands and hasn't touched a file in two or three years, yes, maybe that should be revisited and put that allocation where it's needed.

Sorry; could you remind me of your first question?

Mr. Jeff Burch: What is the one thing that you would like to see the government do when we go back to the Legislature in the fall?

Mr. Russell Higgins: I'd like to see you upload sewer and water to the county of Simcoe.

The Chair (Ms. Laurie Scott): To the government side: MPP Byers.

Mr. Rick Byers: Thank you to the presenters.

Mr. Higgins, I think you were on for the outstanding presentation by the town of Innisfil earlier and heard or may be aware of this already—their municipal services corporation, InnServices. I heard you clearly about the regional boundaries, but that municipal services corporation model—is that something that you, as a builder, would support and like to see in other municipalities across the province?

Mr. Russell Higgins: First of all, to clarify, I didn't hear the Innisfil presentation, but I understand the question.

My understanding of municipal services corporations is that the big advantage for municipalities is its off-balance sheet when they do their funding. It doesn't affect the debt load of the municipalities if an independent municipal services corporation is set up. So in certain circumstances, yes, it could be used, but I think a good, dedicated, professional engineering staff or planning staff at an upper-tier municipality can do the job. I would assume it would be more or less the same thing; it would just be under a different employer, as it were. I think there's a place for both in the day-to-day planning of sewer and water—it could be the county or it could be an MSC. An MSC may have the advantage that you don't—as I say, it can be partly privately funded, and the debt it incurs won't necessarily impact the borrowing restrictions that some municipalities have, although in the case of something like the county, that may not be of importance.

Mr. Rick Byers: Thank you.

To the team from the Town of the Blue Mountains: As I've been on committees before, every once in a while, I'll ask a question and I can tell people in the room say, "Shouldn't that guy have known the answer?" So I'm going to do the same right now.

On your comments about workforce housing and rental: Why can't the Town of the Blue Mountains say, "Hey, MacPherson housing, before you're going to build your 10 \$2-million homes, you will build 20 \$400,000 homes in this area or we won't approve you over there," and/or, "You will build 30 rental units or we won't approve you over there"? Can you not do that now to force the outcomes that you and others have been talking about in terms of the type of housing in the community?

Mr. Shawn Everitt: Thank you for the question.

The Town of the Blue Mountains witnessed this in a recent file where the town was asking for a developer to actually build—I think it was eight attainable units within their development, and one of the issues was, when we put that forward, our official plan was a little grey on it. The county's official plan actually wasn't grey and said, "No, we can't ask you to do that."

So again, when we look at the regional planning perspective, getting away from the duplication and trying to have that one regional planning perspective I think would be hugely beneficial because, as a regional, it would allow for—in our case, the Town of the Blue Mountains, meaning Grey county—having nine municipalities that all have the same rules. I hear quite often, "Well, you can do this in Meaford," or, "You can do this in Grey Highlands"—where, if the counties were the hammer on that, then there would be that level of consistency.

At the end of the day, going through an official plan—every municipality would still have its own official plan, but it would be under the guidance of the county's official plan to make sure that there was that consistency. I think that's hugely important. I've seen where some municipalities get played off of others, so having that consistency would be beneficial. And then again, having those changes in an official plan that would be supported by the county and the province and making the ruling that, "Yes, you know what? We're good with that"—you could actually enforce that at the province level. I think it would be a huge step in the right direction.

Mr. Rick Byers: Have you had some of those conversations with Grey county about coordinating and getting consistency?

Mr. Shawn Everitt: We're trying to do as much with the county and our eight other partners at a regional level for a lot of the different services.

I'll tell you one thing from the Blue Mountains perspective, and it goes to the workforce housing: This is my 31st year that I've been with the town, and it used to be about 80% of the staff who worked for the Town of the Blue Mountains lived in the Blue Mountains; we're at about 25% now, because they can't live in the Blue Mountains. So that workforce housing is definitely something that is a huge issue.

Mr. Rick Byers: I'll pass my time to MPP Rae.

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

Mr. Matthew Rae: I defer the remaining time, Chair. We're not going to use it.

The Chair (Ms. Laurie Scott): Okay.

Thank you to the presenters today. That was very good. You are excused, if you wish.

A reminder that the written submission deadline is 7 p.m. tonight, for anyone watching or anyone there.

COMMITTEE BUSINESS

The Chair (Ms. Laurie Scott MPP Burch):

Mr. Jeff Burch: I do have a motion for the committee's consideration, if I can make that now.

The Chair (Ms. Laurie Scott): Yes.

Mr. Jeff Burch: I move that, pursuant to standing order 113:

—the committee conduct a study regarding the closure of the Ontario Science Centre; and

—that the committee meet for public hearings as soon as possible; and

—that the Minister of Infrastructure be invited to appear before the committee; and

—that the minister shall have one hour to make an opening statement, followed by three hours of questions and an-

swers divided into three rounds of 25 minutes for the government members, three rounds of 25 minutes for the official opposition members, and three rounds of 10 minutes for the independent member of the committee; and

—that legislative research provide the committee members with a summary of the hearings as soon as possible; and

—that the committee meet for report-writing no later than 10 sessional days following the hearings; and

—that the subcommittee on committee business be authorized to schedule meeting dates and deadlines.

The Chair (Ms. Laurie Scott): MPP Burch has made a motion.

Members, I have a ruling: The motion is out of order. At this time, the committee cannot consider this motion. The Standing Committee on Heritage, Infrastructure and Cultural Policy is only authorized to meet during the summer adjournment to consider the study on regional government pursuant to standing order 120(d) and to consider the 2024-25 estimates pursuant to an order of the House dated June 6, 2024.

Mr. Jeff Burch: We are disappointed that Ontarians won't get the answers they deserve from the Minister of Infrastructure.

The Chair (Ms. Laurie Scott): Thank you very much. There's no debate on my ruling, so I declare the committee is now adjourned.

The committee adjourned at 1619.

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