

Legislative
Assembly
of Ontario



Assemblée
législative
de l'Ontario

**Official Report
of Debates
(Hansard)**

HE-43

**Journal
des débats
(Hansard)**

HE-43

**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
Friday 12 January 2024

1^{re} session
43^e législature
Vendredi 12 janvier 2024

Chair: Laurie Scott
Clerk: Isaiah Thorning

Présidente : Laurie Scott
Greffier : Isaiah Thorning

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House Publications and Language Services
Room 500, West Wing, Legislative Building
111 Wellesley Street West, Queen's Park
Toronto ON M7A 1A2
Telephone 416-325-7400; fax 416-325-7430
Published by the Legislative Assembly of Ontario



Service linguistique et des publications parlementaires
Salle 500, aile ouest, Édifice du Parlement
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Toronto ON M7A 1A2
Téléphone, 416-325-7400; télécopieur, 416-325-7430
Publié par l'Assemblée législative de l'Ontario

CONTENTS

Friday 12 January 2024

Regional governance	HE-941
City of Mississauga; Mr. Gurpartap Singh Toor; City of Brampton.....	HE-941
Mr. John Kovac	
Ms. Shari Lichterman	
Mr. Steve Ganesh	
Metamorphosis Network; OPSEU/SEFPO Local 277, Peel Paramedic Union.....	HE-950
Mr. Sean Meagher	
Mr. Dave Wakely	
CARP, Brampton chapter; Indus Community Services	HE-958
Mr. Terry Miller	
Mr. Arvind Krishendeholl	

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**

Friday 12 January 2024

Vendredi 12 janvier 2024

The committee met at 1001 in the Courtyard by Marriott Hotel and Conference Centre, Brampton.

The Clerk of the Committee (Mr. Isaiah Thorning): Good morning, honourable members. In the absence of the Chair and Vice-Chair, it my duty to call upon you to elect an Acting Chair. Are there any nominations? MPP Rae.

Mr. Matthew Rae: Good morning. I'm going to nominate MPP Billy Pang.

The Clerk of the Committee (Mr. Isaiah Thorning): Thank you. MPP Pang, do you accept the nomination?

Mr. Billy Pang: Yes.

The Clerk of the Committee (Mr. Isaiah Thorning): Are there any further nominations? There being no further nominations, I declare nominations closed and MPP Pang elected Acting Chair of the committee.

REGIONAL GOVERNANCE

The Acting Chair (Mr. Billy Pang): Good morning, everyone. The Standing Committee on Heritage, Infrastructure and Cultural Policy will now come to order. We are meeting in the city of Brampton to conduct public hearings on the study on regional governance. We are 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? Thank you very much.

Today's presenters have been scheduled in groups of three for each one-hour 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 4.5 minutes for the independent members of the committee. Are there any questions?

CITY OF MISSISSAUGA

MR. GURPARTAP SINGH TOOR

CITY OF BRAMPTON

The Acting Chair (Mr. Billy Pang): Now I call on the city of Mississauga, and then Gurpartap Singh Toor, and the city of Brampton.

Before your presentation, please say your name for the record.

Mr. John Kovac: Through you, Mr. Acting Chair: John Kovac is my name. I represent the area of ward 4; I'm a city councillor in Mississauga, and I'm also serving as the acting mayor currently. I'm joined by my colleague the city manager of Mississauga, CAO Shari Lichterman, who is here to my right. It's a pleasure, it's a privilege to be here, to be fed, to be welcomed. You've provided drink. You've made it very hospitable. We appreciate that. Thank you. It's a nice, loose and informal setting.

We are here to talk about regional governance, Mississauga's position on its future, and to provide recommendations, if you'll have them, to this committee about what we see as the path forward. I want to state at the outset that nothing that we do say today is a reflection in any way on the men and women who work at the region of Peel and consistently deliver high-quality, critical services to residents. We thank them so very much for their hard work and dedication to the residents of Peel; in particular, to Mississauga residents.

We are here today to talk about the structure of regional governance and to assist the province in its goals of making municipal government more efficient and responsive to the needs of taxpayers as well as meeting and exceeding the province's housing targets. Of course, the ambitious but—I still need help. I'm the acting mayor. I need help working a microphone. That's okay. We do still believe that an independent, single-tier Mississauga is the best way to do this. We remain as supportive of the Hazel McCallion Act today as we were back in June 2023, when it was passed into law. Mississauga is able to stand on its own two feet and deliver all municipal services, just like so many other single-tier municipalities do across Ontario—I believe there are over 130 in Ontario that are single-tier. Brampton, we know, can do the same, and all three Peel municipalities have spent the last several months preparing for this change. Hazel McCallion knew that we could do it, which is why it was so fitting that Bill 112 was named after her.

With this said, we understand the decision of the government on December 13 to pull back from a full dissolution and instead to focus on a revised mandate to move certain services like roads and planning to the lower-tier governments. We see this as a positive step forward, and we will continue to work with the transition board, just as

we have been since it was appointed, to make this transition as seamless as possible. Mississauga sees this as phase 1 of a larger process and an excellent opportunity to gather data, develop real plans and, for the first time since the discussion of dissolution began over two decades ago, collect verifiable data.

We have always advocated for fairness for all taxpayers and residents. One municipality cannot benefit at the expense of others. However, all taxpayers, including those in Mississauga, must be treated fairly. The regional model in Ontario is now over 50 years old—in fact, we're going to be celebrating 50 years this year. I'm sure my colleagues from the province, MPP Kusendova-Bashta and MPP Sheref Sabawy, feel very excited about that fact. It's going to be a celebratory year for us, but it's time, we feel, for a full review to ensure that it is working for all taxpayers.

I will now turn it over to my colleague CAO Lichterman. Thank you for indulging myself.

Ms. Shari Lichterman: Thank you, Acting Mayor Kovac, and thank you to the committee for having us here today. As he said, my name is Shari Lichterman, and I'm the city manager and chief administrative officer at the city of Mississauga.

Mississauga has been at the table for every meeting of the Peel transition board, and we'll continue to work with them and our partners at the region of Peel, the city of Brampton and the town of Caledon to realize the government's new objectives.

We've been working on a fair deal for all municipalities, one that would see all municipal services delivered at the local level, but we understand the government's change of course on December 13, and we are committed to working co-operatively to move at least some service areas to the lower tiers. We're confident that we can deliver those services efficiently and effectively, as we do with all of our services, and we're also confident that having more control over water and waste water servicing, roads, waste management and land use planning will help us achieve our housing targets, as we've set out in our city's Growing Mississauga housing plan.

We have long advocated that Mississauga has outgrown the regional model of government and that duplication has slowed down our work. We need to eliminate the red tape and the bureaucracy of two levels of government. That will allow us to get on with realizing our goals around housing and growth. So as this government and as this committee is seeking feedback on regional governance, we do have some recommendations for your consideration.

The first is to support and acknowledge the work of the Peel transition board. For the first time, we are developing verifiable data sets and workable solutions on service delivery and transfer to the local tiers. You have a provincially appointed group of independent experts who can provide good advice on this to the government.

1010

The second recommendation is to be public and transparent with the data that's collected and the work that's done through this process. While the transition board has

been doing very good work for the last several months with its municipal partners, there has—

The Acting Chair (Mr. Billy Pang): Thirty seconds.

Ms. Shari Lichterman: Sorry?

The Acting Chair (Mr. Billy Pang): You have 30 seconds.

Ms. Shari Lichterman: Oh, okay. There has been a lack of transparency beyond the working groups which has led to some concerns and allowed certain facts to be circulated publicly that aren't accurate.

We couldn't agree more that there's duplication between the regional and the lower-tier governments that needs to be eliminated—

The Acting Chair (Mr. Billy Pang): Thank you very much for your presentation.

May I invite Mr. Gurpartap Singh Toor for your presentation. Please say your name for the record.

Mr. Gurpartap Singh Toor: Thank you. Good morning, Mr. Chair. My name is Gurpartap Singh Toor. I'm a regional councillor for wards 9 and 10 with the city of Brampton. Welcome to what I believe is the best city in Canada. A special good morning to my provincial counterparts, MPP Sandhu and MPP Grewal.

As I begin, I would like to say that Brampton is one of the fastest-growing municipalities in Canada, and when we look at the top 25 largest cities in Canada, we are the fastest-growing city.

We've been working with the province to identify and address duplication and eliminate red tape and redundancies across the city to streamline approval processes and service delivery. The city has consistently advocated for a regional governance model that enables Brampton to grow with all the tools necessary to realize our full potential by delivering strong value for the investments taxpayers make in our city.

Over the last several months, we have identified the most pressing concerns for Brampton related to dissolution, including regional servicing to support growth and economic development, emergency services like the paramedics and policing, local shelters and long-term care. The current governance structure does not provide Brampton with sufficient votes on Peel regional council to ensure adequate and much-needed servicing infrastructure to support and enable growth and development.

Brampton has consistently advocated and called for representation by population, which would reflect the rapid growth and the need for servicing we are experiencing. Like I said when I began my remarks, Brampton is one of the fastest-growing cities in Canada, but also the fastest-growing city when you look at the top 25 cities. And very soon in the future, we will be surpassing our population compared to the city of Mississauga.

It is crucial to ensure the regional governance review does not negatively impact regionally delivered emergency services and other critical social and wraparound services. These are services that our residents and businesses rely upon, and they are critical to our growth and development.

We are focused on ensuring no financial cost or added tax burden is placed on our residents because of the regional governance review. Brampton is aligned with the province in ensuring the regional governance review should not risk and negatively impact the stewardship of assets and services offered to our residents, including essential and critical emergency services.

While the city of Brampton did not advocate for the dissolution of regional government and we have identified clear financial risks in the full dissolution of Peel region, the city continues to be supportive of addressing duplication and redundancies to ensure we deliver the best possible value to our residents.

We have been working to identify services such as land use planning, servicing to support growth or roads that would benefit from being solely municipal responsibilities. The city remains committed to working closely with the province and on a path forward that is in the best interests of taxpayers in Brampton and across the region of Peel. Thank you.

The Acting Chair (Mr. Billy Pang): Our next presenter will be the city of Brampton. You have seven minutes for your presentation. Please introduce yourself for the record.

Mr. Steve Ganesh: Good morning and happy new year. Thank you for this opportunity to speak with you today. My name is Steve Ganesh and I'm the commissioner of planning, building and growth management at the city of Brampton. I'm here today to speak to you about the regional governance review at the region of Peel and its impacts and implications to the city of Brampton, its residents and businesses.

Over the years, Brampton has been a reliable partner for the province to build housing, develop improved local and regional connections and to move people as we grow our economy. For the past several months, Brampton has been committed to working closely with the transition board and all affected parties on a path forward that meets the best interests of our taxpayers in Brampton and across the entire region of Peel.

Since the introduction of Bill 112, we have consistently advocated for a regional governance model that ensures Brampton has all the tools necessary to realize our full potential by enabling growth, supporting economic development and delivering strong value for the investments and taxpayers that make our city a great one.

We recognize the region of Peel has a role to play in delivering municipal services. However, we also acknowledge the need to address duplication and eliminate red tape and redundancies. Brampton has a long-standing track record of doing that, and in fact, in recent years, we've seen a 5% reduction in approval times of our applications, to build homes faster. Once our program is fully implemented, these reductions will result in a nearly 25% reduction in development application approval timelines.

Further, while there are clear financial risks in the full dissolution of the region, there are opportunities to achieve an enhanced level of service, reduce red tape and provide value for taxpayers. Examples where benefits can be gained

include land use planning, development servicing such as water and waste water provision, and transportation. These are significant areas that play a role in Brampton achieving and supporting the province's goal of building 1.5 million homes by 2031. Brampton's contribution to this target is 113,000 new homes.

Land use planning, as you may know, is currently delivered by both the regional and lower-tier municipalities. Opportunities exist to reduce overlap, find efficiencies and enhance service delivery.

On November 1, 2023, Brampton council endorsed a new official plan that positions Brampton to continue growth and be open for business. Currently, because of the two-tier system, the new official plan is being held up by our upper-tier municipality, which slows down the expeditious development of applications for new homes and businesses in the city. By removing the upper-tier level of government at the region for land use planning, we'll be able to create autonomy for the city of Brampton to deliver the vision as espoused by council and aspired to by the residents and businesses.

With respect to services like water and waste water, Brampton needs to ensure that there is adequate servicing to enable development and major infrastructure decisions to maximize the benefits and meet the needs of the community. This can be realized along a lot of our key corridors, like the Queen Street corridor, where the province continues to invest in transit. We want to support that investment.

Other examples of shortcomings in the lack of adequate water and waste water infrastructure in our city to enable development are those in our key employment areas, where we have a number of employment applications that are held up because of the duplication and inability to coordinate with two levels of government. By having a service delivery model for water and waste water with more control by the city of Brampton, it will allow for the expeditious approval of these development applications.

Roads, as well, provide the structure of well-planned cities, and roads are the backbone of well-planned cities. Similar efficiencies can be found in the delivery and maintenance of our roads. There are approximately 700 kilometres of regional roads in Brampton, and dual ownership of the roadways between the city and the region results in duplication and administration inconsistencies related to servicing and maintenance.

Furthermore, should Brampton assume regionally owned roads and become the sole operator of all services and maintenance of road infrastructure, a number of efficiencies would be possible. Additionally, from a development perspective, single road ownership could result in more streamlined and consistent processes with respect to the review and approval of site plan applications. Single road ownership would ensure a consistency of services and service levels, especially for winter operations, and allow for an optimal approach in coordinating road closures associated with construction projects.

The city supports efforts for streamlining approvals. The current work around regional governance is a path forward to do that.

In conclusion, Brampton recognizes the value of regional government, but we also see opportunities to achieve enhanced levels of service, reduce red tape and provide value for taxpayers. At this stage in Brampton's evolution and growth, having more autonomy over services that are key to growing and building the city that our council and residents deserve is critical for the city. We are optimistic and committed to working with the government and all involved parties to ensure that the governance model in Peel ultimately delivers the best value for our residents and ensures Brampton has the necessary tools to grow and prosper.

1020

On behalf of the city of Brampton and as a long-term resident who has lived in Brampton for more than 40 years, I appreciate the opportunity to address this committee today and share this perspective with you.

The Acting Chair (Mr. Billy Pang): Thank you for the presentations. This round of questions will start with the official opposition. Mr. Rakocevic.

Mr. Tom Rakocevic: Happy new year, everybody. I wish you all the best in 2024. It's a pleasure to be here.

First off, I want to thank the acting mayor of Mississauga. It's really important to the process to have important officials from the regions themselves come out. I really appreciate having an acting mayor come. Acting Mayor Kovac, this is now the second time that I've met you. We met over the summer, and it was a real pleasure to speak to you at the time. Congratulations on the appointment.

The theme here is duplication, and I might ask you to duplicate some answers from what you have been saying already. What we have here is a group from Mississauga that are saying that they favour and they want the dissolution, yes? To become a completely independent municipality. The group representing Brampton are saying—and I'm asking, perhaps, to duplicate again—that there are elements of the dissolution that are beneficial, but overall, you would like it to remain as a region. Is that a correct understanding?

Mr. John Kovac: That is correct.

Mr. Tom Rakocevic: Yes?

Mr. John Kovac: Through the Chair: That is correct.

Mr. Tom Rakocevic: Okay. First off, I'd like to, in the short time—Ms. Shari Lichterman was rushed at a certain point, and she had a number of recommendations. Did you get through all of your recommendations? I'm happy to allow you to expand on that if you have not.

Ms. Shari Lichterman: Thank you. Through the Chair: No, I didn't get through all of them. I'm not sure if our seven minutes was combined instead of separate—

Mr. Tom Rakocevic: No problem, so just—

Ms. Shari Lichterman: My apologies if we—but the recommendations really that I didn't get a chance to speak about were to use the work that we're doing with the transition board that is still going on relating to some of the services that both of us have talked about and to use that as a guide for a review of the other regions in the province. You have this independent board that is now doing work with consultants in partnership with the municipalities.

That's a great opportunity to see the output of that work and apply that, potentially, to other regions. So that was one recommendation.

The other recommendation, really, is to engage in direct consultation with the lower-tier municipalities so that more of us can provide feedback to this committee and to the government. Certainly, two cities the size of Brampton and Mississauga, for example, approaching a million people in the next decade, really should be able to have a say in the services that those cities deliver. So being able to consult directly with those affected municipalities is a strong recommendation.

Those were the main things that I didn't get to. Thank you for giving me that opportunity.

Mr. Tom Rakocevic: How much time for this one round?

The Acting Chair (Mr. Billy Pang): Four and a half minutes.

Mr. Tom Rakocevic: Okay. I would ask either the Peel regional councillor or the representative from Brampton to answer. With regard to what we've just heard as to some of the reasons as to why dissolution would make sense, can you tell us some of the benefits for the regional model, as it exists right now, for the city of Brampton?

Mr. Gurpartap Singh Toor: Sure, I'm happy to speak on that. Currently, under the regional government, I know we focus a lot on planning and the roads and the tangibles that we see, but then you have Peel housing and the social support services around that that we see that are working with this model. All cities, right now, are facing the similar issues of—when we talk about homelessness, the region of Peel, having advocated for that very recently from the federal government, did receive funding to get more shelters in place to house more people in place. For a lot of people who come to Canada, they come through the doors at Toronto Pearson airport, and because of that, we see a large influx of population in Mississauga and in Brampton, and we're one of the first cities to always welcome people from all parts of the world. So having those support services being shared amongst the two cities and the region at large has definitely been beneficial.

Like I mentioned in my remarks earlier, as well, our emergency services with paramedics and policing—that has been a model that has worked so far, and we hope that continues that way.

Mr. Tom Rakocevic: Mr. Ganesh, did you have anything to add to that?

Mr. Steve Ganesh: Through the Chair: No. Councillor Toor summed it up quite well.

Mr. Tom Rakocevic: So where the issues remain is the ability to have self-determination, I guess. If I understand, when you were saying it was duplicate—also, there were other elements, actually, I did want to ask Mr. Ganesh to speak about. You mentioned that waiting on approvals from the higher-level region can delay construction at times, or building. Can you give an example of where this occurs or has occurred?

Mr. Steve Ganesh: Through the Chair: Excellent question. Right now, the land use planning system at the region of Peel suggests that when a development application

comes into the local municipality—in this case, the city of Brampton—it requires both approval by my staff and then staff at the region. We've done some calculations and, on average, it's about a 90-day delay time in waiting for comments from the region on an application; that's about three months. Compare that to some of the new legislation that the province has put forth that municipalities have to adhere to through bill—I believe it's Bill 109—timelines to expedite development. That 90-day delay period can really impact our ability to expedite development in a timely manner and, in some cases, have an unintended consequence of disincentivizing investment in the city to reach our economic and employment goals.

Mr. Tom Rakocevic: I understand that, and I can imagine how that can be frustrating.

Under the current system, there are certain essential services and essential needs that you need to provide that—through the region, you're able to cost-share and assist one another with regard to that. At the same time, you're wanting that form of assistance, but you're not wanting any need for approval by the region itself when it comes to certain things.

Mr. Steve Ganesh: Through the Chair: Just to follow up on that, I would say that when it comes to matters of land use planning, city planning is best left at cities. Brampton's position is that we want more autonomy to be able to control our own destiny with land use decisions.

The Acting Chair (Mr. Billy Pang): You have 30 seconds.

Mr. Tom Rakocevic: Okay. I'll wait till the next round.

The Acting Chair (Mr. Billy Pang): Now the turn goes to our independent member. MPP McMahon.

Ms. Mary-Margaret McMahon: Good morning, everyone. It's going to be speed questioning because I have half the time for you. Thank you very much for coming in. Happy new year. It's great to be in, I guess, the most beautiful city in the universe—but I heard that from Burlington's mayor yesterday, so you're going to have to battle that title out.

Just following up on my colleague's question, because this has come up before, what we're hearing is municipalities are thrilled that the planning process has been essentially downloaded for approvals to the local level, except there's still a little bit of tweaking, and I think that's what you're intimating, and this 90-day delay is concerning. So what is the final thing that needs to be—you want full autonomy on the planning process, so what's the extra little tweaking that needs to be done, specifically?

Mr. Steve Ganesh: Through the Chair, I would say that Bill 23, if I recall—by de facto, it eliminates the upper-tier role in regional planning. The full regulations to implement that have yet to be released, so the tweak needs to be those regulations for the municipalities to have the full autonomy, and Brampton anxiously awaits that.

Ms. Mary-Margaret McMahon: Emphasis on the “anxiously,” right?

Mr. Steve Ganesh: Through the Chair: correct.

Ms. Mary-Margaret McMahon: Thank you, yes. That's fabulous. Okay, and so while we're speaking of housing, how is it going in Brampton with your housing starts?

1030

Mr. Steve Ganesh: Through the Chair: Now that Minister Calandra has signalled to municipalities that long-term-care beds and ARUs can be considered in our housing targets, Brampton is well on its way to meeting our housing target. I believe the last data set I saw, close to year-end 2023, we were approaching the 97th percentile marker of meeting our first-year targets, with the inclusion of traditional housing starts and ARUs, additional residential units.

Ms. Mary-Margaret McMahon: Okay, great—even though I disagree on counting long-term-care beds as homes, but that's another issue.

Yesterday we heard in Burlington that there's a holdup at the land tribunal, so that holds up some housing units, and that developers are not coming in to get to their site plans—there's a holdup for that—and that some developers aren't coming in to get their—they have their approvals, but they're not getting their building permits, so there's a holdup for that. I think those were essentially the key holdups. Are you experiencing that at all with your numbers?

Mr. Steve Ganesh: Through the Chair: In terms of holdups at the OLT, I would probably allude to that as more of a backlog in terms of overall case management.

With respect to your latter question around approvals where the developers have yet to pull permits, we have witnessed close to 10,000 residential units that we've approved in our development pipeline where the developer has yet to pull permits. I understand the province is looking at a use-it-or-lose-it type of sunset clause, which I think will underscore the need for the industry to continue to work with the province and the municipalities to pull permits where approvals have been in place so we can all meet our housing targets.

Ms. Mary-Margaret McMahon: That's great, and I'm hearing that too. But do you think there are improvements for the land tribunal with the backlog, addressing that?

Mr. Steve Ganesh: Through the Chair, I would say that perhaps more criteria could be used in the scrutiny of the types of applications that come before the land tribunal to differentiate—

The Acting Chair (Mr. Billy Pang): Thirty seconds.

Mr. Steve Ganesh:—those that are vexatious in nature, so from your typical NIMBYism, versus those that are aligned with the outcomes of the province and Brampton's council to build more homes and complete communities.

Ms. Mary-Margaret McMahon: That's awesome, and it's awesome to see the four of you at the table together not at each other's throats, as what we hear in the media. You seem to be working convivially here today. Thanks.

The Acting Chair (Mr. Billy Pang): This round: MPP Rae.

Mr. Matthew Rae: Thank you to the presenters. It's lovely to be in Brampton today and driving through, obviously, Mississauga to get here, but it's wonderful to be

here. I can't really speak to everyone on the committee, but I found it very beneficial this week. We were in St. Catharines, we were in Halton, Burlington yesterday and now, obviously, in Peel today, and next week we're doing three other regions. The minister asked the standing committee, obviously, as you know, to look at regional governance in seven regions across Ontario, the fastest-growing municipalities, and really focusing on how, as a committee, we can recommend to him potential solutions to ensure that we get more homes built. Housing-enabling infrastructure has also come up already today, and ensuring that the services that are provided to the taxpayers—and I like to tell people there's only one taxpayer in Ontario—are provided in an efficient and effective manner.

We've heard a lot of things over the week and even this morning, and we'll hear from the presenters later today. I'm actually going to build off of my Liberal colleague's questioning and some of her remarks.

It came up often in your presentations—around red tape and needing to reduce that. Our government obviously agrees with the need to reduce red tape to ensure that more homes get built. In fact, as you've alluded to already, we've introduced a lot of legislation over the past five-plus years since forming government—Bill 23 obviously comes up. As the representative from the city of Brampton mentioned, many have asked that the minister proclaim those regulations for Bill 23 and provide the planning authority to lower tiers. The minister is hearing that, and I know they are working on that in the ministry. Obviously, in Bill 23—planning authority was one of it.

I want to ask both Mississauga and Brampton, has the removal of unnecessary appeals around site plan minor variances—I know we were talking about the OLT, but we already removed some of those appeals that an individual could make. Has that been beneficial to ensuring that those housing starts continue to move forward?

The city of Mississauga first.

Ms. Shari Lichterman: Thank you for the question. Through the Chair: Yes, some of those improvements have definitely had an impact. They came at a time when development and the housing market have slowed down to some extent because of high interest rates, the supply chain, so we're not seeing as many applications in recent months, since Bill 23 was enacted. But from what we are seeing, yes, anything that can be done to streamline, particularly those that get escalated to the OLT, is of benefit. We're definitely seeing some improvement.

Mr. Matthew Rae: And the city of Brampton?

Mr. Steve Ganesh: Through the Chair: Likewise, we're seeing some of the same improvements. I would, again, just echo that those improvements, or the signal to those improvements, have indicated to those who would typically appeal that they ought to think twice about doing so, so that municipalities can build more homes quicker.

Mr. Matthew Rae: My follow-up question to both Mississauga and Brampton: Do you believe that we should look at potentially removing third-party appeals?

Ms. Shari Lichterman: Through the Chair: Certainly, I think, at minimum, they should be limited or scoped to very specific—I guess, a stake in the project, as opposed to, as I think my colleague from Brampton called it, your typical NIMBYism, just objecting to a project. So, yes, I think that should be looked at.

Mr. Steve Ganesh: Through the Chair: Likewise. It would be more of a criteria-based approach for third-party appeals rather than a universal approach.

Mr. Matthew Rae: My final question before I turn it to my colleague: The city of Brampton already brought up, and it also came up earlier this week in Niagara—around a use-it-or-lose-it policy. I'll start with the city of Mississauga because I kind of know how Brampton is going to answer. Would the city of Mississauga support a use-it-or-lose-it policy?

Ms. Shari Lichterman: Through the Chair: Absolutely. We've been advocating for that. We have tens of thousands of units that have been approved where the permit has not been pulled in Mississauga. It's a very lengthy process on both sides to get development approved, so once it does get approved, of course we want to do everything we can to see that move forward. I think with the right criteria in place, we need to find a way to ensure that these developers are actually pulling the permits and putting shovels in the ground to start building, so that it's not just about speculation and driving up the land cost to then transfer it to a new owner.

Mr. Steve Ganesh: Through the Chair: Very much likewise. We would support that type of legislation sooner rather than later, not only to increase the supply of housing, but to really create complete communities, which ladders up to where the province and Brampton's council wants to go.

Mr. Matthew Rae: I defer my time to MPP Sabawy.

The Acting Chair (Mr. Billy Pang): MPP Sabawy.

Mr. Sheref Sabawy: Thanks to the city of Mississauga, the city of Brampton and the region for the informative information you passed to us.

Just following my colleague's questions about Bill 23: As we are trying as a government to continue pushing to accelerate and shorten the cycle of the developer-to-consumer cycle—I'll direct my questions to Mississauga. I have a couple of questions, so please make it as short as you can so that we can use the time. Are you aware of something called the DARC committee?

Mr. John Kovac: Of course, yes.

Mr. Sheref Sabawy: The DARC committee is prior to the developer applying for the permit, and there's no limitation—this is outside the scope of Bill 23 because the application is not filed. So basically, it's not on the records at all. It's not on the radar of Bill 23. Can you confirm that?

Mr. John Kovac: I'll let the CAO actually give that a try.

Ms. Shari Lichterman: I just want to clarify your question: You're asking about the purpose of the DARC committee? Or are you suggesting it's a barrier? I didn't quite—

Mr. Sheref Sabawy: It's not covered by Bill 23 because the application is not filed.

Ms. Shari Lichterman: That's correct. It is really—

Mr. Sheref Sabawy: So technically speaking, there is no time limit on this. It could be DARC 1, DARC 2, DARC 3, DARC 4; one year, two years, five months.

The Acting Chair (Mr. Billy Pang): Thirty seconds.

Ms. Shari Lichterman: Yes. Through the Chair: The purpose of it, though, is to give developers the information they need so that when they submit an application, it's complete and can be moved quickly through the process. For a lot of developers who aren't used to developing a large project, this allows them to meet with staff and get direction and feedback on how to properly submit their application. But it is outside of Bill 23; you're correct.

1040

Mr. Sheref Sabawy: Yes, but you understand that this is kind of—

The Acting Chair (Mr. Billy Pang): Thank you very much.

Let's start the next round of questions. We'll start with the official opposition. MPP Rakocevic.

Mr. Tom Rakocevic: I'd like to begin my next and final series of questions with regard to the dissolution itself—rather, around the news about the dissolution. At the beginning of the acting mayor's presentation, he had mentioned that talk about dissolution has been going on for about 20 years. When the dissolution was announced in the media and everybody heard about the regional dissolution, how far in advance of that announcement did you as an acting mayor and the city manager know that it was imminent?

Mr. John Kovac: Thank you, MPP. I can just say, as one member of council, that I was not given a heads-up of any kind that that type of an announcement would be made, so if I was to answer very clearly and honestly, it did catch me off guard. To speak for other members, I would just say it seemed as though my colleagues, as well, were caught off guard by that announcement on the 13th that you're referring to.

Mr. Tom Rakocevic: And the city manager: May I ask? Were you aware of the dissolution before it was announced in the media, when all of us learned that it was imminent?

Ms. Shari Lichterman: Through the Chair: This was the June announcement about dissolution you're speaking about?

Mr. Tom Rakocevic: Yes.

Ms. Shari Lichterman: No. I believe the mayor spoke to the Premier shortly before the announcement, but we were not involved in the preparations or the advance work on that announcement.

Mr. Tom Rakocevic: Right.

To the acting mayor: Thank you very much for that. So, essentially, it took you off guard. How many councillors are there in Mississauga?

Mr. John Kovac: There are 11 councillors.

Mr. Tom Rakocevic: Eleven councillors.

Mr. John Kovac: With the mayor, a team of 12.

Mr. Tom Rakocevic: Right. And you are the highest level of elected representatives at the municipality. You are obviously very, very important decision-makers, and a decision affecting the future of your municipality at that magnitude—it's rhetorical; I won't ask you to answer that, but you'd probably expect to have known about this coming, not probably finding out about it on CP24. Yes, you've stated it.

I'd like to move on to the regional councillor. How far before the announcement of the dissolution—which would obviously have a big effect on you personally—did you know about it?

Mr. Gurpartap Singh Toor: I believe we learned about it the night before the announcement, because the minister had invited the three mayors to join them at a press conference at Queen's Park—so not the contents of the announcement but knowing that an announcement would be imminent.

Mr. Tom Rakocevic: Okay.

Mr. Ganesh, you are not the city manager, of course. You're the manager, essentially, for planning in the region, in Brampton?

Mr. Steve Ganesh: Right.

Mr. Tom Rakocevic: You are the commissioner of planning, building and growth management, but you're not, obviously, the city manager, so I won't ask you about whether you had heard—but I guess I could. When did you find out about the decision?

Mr. Steve Ganesh: Through the Chair: It was in and around the same time that Councillor Toor alluded to. There was no intimate knowledge as to when certain decisions or the timing of those.

Mr. Tom Rakocevic: All right.

My next question is, when did you find out that the dissolution was probably not going to happen? How far in advance of that announcement in the news did you find out that it wasn't going to happen?

Mr. John Kovac: It's going to get repetitive. I can give a very similar answer. Again, it caught me by surprise. Now, we're talking very clearly, on December 13, that announcement—I would repeat, similarly, the answer that I had given earlier, that it caught me by surprise.

Mr. Tom Rakocevic: All right. Is it a similar answer for the city manager?

Ms. Shari Lichterman: I received a call from the Deputy Minister of Municipal Affairs and Housing moments before the minister's announcement.

Mr. Tom Rakocevic: Regional councillor?

Mr. Gurpartap Singh Toor: I would say that when the announcement happened, we were pleasantly surprised that it happened and the outcome of it.

Mr. Tom Rakocevic: Mr. Ganesh, similar?

Mr. Steve Ganesh: Through the Chair: Same thing, through the media outlets.

Mr. Tom Rakocevic: All right. The structure of the committee doesn't allow me to ask government members anything, but I'm sure if I did ask, you probably would have a similar timeline.

Is it easy to do your job as elected representatives—at least two of you here—managers, high-level city staff officials, and does it seem, perhaps, prudent or the best way forward to have such an important decision on the future of a region happen and what appears to have so little consultation with anyone—not the mayor, because I heard now that the mayors were notified literally the day before the announcement, nor the highest-level city officials. I don't want to put anyone on the spot, so how can I ask this in a very nice and gentlemanly way? Does that make your job easier—how about that—finding out that way?

Mr. John Kovac: Thank you very much, MPP Rakocevic, for the question. I would say our support for dissolution has been ongoing for many years. We had believed in the work of the transition board. We had the belief that that would go very smoothly, and by all accounts, it has been.

I guess if I was to answer that, I would say, while there was a little bit of surprise, there were some positive aspects to the announcement. I would say, as one member of council, I still believe in the work that can be done by this transition board made up of experts that were provincially appointed. I believe that they hope to continue to be allowed to do this work, as I know they can do a good job, and help us mine and provide some more of the verifiable data that we're looking for.

Mr. Tom Rakocevic: Okay, thank you for that. I know that these are difficult questions. I can understand that if you support dissolution, you didn't hear about it, it's happening, it's good news; then it's off the table, it's bad news—in both cases, you didn't know what was happening or not happening. And for Brampton, if dissolution isn't the best idea, it was bad news, then it's good news, but again, you didn't know.

I'm going to leave, so I want to thank you all for speaking—

The Acting Chair (Mr. Billy Pang): Thirty seconds.

Mr. Tom Rakocevic: Thirty seconds? Last question, to the regional councillor: Do we need to fix auto insurance in Brampton?

Mr. Gurpartap Singh Toor: One hundred per cent.

Mr. Tom Rakocevic: A hundred per cent?

Mr. Gurpartap Singh Toor: One hundred per cent.

Mr. Tom Rakocevic: Do you believe that Brampton residents are being overcharged, and do you believe it's the responsibility of the government to do something about it?

Mr. Gurpartap Singh Toor: It's not a belief; it's a fact.

Mr. Tom Rakocevic: Thank you very much for your time. Thank you, everyone, for answering the questions. We really, really, really appreciate all of your important and hard work—

The Acting Chair (Mr. Billy Pang): Thank you.

This turn goes to the independent member. MPP McMahon.

Ms. Mary-Margaret McMahon: I'm going to ask Mississauga about housing first, very quickly, and then I'm going to do a rapid-fire little question quiz at the end.

Okay, so, Mississauga, same thing I asked of Brampton: How's it going with your housing starts and what's the holdup, if any?

Ms. Shari Lichterman: Through the Chair: Housing starts are a figure that changes wildly from month to month. One month we are well below our target, and the next month we're very close. Right now, we are certainly behind on our provincial target, but we do have a council-approved plan to ensure that we have made room and made the plans for the housing that is needed across the city. The barriers really are, number one, that sunset clause and getting developers to get shovels in the ground where they have approvals. Another barrier is regional planning and regional approval of our plans. We are waiting for the region of Peel to approve the plan for our MTSAs, which is critical to advancing dense urban growth across our city.

Ms. Mary-Margaret McMahon: Yes, that's what we heard yesterday, when the Burlington mayor, apparently, was reaching—Burlington has just reached 12% of their targets. Mayor Ward had all the stats and facts and figures of why that is: the holdup at the land tribunal, the developers not coming in and whatnot. There are three sides to every story, and we need to hear every side and get the full picture and the full facts, not just a target number thrown out in the media. So I appreciate that.

Maybe we'll go to a rapid-fire—and it doesn't have to be too, too rapid; just a couple of minutes, though. We'll go around to each person. Maybe we'll start with you, Steve.

So here you are. I think it's fantastic—you're sitting beside each other, you're getting along. You have this transition board, and you've been told one thing and then—completely reversed decision—told another thing and back and forth. So I'm not sure how much faith you have in us and the decision-making and the path forward.

1050

I want to know your level of frustration with the situation, with the transition board, with what's happening, and your level of hope and optimism, so we can end on a good note. But let's get into the nitty-gritty first. Steve?

Mr. Steve Ganesh: Through the Chair: Great question. I would say, first and foremost, Brampton staff continue to work co-operatively with staff from Mississauga and the town of Caledon and the transition board on this body of work. I wouldn't constitute it as a level of frustration, but an area that requires more clarity is a clear indication of the scope of work that the transition board wants to tackle and the parameters of that scope of work so that municipal staff can be calibrated accordingly to help the transition board execute on that.

Ms. Mary-Margaret McMahon: Gurpartap?

Mr. Gurpartap Singh Toor: I would say our level of optimism lies in the fact that we feel that the transition board is doing the work by meeting all of the municipalities and having our staff at the table and listening to the concerns. We've had some really heated debates at the region of Peel table, talking about the essential services and protecting those and especially protecting the jobs that are at the region of Peel. So the level of optimism defin-

itely comes after the last announcement, to see that we're going to have a pragmatic approach, something that works and is not a political promise.

Ms. Mary-Margaret McMahon: And then 15 seconds each for the rest of you; sorry.

Ms. Shari Lichterman: I will say I'm optimistic that we can work very co-operatively on this phase where we're looking to transfer things like roads, planning, the real hard services. We are very much co-operating with our neighbours and optimistic about this next phase.

Ms. Mary-Margaret McMahon: John, bring it home.

Mr. John Kovac: The level of frustration was high, mixed in with a bit of confusion. Residents want transparency; as a member of council, I want that.

I'm optimistic about continued collaboration between the province—

The Acting Chair (Mr. Billy Pang): Thank you.

This round of questioning will go to the government. MPP Kusendova-Bashta.

Ms. Natalia Kusendova-Bashta: It's wonderful to be here in the city of Brampton to talk about regional governance, and it's wonderful to have representatives from the city of Brampton, the region of Peel, as well as my counterpart Acting Mayor Kovac from the city of Mississauga.

I want to start by putting on the record that it has been an absolute privilege of a lifetime to represent Mississauga Centre for the last six years, as a member of the Doug Ford government. We've worked really hard and brought many, many investments to the city of Mississauga and the region of Peel, including building the largest hospital in the history of Ontario in Mississauga, which will include a special tower for women's and children's health. We're building the Hurontario LRT, a \$5-billion investment; Wellbrook Place, which is one of the largest long-term-care facilities, which will be housing over 600 residents at full completion; and many others, including a medical school that's coming to the city of Brampton. So we're very proud of those investments and working hard with my colleagues here at this table.

I think the residents of Peel are very happy with our work, so much so that in the last election, they brought all 12 Progressive Conservative members back into government. So we will continue working hard and making those investments.

Today, I wanted to ask some questions of Mayor Kovac—that sounds pretty good, you know, Mayor Kovac. I did want to ask about, in your opinion, what are the top issues in the city of Mississauga? If you were to talk to our mutual constituents, what would be, like, the top two or three issues that they would bring forward?

Mr. John Kovac: Very good question. Thank you, MPP Kusendova-Bashta, for asking it. To preface, I will say I've enjoyed collaborating with you. Thank you for the work that you do in Mississauga Centre, an area that ward 4 falls within. I do look forward to continuing to work with you.

It's a little bit difficult. If I were to narrow it down to two—it really does depend on the day and the week when

you're talking to residents of my community—I would say that housing comes up, affordable housing, certainly. There's concern about the number of encampments that appear to have popped up in the last several months. People are very worried about those who have had to take shelter in this kind of a way.

I would say when it comes to the services that we provide as a city, people want to ensure that they're provided efficiently. Sometimes, there could be a sense that maybe it's not being done efficiently, so you might want to walk them through exactly how and where that is happening efficiently, and we do believe that in many cases we are doing that. I guess when it comes to why we're here and the whole regional governance aspect, we just want to ensure that we are being as efficient as possible, and going forward, we can get to a point where perhaps we're even more streamlined.

Ms. Natalia Kusendova-Bashta: Thank you.

I would ask the same question to the region of Peel: What would be the top concerns that residents of Peel are bringing forward?

Mr. Gurpartap Singh Toor: Just to clarify, for the record, also city councillor for Brampton. That's always been the disparity there.

The top three issues, if I would say, especially provincially focused: Number one would be health care. We're delayed on our second hospital, no plans for a third one, waiting for a fourth one, hopefully. That has been the biggest frustration. I always field calls about health care in our city.

The second one would be the same issue that we see across Canada: the rise in crime and the need for investments in policing, in finding innovative solutions. I know we will be building a new division in the city of Brampton, but I believe we need continued investments in that.

The third one, definitely, again, is the national issue that we see, housing affordability.

Ms. Natalia Kusendova-Bashta: Thank you. Since both of you brought up housing, I did want to ask Mayor Kovac about Mississauga housing starts. According to our numbers, Mississauga is at 27% of progress meeting the 2023 housing targets. Can you tell us a little bit what are the challenges in Mississauga and why that number is low? And hopefully, we can work together to ensure that that number is 100% in 2024.

Mr. John Kovac: Thank you for the question. Being the city councillor for ward 4, the area, if you can think of Square One Shopping Centre and the surrounding area where there are a lot of condos—I live in this area myself, and I also live in a condo. I have seen so much growth that has happened, and I continue to see it. Where there are delays—and the CAO had kind of mentioned it as well—it's that the market is fluctuating to such a degree where you can feel that. I do speak with members of the development community. You get the sense that they are—not gunshy but wanting to ensure that things get to a point where it's a bit more settled.

I do believe that this is having a strong effect on—you know, they're going all in. We have made many, many, I

would say, advances on this front. We've got unlimited height and density, for example, in the downtown core of Mississauga. We've got 39 cranes currently in Mississauga. I'd like to find another city in Ontario that has this many cranes. So we are building—

Ms. Natalia Kusendova-Bashta: Thank you so much. Sorry, I just want to make sure that there are at least a few minutes for my colleague MPP—sorry about that.

Mr. Amarjot Sandhu: Thank you so much for appearing before the committee, all three presenters—especially my friends, from the city of Brampton, Councillor Toor and Steve Ganesh.

My question is directed to the city of Brampton. You mentioned in your presentation that the city of Brampton is the fastest-growing city in Canada and the most popular destination for new immigrants and new international students.

I would like to thank Mayor Brown and Councillor Toor and the entire council for working together with the province. We have achieved some historic things in the last six years, especially the new hospital, the new medical school, long-term-care homes. So congratulations on that. Also, thank you so much for sharing your feedback on regional governance.

I would assure you that the province is working to ensure that municipalities are prepared to support the future growth and meet the needs of their residents, particularly when it comes to building new housing and housing-enabling infrastructure.

The Acting Chair (Mr. Billy Pang): You have 30 seconds.

Mr. Amarjot Sandhu: Could you please share with the committee, what are some of the current challenges you guys are facing in building new affordable homes?

Mr. Gurpartap Singh Toor: Commissioner Ganesh mentioned it earlier, about introducing a sunset clause. That would really help because the biggest cost factor right now is land cost. It's impossible to buy land in the GTA because of the land values. When someone is sitting with a site plan permit but not pulling the building permit and just flipping the property, that is just escalating those land costs. So that would definitely help, because we can approve homes faster, but we can't really build homes faster—

The Acting Chair (Mr. Billy Pang): Thank you very much.

Thank you to the first group of presenters.

I would like to invite the second group of presenters forward. The first group can be dismissed.

METAMORPHOSIS NETWORK

OPSEU/SEFPO LOCAL 277,
PEEL PARAMEDIC UNION

The Acting Chair (Mr. Billy Pang): The second group will be the Metamorphosis Network and OPSEU/SEFPO Local 277, Peel Paramedic Union.

1100

We will allot seven minutes for an opening statement, followed by 39 minutes of questioning for the witnesses.

Our first presenter will be the Metamorphosis Network. You may start your presentation, and please introduce yourself first.

Mr. Sean Meagher: My name is Sean Meagher. I'm the coordinator of the Metamorphosis Network, which is a coalition of over a hundred non-profit organizations working on the front lines of community service across Peel region and working to ensure that adequate support for vulnerable residents occurs in Mississauga and Brampton and Caledon.

We know from first-hand experience that Peel is in need of real change. We have a crisis in mental health, homelessness and housing, youth services, addiction services, family violence, seniors supports. All of these remain unaddressed in the current situation.

We have a community services sector that is stretched to the breaking point by COVID, poverty, inflation and struggling to manage the growing fire that is in front of us, and the public sector is no less strained.

Let's be clear: We are not facing garden-variety challenges. Peel has, as a fast-growing municipality, been perennially underfunded, and the consequences are significant. These are not small gaps or modest shortfalls. They are significant structural issues driven by shortages of funding, largely from provincial programs.

Let me just give you a few examples. Peel gets less than half as much funding for mental health programs as the Ontario average. We have about half as much access to emergency rooms and primary care. We get 68 cents on the dollar for public health. And we are 36% less well-funded for health care, overall, than the average for the province of Ontario. Peel gets 7% less funding per student for education and 13% less funding per capita for EarlyON programs. Toronto gets 35% more in child care funding per capita and 19% more for children's aid, even though children make up a larger proportion of Peel's population. Peel has half the population of Toronto and about a sixth as much social housing, and it has about a tenth as many shelter beds, even though the poverty rates in Peel are as high as they are in Toronto. And the average housing cost in Peel is now higher than it is in Toronto, and growing faster.

These are significant gaps and what we really want to bring to the attention of the committee is, as you think about structural change, we have to be conscious of the fact that there are no structures that are so efficient that they make up for gaps of this size.

Queen's Park can pick any number of municipal structures for our community. You can choose to dissolve Peel or choose to redistribute services or choose a different option tomorrow. Any structural change that you want to pursue cannot and will not be nearly as important as ensuring that the programs that people rely on are properly funded, and Peel is not. We need fully funded programs. We need coherent, connected programs, and that's a big part of the planning process. But before we even get to talking about structures, we need to talk about adequacy.

These circumstances have not just left service users worse off than people in other parts of Toronto, but it's been hard on local taxpayers. Peel property taxpayers are

left picking up the shortfall that Queen's Park has left. Property taxpayers in Brampton and Mississauga pay as much as 30% more than the average property taxpayer in Toronto or Markham or Vaughan or Oakville. Underfunding necessary programs is bad for everyone.

Now that there is a new deal for Toronto, it's time to talk about a fair deal for Peel, as well. Municipalities need and deserve mature financial and structural relationships with our provincial partners, and we hope this committee is going to recommend that. After all, seven months ago, when the Premier announced Bill 112, he said that he had made a promise to Hazel McCallion to set things right in this community. He had promised that he would make services better than they were before and that he would not leave property taxpayers carrying higher costs. That promise was reiterated last month by the minister. Regardless of the outcome of any kind of restructuring, those promises are worth keeping.

We in the non-profit sector and the public service staff that we work with have invested literally thousands of hours of work reviewing how our systems function during the Bill 112 discussions, examining their strengths and weaknesses and assessing what is needed. We know from that detailed work how badly Peel needs to bring our services up to provincial standards and how critical a solid commitment from the province of Ontario, from Queen's Park, is to that process. The people we serve need to see services in Peel that reflect what everyone else in Ontario enjoys. That means investment from the province that matches what we see in Toronto or York or Ottawa. A plan that ignores that reality—any plan, any structure—will not meet the needs of our community, nor the commitment that the Premier has made.

There are opportunities to do better. We hope that we can take them together.

The Acting Chair (Mr. Billy Pang): Thank you.

This is for our next presenter: Please introduce yourself for the record.

Mr. Dave Wakely: My name is Dave Wakely. I'm the local president of the Peel Paramedic Union, OPSEU/SEFPO Local 277. I work in Peel. I have proudly served Peel region as a paramedic for the past 20 years. I live in Peel. I grew up in Mississauga and I'm now raising my family in Brampton.

Today, I would like to tell you a little bit about the region and about our paramedic service. Much has been made of the government's important and achievable goal of building 1.5 million homes by 2031. It is no secret that we have a housing crisis and efficiencies need to be developed in building the appropriate housing stock.

I am not an expert on how to build houses. But homes aren't just buildings. Homes are the geography of family units. They are places where people live, places where people are born, places where people develop, places where people experience career transitions, places where people get old, and places where people die. Upper-tier municipalities like Peel support the transformation of empty, soulless buildings into homes that are a part of a community. Regions provide services that are critical to the lives of the people that are going to live in those 1.5 million homes.

Prior to birth, Peel offers prenatal counselling. At birth: baby-feeding support programs. Throughout childhood and beyond: vaccinations. Young adulthood: sexual health services. Throughout the ages: food safety, water and waste water, health inspections, housing, supportive housing, TransHelp and paramedic services. Throughout Ontario, in places where there is a two-tier municipal government, most of the services that are essential to the lives of people are delivered by the upper-tier government. Outside of regions and county systems, the vast majority of Ontarians depend on other forms of consolidated municipal service managers to deliver services that people need. These structures lack the ability to coordinate and innovate service delivery and they lack the democratic accountability of regional governments. Regional governments provide economies of scale that enable the provision of important services efficiently and enable those services to be coordinated.

While it may be possible to disentangle the services from the region, the result will be service lapses, while lower tiers attempt to staff up and figure out how to deliver these services. Those lapses could take years. In the case of health, paramedic services and others, these service lapses could mean the difference between life and death.

The government's goal of building 1.5 million homes is winning the Stanley Cup. We are in the first round of the playoffs. Making drastic changes to regional structures that enable the growth of needed services by those homes is the equivalent of firing the entire back office because you're concerned about penalty minutes. Are there changes that could be made to improve efficiency? Yes. Is it worth making those changes to make things more efficient and effective? Yes. Is it worth dissolving regions and figuring out how to try to deliver those same services? No.

Peel is a strong organization that provides excellent value for money. Its large span allows it to harness economies of scale that would not be reproduced by the municipalities of Brampton, Mississauga or Caledon standing alone. In Peel, we have built the strongest, most capable and high-performing paramedic service in the world. From a person's first breath through to their last, our paramedics care for people across their entire lifespan, and our work is literally a matter of life and death.

Through innovative research, community programs and service delivery models, our service is widely recognized as a leader in high-quality pre-hospital emergency medical care, with one of the highest rates of survival from cardiac arrest in North America. Our 900 paramedics are proud to work for Peel region.

In Ontario, there are currently more than 1,000 unfilled paramedic jobs, and the Ontario Association of Paramedic Chiefs is forecasting a deficit of more than 400 paramedics each and every year. Recruiting is hard for Peel paramedic services. Last year, we attempted to hire 100 paramedics, and Peel was only able to hire 68. Creating more municipalities that need to recruit paramedics won't create more paramedics; it will just lead to the same number of paramedics, scheduled less effectively. It will drive demand for paramedics even higher.

The demise of regional government will not build new houses. The people who come to live in those 1.5 million

new houses and the people who already live in regions will need the regional-based services. Other models are not as prevalent and don't allow the same level of coordination and economies of scale as regions do.

1110

Accordingly, I encourage the committee to focus its work on finding efficiencies within existing structures, rather than inflicting instability on services that the people need to live by dissolving upper-tier governments.

The Acting Chair (Mr. Billy Pang): Thank you very much.

This round of questions goes to our official opposition.

Mr. Tom Rakocevic: It's an honour, again, to be here, and I want to thank both presenters for being here today, but also for their really, really important work.

Firstly, Mr. Wakely, I appreciate—you had said that you were 27 years a paramedic, if I understood correctly?

Mr. Dave Wakely: Through you, Chair: 20 years.

Mr. Tom Rakocevic: Twenty years a paramedic—sorry, I aged you there a little bit. I apologize for that. But I really want to thank you for your years of work, for saving lives. Our first responders are literally the salt of the earth, and we really appreciate you.

Mr. Meagher, thank you for all your years of advocacy for the most vulnerable. I wanted to begin with you. I read a little bit about your Metamorphosis Network which you are a part of. I believe 80 service agencies—

Mr. Sean Meagher: We're up over 100 now.

Mr. Tom Rakocevic: Up over and growing. Can you tell us how the network came to fruition, why it came together and a little bit about the network itself and what its aims are?

Mr. Sean Meagher: Absolutely, and just to echo what Mr. Wakely said earlier, when it was announced by the province that there was a plan to dissolve the region of Peel, that generated a great deal of concern because human services in this part of the province are largely delivered through the region. They're the regional service manager for housing; they're the regional service manager for child care. They also fund a lot of the non-profits in Peel region, and so any change there is going to have a big impact.

I need to be very clear: We did not take a position specifically about whether dissolution was a good idea or a bad idea, but our position was very clearly that these services are critical services, and disruption to these services would be harmful to vulnerable people, and so any change that happens needs to be focused entirely on what's good for the people that these services are designed to support.

It took only about a week for the Metamorphosis Network to come together because everyone was so alarmed about change here that didn't seem to have a plan behind it, and the importance of planning. That's part of why we sat down and did the research that I just walked through some of. There are a lot more statistics, and all of them are just as scary, because we felt that change needs to be driven by facts, that policy should be evidence-informed.

So we started pulling the evidence together, and the evidence is really clear that Peel region is struggling not because it has a structural problem; Peel region is struggling

because it has a funding problem. If funded properly, the structures that we have in place today would necessarily do a better job. Are there opportunities to do better? Absolutely. Are there ways that we can continue to tweak and adjust? Absolutely. Our position is that those changes should be driven by people who understand what that means on the front lines, that those changes should not happen at 30,000 feet but that the people who deliver services directly, day-to-day, should be engaged in that change process. That's why the network came together.

Mr. Tom Rakocevic: I can imagine what it might have felt like for the members of the network when the announcement came, like a bolt of lightning out of the sky. I know that there has been discussion around dissolution for many, many years, but of course, it was an idea, but it wasn't anything that seemed to be a large, open, transparent consultative process leading up to it. I know, again, you haven't taken a position against or for, but did the announcement take you by surprise?

Mr. Sean Meagher: We weren't anticipating it at that moment, and I have to say that the thing, I think, that surprised us most was the pace. The period of time available for the dissolution seemed quite short, and I think most people, including members of transition board, have said that. To their credit, the transition board has been very transparent, very open, very engaged with us. They are very clear about the fact they had a very tight time frame, and they needed evidence to be able to make better choices. So we were engaged very actively with them to try to inform those choices.

Now that there is a little bit more breathing room, now that the legislation has been sort of relaxed a little bit to explore other options, we hope it will also be relaxed in terms of time and that the people who are on the front lines, who are delivering service every day in our community, are fully engaged in the conversation to ensure that the structures that serve people are shaped by folks who understand what that service looks like on a day-to-day basis.

Mr. Tom Rakocevic: Thank you for that. How much time do I have, by the way?

The Acting Chair (Mr. Billy Pang): Two and a half minutes.

Mr. Tom Rakocevic: Two and a half? Okay, I'll have another round after that, as well.

We had a delegation from the region as well that just spoke. Two of the people that were at the table you were just sitting at—one was a regional councillor; the other was a commissioner for planning in Brampton. They echoed some of your concerns around dissolution, namely the costs. There are obviously shared costs under the regional model that that would change, and you're actually providing a higher level of detail as to what that actually looks like when those costs and those shared costs are removed, in fact going a little further and speaking about the needs for more support from the provincial government.

Mr. Wakely, could you walk us through a little bit—if dissolution happened like that, tomorrow, what would that mean for paramedic services? What additional cost burden—

how would you be able to do that, considering the challenges you're facing today?

Mr. Dave Wakely: Thank you for your question. Through you, Chair: Given the health human resource crisis that paramedics, along with just about every other health profession, are facing, if we were to have transition tomorrow, I think one of our major challenges wouldn't be an increased cost; it would be the fact that there are no paramedics to spend money on because they would all find other places to work. Paramedics crave stability in their career, if not in their actual work, so that they can go anywhere they want. We ran into a very real problem where paramedics that work for Peel were applying to other services, and it was looking like we were going to lose a massive portion of our workforce because of the instability caused by the potential dissolution. Luckily, we've changed direction on that. So the answer is, I think we'd actually save money because there would be no paramedics to respond to calls, and that would be a tragic event.

Mr. Tom Rakocevic: Yes, that would be terrible, actually. I appreciate you sharing that with us.

And in the—

The Acting Chair (Mr. Billy Pang): Thirty seconds.

Mr. Tom Rakocevic: Okay. Well, I'll go to my next section. I'd like to talk about housing as well in the next block of questions. Thank you so much.

The Acting Chair (Mr. Billy Pang): The independent member, MPP McMahon.

Ms. Mary-Margaret McMahon: Thanks for coming in. I know Sean well from the neighbourhood and city hall and whatnot. Thank you for your long-standing, tireless advocacy. You just pick yourself up, dust yourself off and get back in the game.

To David: I'll start my questions with you. First of all, I'm very impressed with your long-standing career as a paramedic. I can't imagine, although I did do a ride-around way back in the day when I was a Toronto city councillor with some paramedics in an ambulance, and I don't think I've ever been the same since. I can't even fathom what you go through on a daily basis. It's admirable, truly admirable, what paramedics do, so thank you for that.

You're saying that you had 1,000 vacant paramedic jobs and you're trying to recruit, and I'm like, I can't apply because I just don't have the disposition, the demeanour for it—calm, cool and collected. You tried to hire 100 paramedics, but you only were able to hire 68. Can you explain to us why that is?

Mr. Dave Wakely: Yes, thank you. Through you, Chair: In Ontario, paramedic training for entry to practise is two years. So there's a pipeline where people apply to the program and either are successful or not successful. The ones that are successful can go on to write a provincial test, which is like licensure, and then they can get hired to be paramedics in the province.

With the challenges posed by COVID, people left the profession faster than people entered the profession, and faster than we were able to train people to enter the profession. We also recognized that there were some unmet

needs, so there were service enhancements that were put in place to increase the number of paramedics to serve the community, and we haven't been able to keep up with those.

The pay for paramedics is not as competitive as the pay for police and fire, so for those folks that are interested in going into emergency services more generally and don't have a specific focus, they make other choices. We certainly lose some paramedics to the fire service and to the police service because they have early retirement and more competitive compensation.

1120

Ms. Mary-Margaret McMahon: So if we want to actually retain and grow and keep our amazing EMS service, we need to address these ASAP, is what you're saying?

Mr. Dave Wakely: Yes. Through you, Chair—

Ms. Mary-Margaret McMahon: Your wish list.

Mr. Dave Wakely: I think that reviewing the compensation of paramedics would help address the health human resource crisis. One of the things that we talk about a lot is retention pay, so providing pay at the latter part of people's career to get them to stay in the profession. It's something that is across the province for police and fire and doesn't exist in a single paramedic agreement today. So for those paramedics who have been in the profession for 20-plus years, they're making the same amount as somebody who's been there for three years. At a certain point, that doesn't seem fair because of the experience you have and the value you bring, and folks leave.

Ms. Mary-Margaret McMahon: Okay. That's unfortunate.

The other thing that came up in Burlington yesterday: You know how paramedics, when they take someone to the hospital, are required to stay in the hospital, but I think it was in Burlington where they had hired nurses to take over that role so that they could alleviate the paramedics and get them back out on the street.

The Acting Chair (Mr. Billy Pang): Thirty seconds.

Ms. Mary-Margaret McMahon: What do you think of that?

Mr. Dave Wakely: I think it's a great program. The government has provided funding for the off-load delay nursing program, which, in Peel, puts a nurse in all three of our hospitals to allow us to off-load up to four patients, which is extra funding on top of whatever their base bed count is. It allows us to off-load those patients and get clear of the hospital. The problem is, we have two people with one patient. If that patient is of a certain level of seriousness, we have to—

The Acting Chair (Mr. Billy Pang): Thank you.

This round of questions goes to the government. MPP Coe.

Mr. Lorne Coe: Yes, thank you, Chair, and through you to Mr. Wakely: Good morning, sir. How are you?

Mr. Dave Wakely: Good morning, sir. I'm well.

Mr. Lorne Coe: Good, thank you. I served for 13 years on Durham regional council before being elected in 2016 as the MPP for Whitby, so I was a Durham region-based

regional councillor when I did serve. I chaired the health and social service committee for seven years, so I had to defend the budget of the paramedic service and public health every year at regional council—successfully for seven years.

I'm interested in your perspective about what you see as the biggest challenges facing two-tier municipal government structure.

Mr. Dave Wakely: You don't shrink your way to greatness. I think when you create smaller structures, you lose a lot of the efficiencies, you lose opportunities to deliver services on a larger scale. In Peel, we do 130,000 or 140,000 calls a year. That call mix allows us to try things and get results quickly. We're a lead site for research. We've changed the way that cardiac care has been done worldwide, because of our patient population and the diversity of the calls that we do and the volume of calls that we do. When you start splitting up those calls, you lose a certain amount of weight in the data, you lose a certain amount of opportunity that comes with scale. So I think that would be the largest challenge with separating the paramedic service into the lower tiers.

Mr. Lorne Coe: Thank you for that response. I'd like you to reflect a bit and respond on whether there are responsibilities and services that could be modified or combined, moved from one level of local government to another or integrated among existing local governments to support the construction of new homes and the provision of effective local governance. Can you respond to that question, please?

Mr. Dave Wakely: Through you, Chair, when it comes to the delivery of health care, I believe that it needs to be done on a larger scale because there are so many connections to the larger health community: local hospitals, LHINs, other service providers.

Are there opportunities within government to create efficiencies between the two tiers? Absolutely. From what I hear, it involves planning and roads. But that is well out of my bailiwick, and I try to stick to my lane.

Mr. Lorne Coe: Well, of course, some of your members or new members would want to live in affordable housing, so we're here today to discuss affordable housing, amongst other aspects that influence that. That was the basis for my question.

In your earlier responses, you spoke about what you said were efficiencies that exist within the existing structures. I'd like you to provide some examples of what you see those efficiencies to be.

Mr. Dave Wakely: Certainly. Thank you. Through you, Chair: In paramedics, we respond to emergencies. We don't have any control of when those emergencies come in, so we need to maintain a certain level of buffer. Right now, we have a regional buffer. Everything doesn't go bad all at once, so when Mississauga's a little busier, we can move that buffer to Mississauga to ensure that the residents and visitors to Mississauga have adequate paramedic coverage. When Brampton gets a little busier, that buffer moves to Brampton.

If we were to separate the municipalities the way the legislation is currently, we could certainly send ambulances to respond to calls in Mississauga from Brampton, or from

another service, but we don't provide coverage for other services. So that buffer would need to be reproduced in each of whatever the sub-divided services are. Your extra that you carry just in case, everyone now needs to start carrying that just in case, so it drives up your actual front-line staffing needs.

Mr. Lorne Coe: Right. Your response speaks to service delivery at one level. I'd like to hear your suggestions also to improve and enhance service delivery, which would support effective local governance in a two-tiered system.

Mr. Dave Wakely: To enhance service delivery, I think that one of the major things that paramedics is always seeking is in-year funding. Paramedics currently is funded at 50%, but it's of the previous year's expenses. When we talk about growing communities, we know that there's an associated need that comes with the new people that move into a community. As it currently is, the municipality is required to carry the cost of the enhancement for the first year; they carry 100% of that cost, where typically ambulances operate on a 50% cost share. If we could get that in-year funding, it would remove a barrier to growing those services along with the community.

Additionally, I think we need to talk about adding community paramedics to the base funding of paramedicine. It is right now funded through a grant through the Ministry of Health and Long-Term Care. The grant right now goes to 2026, but it's not part of the base funding. We've shown that community paramedicine helps divert some of those heavy users from paramedic services and stops the rapid increase in calls. I think those are two areas that could be enhanced that would help paramedic services cope with new growth.

Mr. Lorne Coe: Well, thank you for that response.

Chair, through you to MPP Rae for further questions, please.

The Acting Chair (Mr. Billy Pang): MPP Rae.

Mr. Matthew Rae: Very briefly, to David: I know you were mentioning you want to stay in your lane, which is understandable. Again, as my other colleagues have mentioned, thank you for your service over 20 years and your continued advocacy on behalf of your members.

I was just wondering, because fire is at the lower tier—obviously, you work with the fire departments locally, as paramedics. We heard in Halton—it was the mayor of Oakville—that they train some of their firefighters to help administer a car accident and be there while your colleagues in Halton can arrive on the scene. I was wondering, if you're able to, would you think it's beneficial to upload fire to the region?

Mr. Dave Wakely: I'm going to say that I'm not an expert in fire service delivery. I'm happy that they respond to our calls, and I think they have a lot of similar challenges that we do, not so much with the funding but with needing to maintain a certain level of infrastructure and service throughout the day.

1130

Mr. Matthew Rae: Thank you.

The Acting Chair (Mr. Billy Pang): We will now go to the official opposition.

Mr. Tom Rakocevic: Thank you, Chair. Saved by the bell, there—wasn't expecting that one.

Interjection.

Mr. Tom Rakocevic: Yes, yes.

I would like to begin again with Mr. Wakely, and then I'm going to talk mostly to Mr. Meagher about housing.

First off, again, I want to acknowledge the important work of our paramedics and first responders. One thing that I know that many face is PTSD. Your job is difficult physically, but certainly emotionally and mentally it is—I can't imagine.

As well, all MPPs have worked together to try to help some of our first responders; for instance, firefighters, who can fall ill from certain chemicals they're exposed to. As we begin to learn more and more, that can lead to things like cancers and whatnot. They deserve the supports.

Since you're here in committee, is there anything we as MPPs should be hearing about a particular type of support that PTSD—it could be that; it could be anything that paramedics might benefit from, not just in your municipality, but paramedics across the province. Is there something that we could be doing more for you, to help you?

Mr. Dave Wakely: Yes, thank you for the question. I think PTSD is an important issue, but it is probably artificially limited. When we talk about presumptive diagnoses and we talk about the impacts of critical incident stress, what we're forgetting is the increased incidences of depression and anxiety. What I see is members who sometimes have trouble getting workplace injuries recognized because they don't have the tag of PTSD.

The presumptive legislation has helped; it's helped a whole lot. It has saved lives, without question. In my perfect world, we'd see an expansion of those presumptive diagnoses to include anxiety and depression that is work-related, because it is such a big problem.

I know the Ontario Association of Chiefs of Police is in the process of lobbying to decrease entitlements under presumptive legislation because it's too expensive. Those are real people with real lives, and I think it's disgraceful.

Mr. Tom Rakocevic: Thank you for that.

I'd like to move on to Mr. Meagher then, and talk about housing, because I think that had a lot to do with what he was speaking about, of course. The government that we've had now for the last five years has spoken quite a bit about housing and the need for housing, but when push comes to shove, it's generally about market-value homes.

What you're discussing is the need for affordable housing, social housing and other forms. I know the government touts itself as having a number of rental starts that have come up, but when \$2,000 rent in Toronto is considered cheap, as an example, certainly there's an incentive for landlords to build because they're charging an arm and a leg, and a lot of people can't afford it. In fact, increasingly, more and more people are becoming unhoused.

I'm sure all of us get phone calls from residents who are struggling and trying to get on an affordable housing list. Can you tell us how important it is—and the fact that the government itself can build affordable housing—why

there's such a desperate need in the GTA, Brampton and everywhere?

Mr. Sean Meagher: Absolutely. I think there are some inescapable facts about housing. One is that in order to have more housing, you need to buy land and hire workers and do construction, and that requires investment. Right now, the private market has been doing a fantastic job of making those investments and building a lot of housing very, very quickly in that higher rental bracket and that higher sale price bracket. They're doing great. They will tell you, as they have told me, that it does not work economically for them to do that for affordable housing, for housing that can be afforded by somebody who is working at minimum wage, somebody who is living on social assistance. They can't make that pencil out without public investment. The math just works that way, and we do not have enough public investment in affordable housing in Peel to make those numbers add up, which is why they are not building that housing.

Sixty-two per cent of the investment in affordable housing in Peel region is coming from the local municipality, from the property tax base. We need investment from the province of Ontario here in Peel to begin to make up that gap. And that 62% that the regional municipality is investing has been coming from development charges that they're no longer permitted to charge, so we will have less investment in affordable housing, not more.

The reason I'm leaning into and underscoring repeatedly the importance of provincial investment is that it's a mathematically necessary part of achieving the goal of building more affordable housing in this region.

Mr. Tom Rakocevic: Thank you for that. I can imagine families, a single mother raising children, perhaps laid off, struggling to pay rent, which is, again, sky-high. And they tune in to Queen's Park and they listen, and they're told that there are a lot of new rental housing starts. Of course, the argument is that you just add supply and eventually everything will even out.

How much time do some of the families have to wait? If it was simply a supply solution when it came to rental and, I don't know, we were able to double the amount of rental units in a short period of time, how short could it be? How much time do some of these families have to wait before they're going to end up unhoused?

Mr. Sean Meagher: Unhoused by the rising rental rates?

Mr. Tom Rakocevic: By the fact that they're struggling to pay the rent, they've lost work, and they can't afford the rent. They look at another rental building, and it's the same rent or higher. Of course, they've been now living a few years in a unit, so relative to other units, it's going to be cheaper. Do families have the time to wait to simply control this through a supply lens, or are there other things the government can be doing to fix the problem?

Mr. Sean Meagher: Well, the supply component has two parts to it, and they're both very, very important. The population of Ontario is growing, which is a great thing, and all of those people will need homes. That's part of what's made Ontario fantastic, that we're a place that houses

people and makes sure that it is a place to grow. There will be some people who can afford homes at market rents, and what's been happening over the last few years has been good for those folks. There are a lot of people—in fact, the majority of people in Ontario cannot now afford on their income a home at market rents. All of those people will need public investment to make that work.

So there's no amount of time—because the answer is never. People who are working at minimum wage will never be able to afford a house at market rents or an apartment at market rents, because those market rents exceed what they can possibly pay and will continue to do so even if they stayed where they are right now. In Peel, they are rising faster—

The Acting Chair (Mr. Billy Pang): Thank you. This round of questions goes to our independent member. MPP McMahon.

Ms. Mary-Margaret McMahon: I'm going to start with some questions for Sean, and then I'm going to do a little rapid fire, because I have a very short time—

Interjection.

Ms. Mary-Margaret McMahon: Yes, it is my favourite. I do it all the time.

All right, Sean: This Metamorphosis Network sounds very interesting, representing over 100 not-for-profits.

Mr. Sean Meagher: Yes.

Ms. Mary-Margaret McMahon: Can you give me an example of some of them?

Mr. Sean Meagher: Sure. It's the full scope of services all across the full geography of Peel. So Caledon Community Services, their executive director is on what we call our leadership team, essentially our board of directors. So is Indus Community Services, which provides long-term care and settlement programs and employment programs in Brampton and Mississauga.

Dixie-Bloor neighbourhood services, their executive director is also on our leadership team. They're a little local neighbourhood house in the classic settlement house model. There are people who focus on health care and mental health care and people who focus on housing. The full scope of community services is represented in that way.

Ms. Mary-Margaret McMahon: Awesome. Thank you.

You were talking about Toronto getting this new deal. We've heard this before from other municipalities: "What about us?" And rightly so. You said Peel needs one.

Mr. Sean Meagher: Yes.

Ms. Mary-Margaret McMahon: What would that look like?

Mr. Sean Meagher: One of the sentences that I've heard from the staff at the city of Mississauga often is, "We're a grown-up government." They absolutely are. Some of governments in the region of Peel and the local municipalities have budgets that are bigger than some provinces. These are mature, capable governments and they need to be able to generate the revenues and have the powers to spend them appropriately in the way that grown-up governments are able to do.

The City of Toronto Act, for example, gives the city of Toronto different powers both in raising revenues and in being able to spend them independently without provincial approval. There is no reason why the city of Mississauga, the city of Brampton and especially the region of Peel, at 1.5 million people, shouldn't be able to have that flexibility.

1140
But that flexibility, all by itself, doesn't solve every problem. Municipalities are partnerships. They're a partnership between the communities that are there and the province of Ontario. The province needs to come to the table in Peel and invest what it invests in Ottawa, in Windsor, in York region, in Hamilton, and that's not happening right now.

Ms. Mary-Margaret McMahon: Okay. Great.

And now we'll start the rapid-fire with you, and that is your level of frustration with this whole process—we're going to separate; we're not going to separate—and your level of hope and optimism.

Mr. Sean Meagher: I am a perennial optimist, and everybody who works in our network is a perennial optimist or they wouldn't work in our network. So our level of hope and optimism is a 10. Our frustration is about a two, because hope and optimism can always get you through frustration. We're happy to work with everybody to try and make sure that we're building systems and supports that actually work for vulnerable people here in Peel.

Ms. Mary-Margaret McMahon: Great. Thanks.

Over to Dave.

Mr. Dave Wakely: I respond to life-threatening emergencies every day. I don't find frustration particularly helpful, so I'm not. I think it's provided paramedics the opportunity to speak up and talk to people about the value we provide and about the risk to our continued services, and about what we need in the future. So I am super hopeful. I feel that we're in a great position to continue to help our community and to continue to grow.

Ms. Mary-Margaret McMahon: Great. Thank you for all both of you do.

The Acting Chair (Mr. Billy Pang): This round of questions will go to the government. MPP Sabawy.

Mr. Sheref Sabawy: Thank you very much, Mr. Chair. Through you, I would like to direct my question to Mr. Dave, in regard to the paramedics.

How many times or how often does it happen that you need to call for supply, let's say an ambulance car, from outside the boundaries of the region? From Toronto, for example, or other areas.

Mr. Dave Wakely: Through you, Chair, the way that ambulance service is set up in the province of Ontario is a seamless system, so we have different levels of priority. For the highest level of priority, the closest Ontario ambulance goes, no matter where we are. So if I take a patient to Windsor on a transfer, I'm a paramedic asset in the province of Ontario and I'm managed by that local dispatch centre while I'm in Windsor.

Around the border regions, if I am close to the city of Toronto and a life-threatening emergency comes in there,

the system is set up so that if I'm the closest ambulance or the closest advanced care paramedic, I will go to that life-threatening emergency.

For the lower-priority calls, the lower-acuity calls, we don't cross regional borders because people need to take care of their own calls. It is generally considered safe for those calls to wait a little longer, so we will hold those lower-priority calls as part of the system.

But as far as what number, I don't know. We take patients to border hospitals because in the region of Peel we only have three hospitals. So if we're in Oakville, we will do calls in Halton. If we take a patient to Etobicoke, then we will do calls in the Etobicoke catchment area. The system is very much designed to be seamless in order to provide the best services to the residents of Ontario, no matter where you are or where the closest ambulance happens to be.

Mr. Sheref Sabawy: Thank you very much for the answer. Through you, Mr. Chair, my question was directed towards, what's the difference? What's the change? Would it make a difference if there are three different paramedics in Caledon, Brampton, Mississauga, or now as it is, as one region? Because if the dissolving is to happen, then it's basically three different entities, and it's going to be the same if you are getting some help from Toronto or from Oakville, from outside your region. What's the difference?

Mr. Dave Wakely: Thank you for the clarification. The difference isn't the responding to calls; it's how we manage those ambulance assets when they're not dedicated to calls. Currently, we engage in a model of fluid deployment, so if we have three ambulances, they're spaced out evenly. If one of those ambulances goes on a call, we move both of those ambulances so they're covering the same area and they have a minimum distance to all of those calls. We don't adjust our fluid deployment based on what happens in Halton or what happens in Toronto; we maintain that coverage.

I talked earlier about the buffer. We use that buffer within Peel to ensure that there's always an ambulance as close as possible to as many people as possible, and that deployment system is entirely driven by the fact that we're a regional service. It's a regional plan. Every region or service provider in Ontario needs to provide one to the Ministry of Health, and it needs to be approved by them. So whatever happens in Toronto doesn't impact where the region of Peel puts ambulances. We cover our population that's not experiencing medical emergencies in a way to make sure that they have rapid access. If we happen to be closer to a Toronto call or an out-of-boundary call, we go. If you split the region in three, you would need three different deployment plans that didn't interact, and it would create dead zones. It sounds awful, but it has the risk of creating dead zones if one area gets more busy. So it just allows us to be a little bit more fluid in how we deploy our assets to ensure that people get the best coverage possible.

Mr. Sheref Sabawy: So do you qualify that as, I would say, better use of resources money-wise, cost-wise, or enhancement in services? Which one will get impacted more? Do you need more money to cover the three areas if we cut

it to three areas, or the enhancements of the service and the delivery of the service will be impacted?

Mr. Dave Wakely: It's both. You would need more money because you would need more of that buffer. In order for each of those cities to maintain that coverage, they would each need a buffer. So that would cost more money. But also, you're creating gaps. Even with more money, it takes time to transition that buffer, right? There's a chance that you are going to have an inefficient service, so you're going to create service gaps. So it is in fact both, and they have a synergistic effect. They act together to get worse.

Mr. Sheref Sabawy: Thank you very much for this clarification.

I will pass the rest of the time to my colleague Natalia Kusendova.

The Acting Chair (Mr. Billy Pang): MPP Kusendova-Bashta.

Ms. Natalia Kusendova-Bashta: It's nice to see you, Dave. Thank you for coming. And thank you to our other presenter as well.

I had a question in terms of the community paramedicine program. As you know, our government increased the funding—I believe it was in 2020—for the program, and I believe the region of Peel received a \$3-million top-up for the community paramedicine program. Really, the goal was to allow paramedics to go into seniors' homes and to do blood work and decrease the use of our hospital system, and also for seniors who have mobility issues to be able to access care at home. Can you tell us, have you seen those investments on the ground, and has it been a successful program?

Mr. Dave Wakely: Absolutely. If we look at prior to 2018, we had one person that was running our community paramedic program. She did a great job, but she was one person. The program today is, I think, 14 regular paramedics. The region just gave permission to hire those folks as FTEs. The challenge with that is that funding, that top-up has an expiry date. It is grant funding, not base funding, so if we get to 2026 and that grant is not renewed or it's not included in the base funding, we're going to have to figure out how to manage those FTEs.

Certainly, we've seen an expansion of those programs. Some of what they do now is, folks who have been referred to nursing homes or long-term care but they're not there yet, they're helping to manage those patients out in the community.

The Acting Chair (Mr. Billy Pang): Thirty seconds.

Mr. Dave Wakely: So their work is growing all the time. I'm excited to see what they can do with homelessness and the addiction problem. We haven't quite gotten there yet, but there are models across the country that community paramedics are being used in that capacity, and I think it's an interesting area to look at expanding.

Ms. Natalia Kusendova-Bashta: Absolutely, and it's right in line with our goal of ending hallway health care, to take service out of the hospital—

The Acting Chair (Mr. Billy Pang): Thank you. The committee will now recess until 1 p.m.

The committee recessed from 1150 to 1300.

CARP, BRAMPTON CHAPTER
INDUS COMMUNITY SERVICES

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

Now I call on the Canadian Association of Retired Persons, Brampton chapter, and Indus Community Services. You will have seven minutes for your presentation. You may begin.

Mr. Terry Miller: I assume that the red light means I'm on. Good show.

Let me introduce myself and thank you very much for coming here.

Interjection.

Mr. Terry Miller: I'm sorry?

The Acting Chair (Mr. Billy Pang): Can you speak closer to the mike?

Mr. Terry Miller: Closer? How about that? Okay.

Thank you for coming here to Brampton, because we don't often see members of the Legislature here. We see our own members, obviously; we see them quite a bit. Well, thank you for coming today and thank you for listening.

My name is Terry Miller. I'm the past president of Brampton CARP. Brampton CARP is part of the national CARP movement. I wanted to introduce myself because I was there in 1974 as an elected member of the regional council for Brampton, so I think I know a little bit about how regions work. I was there. I was also on the county council of Peel, so I think I know how the counties work.

When I talked to you today, I wanted to point out some issues that I see are important. One is growth; the other is the ability to pay; third is local planning; fourth is the tribunal itself, what it does and what it should do; water and sewage; police and public safety; regional responsibilities; finance; and garbage. Notice I ended up with "garbage."

Let me just point out a few things today. When the region of Peel started, it was started as an adjunct and as the descendant of the county system. It wasn't started as a new system; it was started as the descendant of a county. The county, I should note, was started by Baldwin back in 1843. It was a series of reforms, and Baldwin was quite a reformer. He's one that we all should look at and examine and determine if he was right.

The Baldwin Act repealed the District Councils Act of 1841. Baldwin's main idea was that citizens can best relate to the government nearest them, if the system is simple. If it's complicated, no way, but if it's simple, they can. That's why he created a two-tier system, the county system—and now the regional system. Well, things change, folks. What we've done is we've become more sophisticated in how the regions work.

Let's talk for a moment about the ability to pay. I know that many people have difficulty making ends meet today, and you see that as you go through the province. But the Hazel McCallion Act, 2023, does not help solve that problem. It doesn't solve it at all; it just deals with getting rid of the region. The Hazel McCallion Act creates the need to disestablish the region and establish a more sophisticated form of government to deal with downloaded responsibilities, but it doesn't do anything more.

Seniors are no exceptions, and the problems that seniors have are widespread. You'll learn that as my colleague speaks as well. Those problems have to deal mainly with the financial ability to pay for things. There are 92,000 seniors in Brampton. While that may not seem like a lot of seniors to you, it is to us, and not all of them have the ability to pay. A lot of them are on fixed income.

The Hazel McCallion Act was passed in 20 days. No one asked anybody out here about the Hazel McCallion Act. They may have asked somebody in Mississauga—I don't know—but they never asked anybody in Brampton about it; it was just passed. One would think that you'd want to ask the people that are most affected by it what they think: Should we have this? Is it necessary? Does the region not work? Well, I don't think you'd find a lot of people who'd say the region doesn't work, because a lot of people don't know the region exists, because the region does its job so well. Honestly, it does.

The implementation of this act may create severe financial problems for people. I don't know for certain, but I know through doing—we did a health survey of people from I think it was 26 clubs in Brampton, and we found out that the problem with health services is the problem in most other things: They couldn't afford to pay their bills. They had to substitute, for example, taking eye drops, which they had to pay for, for food. It was absurd.

The inflation rate in Ontario in the past six years, from 2019 to 2024, adds up to around 18%. The actual tax levy in Brampton around the same period of time is 5.6%, so we're way behind the inflation rate. We can't afford to have any changes in the Hazel McCallion Act. We can't afford to have them. The money is not there to do the things that are anticipated by that act.

In planning, for example, the practice has been to have the region marry the financial resources with the decision to build high-rises or the decision to build homes. They provide enormous amounts of money—

The Acting Chair (Mr. Billy Pang): You have 30 seconds.

Mr. Terry Miller: What might be the notion today is that planning is not an important issue. But it sure is an important issue. It's important to everybody, and especially if you say the local government has to pay for planning and is taking over planning to meet certain targets. That's not going to work because the local government will have to then spend enormous amounts of money recruiting qualified staff. Planning at the local level may make some sense—

The Acting Chair (Mr. Billy Pang): Thank you for your presentation.

Our next presenter, please.

Mr. Arvind Krishendeholl: Good afternoon. My name is Arvind Krishendeholl, and it is a pleasure for me to appear before this committee, representing Indus Community Services in my capacity as manager of settlement programs. The purpose of my testimony today is to provide an overview of what we as community organizations perceive as a critical moment as the province engages in this review of regional governance.

Just a few months ago, I finished a master's degree in public administration at the school of policy studies at Queen's University, where my research focused largely on the relationship between governments and non-profits. I believe that this opportunity today will allow me to engage in some policy considerations that we have before us.

A little bit about Indus Community Services: We are a non-profit organization with over 140 staff across seven locations, and we are committed to providing high-quality, culturally relevant services in the domains of settlement and employment, health, family services and beyond. Enshrined within our value system is a strong commitment to equity, diversity and inclusion. This is particularly relevant as the needs of our diverse clients continue to grow and our country anticipates one of the largest increases in permanent residents, a population of 485,000 individuals. Last year alone, we served over 15,000 community members.

In the department that I manage of settlement programs, we provide information and orientation sessions, in addition to needs assessments and referral services to newcomers, including permanent residents and convention refugees. Our goal is to help our clients navigate the plethora of documents, forms and expectations through our wrap-around service model: English-language training and child care, employment support, as well as our specialized skills training program. This is made accessible through funding received from both the provincial and federal governments. We work closely with our government counterparts to address a common aim: We want to ensure that newcomers that are arriving in this country receive adequate services, they receive appropriate services and culturally relevant services.

1310

A little bit about what the academic literature shows us pertaining to amalgamation and dissolution: There are a great amount of studies on amalgamation in Canada. In fact, during the amalgamation process of Toronto—there has been numerous articles and white papers published that describe this. However, there is very little on dissolution. The research just hasn't been done yet. Often, municipal restructuring is framed as a cost-saving measure. However, the debate on this is questionable. We still do not know, until we have a proven and effective way that allows us to measure, if this is truly a cost-saving measure.

What we do know is that municipal governance reforms all aspects of the day-to-day operations existing within a municipality, including the economic implications and pre-established advocacy mechanisms that community organizations and non-profits rely on heavily to advance our advocacy aim.

One other critical point is that there is a significant lack on the data of the human resources sector in Peel. Non-profits rely heavily on data when it comes to our advocacy aims and it helps us with forecasting and determining what are the correct services that need to be addressed to our community.

My next discussion point will be on the impact of the non-profit sector in Peel. Throughout the COVID-19 pandemic, it was the non-profit sector who came together to advocate for the marginalized and traditionally under-represented communities that were ignored. Rates of COVID-19 testing and vaccination for Black, African and Caribbean communities, in addition to marginalized individuals, were extremely low. The government worked in partnership with non-profit organizations such as Indus Community Services in order to provide culturally relevant services, go into the community and help largely traditionally under-represented populations understand more about the vaccine and reduce vaccine hesitancy that has plagued our communities for years.

The essential challenge that arises when we talk about dissolution or municipal governance reform is that we're on shifting sands here. The non-profit sector, in a recent report conducted by the Ontario Nonprofit Network, is at a tipping point. We are overwhelmed, stressed and at our limits when it comes to supporting the most vulnerable populations in partnership with the government. In addition to what we see as major challenges that might affect our funding stream, this could pose significant risks to the everyday service delivery that we provide. The need for evidence-based solutions is not only necessary but evident in order for us to make sure that our populations are being served effectively.

Chronic underfunding has been a common theme that has been stressed many times over, and the statistics are glaring. According to the municipal fiscal sustainability report by Peel region, we are chronically underfunded—and this is statistics done by the region of Peel. The health base funding for Peel Public Health was frozen by the province from 2018 to 2021. Housing subsidies were decreased by the province by 20% between 2017 and 2021. We consistently rank below the provincial average. The following chart here shows the comparison of provincial per capita funding rates across public health units in Ontario. As you can see, Peel is the lowest.

The Acting Chair (Mr. Billy Pang): You still have 30 seconds.

Mr. Arvind Krishendeholl: Potential solutions: The most obvious one is a fair deal for Peel. It's to ensure that the clients of Peel are being respected and treated with the same dignity as community members in Toronto, or Hamilton, or Ottawa.

At the end of the day, we need more evidence-based solutions to address these issues and the need for more engagement with non-profit agencies, who work so closely with both provincial and federal governments to—

The Acting Chair (Mr. Billy Pang): Thank you very much.

This round of questions goes to the official opposition. MPP Rakocevic.

Mr. Tom Rakocevic: Thank you to both presenters. I really appreciate your presence here.

I'd like to begin with Mr. Miller. I think you still had some material that you might have wanted to share with us before the timer was called. Is that correct?

Mr. Terry Miller: That's correct. I can very easily send it to Hansard and have it delivered there if you like. I only have two or three copies, and I'd rather do it that way.

Mr. Tom Rakocevic: What I was going to do is offer you the opportunity to complete —

Mr. Terry Miller: I'm sorry, I can't hear you.

Mr. Tom Rakocevic: I was going to offer you opportunity to finish what you were saying.

Mr. Terry Miller: Oh, thank you.

Mr. Tom Rakocevic: Please do so if you would like.

Mr. Terry Miller: Yes. Just to let you know where Brampton CARP stands, because it's really important that you hear it from older people who have been through the fray: We can't see the Hazel McCallion Act as a necessary act. We don't see it—not yet. Maybe somewhere down the road, that happens. I think it probably will happen when the cities become more mature, but Brampton is not Mississauga.

We would say to you, "Don't do this act now. Study what regional government does." You're doing that. You're out here now studying that. That's important. But don't do the act now because we cannot afford it and it puts an added strain on the 92,000 seniors that live here. So keep things as they are, but don't stop. Don't stop; for God's sake, don't stop. You need to do the research. You need to get a funding base that makes some sense. It doesn't make any sense out here and it doesn't make any sense in Toronto either, apparently, so you need to look at how these things are funded.

If you're going to have a housing program—and I think the housing program is not a bad program, because we've had it here for about 25 years—I think you need to know how to fund the housing program. You need to know how to provide soft facilities. You need to know how to provide health facilities.

I don't know how many times we've been down to Queen's Park, asking them to build us a hospital. Guess what? We haven't got one yet. We've got one hospital and we need three. Just look at the numbers. We're doing numbers. We have signed a deal where we're doing 113,000 homes in 10 years—impossible, but we've signed that agreement with the government of Ontario.

I would simply say, listen, you have the ability to temper this program, to do some really good research—have the tribunal do the research. They're out there already. They're being paid by you guys. Have them go out and do the work. Do the work that makes sense and see how you can fund regional governments, or if you want to have independent cities, how to fund independent cities, because obviously you can't fund Toronto. But you're going to fund Toronto, or somebody is going to fund Toronto, and it may

be the people from here having to pay the tolls that will go on the roads.

Mr. Tom Rakocevic: Okay, sir. Thank you for that. That's a very great explanation.

You had mentioned, I think, when you began presenting, that—I guess you were taken by surprise at the announcement of the dissolution. The imminent dissolution was coming, and I can say that, if you were surprised, you were in good company. We had the acting mayor of Mississauga, and we had heard from others, elected officials, who said that many were just advised the day before the actual announcement was made. Do you believe that's appropriate, in terms of making major decisions that could affect the future of the municipality, that you're finding out on CP24 without any consultation?

Mr. Terry Miller: Thanks very much for the question. That's a really good question, because that's when we found out, and that's absurd. You can't change 50 years of work in a minute. You can't turn things on a dime. It doesn't work.

I don't know whether you know this or not, but people at the region of Peel were looking for jobs long before this happened, because they knew, they heard, that it was going to happen. It's absurd.

Mr. Tom Rakocevic: Thank you.

I would like to move my questions now to Mr. Krishendeholl. Did I pronounce your name correctly?

Mr. Arvind Krishendeholl: That's correct.

Mr. Tom Rakocevic: Okay. Everyone struggles with my last name, so I try to do my best. I really do.

Thank you so much. Your presentation was very clear. In fact, you had brought the PowerPoint and you showed us, especially with health care, the per capita funding per individual in Peel versus other regions like Toronto, where I, in fact, live and represent. There seems to be even a major difference. Of course, in Toronto even, we're struggling. We have many people getting hallway medicine, and the situation isn't perfect there either.

Can you expand a little bit more on what the impact is in not having that adequate funding for health care in Brampton, what it means for the people that come to your programs and are looking for assistance? Tell us what that means for them.

Mr. Arvind Krishendeholl: Through you, Mr. Chair, the most significant consideration that we're looking at is that if there's a chronic underfunding in government services, we have to pick up the slack. That's definitive. We are there to serve everyone. We don't turn anyone away, as non-profits and community agencies. And when there's a significant underfunding, especially if it's chronic underfunding, it puts more strain on our services, and in turn, we get less funding for it. We're all scrambling for the same pot, but if the pot's not big enough, then how does the government expect us to provide high-quality services?

1320

Mr. Tom Rakocevic: Thank you for that.

How much do I have, two minutes?

The Acting Chair (Mr. Billy Pang): One minute and 15 seconds.

Mr. Tom Rakocevic: Okay—and dwindling.

I guess the last question is, the government talks a big game when it comes to housing, but one of the issues that I've heard from other speakers as well is the lack of affordable housing in Brampton. Can you tell members of the committee if there is, in fact, a big need for affordable housing, not just market rate housing, whether it's rental or owned, but actual affordable housing for many, especially newcomers and settlers that probably come and seek help at your group?

Mr. Arvind Krishendeholl: Affordable housing is probably one of the most dominant topics facing policy circles in Ontario today. The wait-list is just absolutely extraordinary. And as we anticipate more newcomers arriving to this country to fill the much-needed labour gap and skilled workers gap, it's just going to increase astronomically. So the need for quick, affordable housing cannot be underscored and understated.

Mr. Tom Rakocevic: Okay. No further questions.

The Acting Chair (Mr. Billy Pang): Thank you.

Let's go to our independent member. Ms. McMahon.

Ms. Mary-Margaret McMahon: I have a much shorter time, so we'll have to be quick with the questions. Thanks.

First off, to Terry: Thank you for coming in. It seems that you have a wealth of knowledge and experience to teach us from your years of service and your years with CARP. Thank you for taking care of your community.

You were mentioning—I found this interesting, when you were talking about the Hazel McCallion Act passing so quickly and you learning about it, basically, on CP24. You said, "Wouldn't you want to ask the people of Brampton about that first?" How would this best have played out, in your mind, in a better way?

Mr. Terry Miller: The Hazel McCallion Act affects the region of Peel. It affects everybody in the region of Peel, not just people in Mississauga. So you would think that you would want the government to say to us, the people of Peel, "Here's what we're contemplating. Here is when we are contemplating it. What do think?" Ask the opinion of the people of Peel. Nobody asked anybody's opinion.

They provided the act, and I think, well, that's fine for the government to do that, because it can. Under section 92, they can do that. But so what? We have to live with it. We have to live with the changes. We have to live with trying to make this thing work.

By the way, I should tell you, in 1974, the same thing happened. The same thing happened when regional government came in 1974; nobody was asked whether they wanted it or not. It was agreed to.

Ms. Mary-Margaret McMahon: Thank you very much. So history repeats itself.

And then to Arvind: Thank you for your presentation—loved your PowerPoint, very informative. Again, thank you for all you do with your not-for-profit community service agency representing so many not-for-profits—amazing work.

You mentioned a fair deal for Peel. We heard that earlier today as well. Some people are grudging at the fact that Toronto has this new deal, but what about the other muni-

cipalities. So what would that look like to you, a fair deal for Peel?

Mr. Arvind Krishendeholl: I think the first thing is taking a look at the baseline human services cost. We don't have that data accessible. If regional staff have that data accessible—I'm sure they do, but I think first we need a comprehensive look at the baseline regional services costs. For example, on this slide here, there is no excuse as to looking at the disparity here. This is the per capita cost. It just simply doesn't make sense. This information has been publicly accessible, and the need to look at different sectors—this is just health care alone. So the need to look at different sectors—I'm curious to see, if we do a comparative analysis on other sectors, other services that the region provides, what we might find.

Ms. Mary-Margaret McMahon: Great. So a baseline, number one, and you mentioned chronic underfunding, which is here. Anything else that stands out—but you would like to roll this baseline out with other sectors as well.

Mr. Arvind Krishendeholl: I think also looking at the demand—

The Acting Chair (Mr. Billy Pang): Thirty seconds.

Mr. Arvind Krishendeholl: I think we're seeing a large demand in Peel, especially after COVID-19. We've seen our numbers increasing. We've seen the clients that have come before us. The complexities of the cases and the complexities of their situations continue to evolve. So I think tying the funding, one, to inflation, and also tying the funding to the increased demands that we see can be excellent. One thing that we always talk about in the non-profit services sector is—

The Acting Chair (Mr. Billy Pang): Thank you very much.

This round of questions goes to the government side. MPP Rae.

Mr. Matthew Rae: Thank you to our guests for their presentations this afternoon. I know there's been lots of talk about the Hazel McCallion piece of legislation. I know, before Christmas, Minister Calandra announced that we're moving forward without dissolution. I think that also speaks to us hearing the feedback we've received from the general public, from Peel region, but also the important work the Peel Region Transition Board did up until that point and will still do. I know the minister is working with the Peel transition board to set out the parameters for their work to continue around service delivery, in conjunction, obviously, with this committee. We're really looking at how we can help our regional government—the fastest growing in Ontario, which we are looking to get more homes built but also the infrastructure associated with that. And then the services that you both alluded to in your remarks—ensuring those are provided in an effective and efficient manner for the people that we all serve.

I do know Arvind was talking about the costs in Peel. Peel is one of the fastest growing—as my Peel colleagues tell me often at Queen's Park, other than that it's the best place to live. It's one of the fastest-growing regions, and we know that Brampton is one of the fastest growing in Canada, let alone in Ontario.

I know our government, under the last budget, did increase their Homelessness Prevention Program by 38% to \$42 million, roughly. I can only speak for my own experience in my own area, but my service managers—I have two in the riding I represent—were appreciative of the fact of the increase, but also that they knew what they would get the next year as well, which would help long-term planning. Peel, for example, because they administer the homelessness prevention aspect of housing and affordable housing and the by-name list, will be receiving \$42 million again in 2024 and then again in 2025. It provides that long-term perspective.

My question is for Arvind, obviously, because you're working within that sector. How are your members and yourselves—what's your experience working with the region as a whole especially around the communication? We've heard in some of the other regions that—for example, we heard earlier this week in St. Catharines, they've hired a homelessness prevention individual, someone who goes out and talks to the unhoused and identifies what needs they may have, whether it's mental health, whether it's addictions, whether it's just economics as well, but they aren't able to get the by-name list from their region. Is it a more productive working relationship in Peel? Any friction you see there?

Mr. Arvind Krishendeholl: I think the relationship that we have with the region, with the non-profits in general—and I forgot to preface with stating that Indus is a member of the Metamorphosis Network. You probably could guess that quite easily. Our relationship with the region has been quite productive, and I don't say that just from a funding standpoint, but I also say that from an advocacy standpoint. Non-profits have been plagued by advocacy for years. It's one of the largest challenges that we see emerging in our sector. And when we have such supportive public sector employees working with us to deliver the same goals, it's absolutely incredible. We also work with provincial staff and municipal staff and federal staff, but when we work so closely with an upper-tier municipality that looks at providing the same high level of services that we're looking to provide in tandem, it can be quite effective, and we have some strong advocacy links and partners at the upper-tier municipality that we depend on.

1330

Mr. Matthew Rae: It's good to hear that aspect and the working relationship you have with the region.

Again for Arvind: Are there any changes that you could see from the governance? I know in your presentation you talked about funding, but are there any changes from the governance model that could help enhance local services and provide better value for the people we serve?

Mr. Arvind Krishendeholl: I think one thing might be better government recognition. A lot of members of the public know what community organizations do and non-profits do, but I don't think it's very clearly spelled out that we provide services in tandem with existing government programs. I think sharing that message and underscoring the importance of what we do will not only benefit the clients we serve, but it will help, I believe, the overall governance process as a whole.

Mr. Matthew Rae: Thank you.

Chair, I defer my remaining time to MPP Grewal.

The Acting Chair (Mr. Billy Pang): MPP Grewal.

Mr. Hardeep Singh Grewal: Thank you for joining us here today. The purpose of the establishment of our committee and our travelling committee of going around Ontario is really to talk about and analyze the regions in each specific area and see how we can—overall, we want to see things improve. When it comes to different areas in Ontario, they require different solutions based on their particular community. In our community here in Peel, the government has decided to roll back the dissolution of Peel and focus on improving Peel, looking at efficiencies, looking at ways we can do business better within our existing systems.

I'd like to direct my question to Indus Community Services for the first one: Do you support the government's decision now to roll back, and do you think that it's better to find efficiencies within the existing system to see how the municipalities can co-operate and move forward together in this particular system? Do you support that decision?

Mr. Arvind Krishendeholl: Our organization, just to be very clear, is not for or against dissolution. What we are for is providing the highest-quality services possible and fixing the underfunding that I've outlined today. I think if we continue down this rabbit hole of underfunding, we're just going to be too—

Mr. Hardeep Singh Grewal: I'd just like to follow up on that aspect of it. When it comes to underfunding—as local MPPs, we've been championing a lot of the work that you guys have been doing at Indus Community Services with long-term-care homes within Brampton and the services that you are providing and the services you're going to be providing within your new site. Are you able to share with the committee today how much the Ontario government has committed in the past six years to your organization, or an estimate—it doesn't have to be an exact number, like a rough estimate—of what the government has contributed to that?

Mr. Arvind Krishendeholl: I can certainly provide that information to you following this proceeding, but what I will also stress is that there needs to be more—

Mr. Hardeep Singh Grewal: Absolutely. When we take a look at things—I'm not denying the fact that you need more funding. I'm not trying to say that you don't need more funding. I do see that in every sector that we enter into, there's always room for improvement, there are always ways to deliver better services, and that does involve added costs that—30 seconds?

The Acting Chair (Mr. Billy Pang): Thirty seconds.

Mr. Hardeep Singh Grewal: So that does involve added costs. But have you seen over the last six years a higher level of support for long-term-care homes with the way this government has been promoting and working to achieve more beds?

Mr. Arvind Krishendeholl: I think, over all, what we need to see is not only funding for long-term care but the overall funding to help our clients grow. That's essential and important.

Mr. Hardeep Singh Grewal: Okay. Thank you.

The Acting Chair (Mr. Billy Pang): The next round of questions goes to the official opposition. MPP Rakocevic.

Mr. Tom Rakocevic: I'll begin again with Mr. Miller, simply to state that I think you very clearly stated your position here, that you were in fact against the dissolution and that it really came out of nowhere. Obviously, it's not something that you thought was a great idea, to govern in that way. Are there any final comments with regard to what the government should be focusing on to help the region, from your perspective—in particular, Brampton—to help seniors?

Mr. Terry Miller: Well, I should point out that there was a conclusion that we reached after a good deal of study on this. And you're quite right: We don't think there should be any changes at this stage until you do some further research. But we also said that if you're going to make a change, why on God's green earth are you looking at anything except putting the two municipalities together—a uni-city? That was the other side of the coin, and it would take a great deal of work to do that. No one is going to get away with doing things on the spur of the moment—no one. This government isn't; no government will. You have to do things, and you have to plan well, and this has never been planned well. The fact that you're here looking at regional governments shows you that fact, that regional governments were not planned well. And every place you go, you're going to find the same thing.

So the answer is, really, we support the government withdrawing the act. But we support the government withdrawing the act saying that the tribunal should start the ball rolling on doing the work on what is to replace it. And we think that it should be replaced by a uni-city, and if not a uni-city, then just leave it alone.

Mr. Tom Rakocevic: Thank you. Being a past president of CARP, of the Brampton chapter, is there anything else in particular that affects the elderly in Brampton you might want to talk about? I know that, actually, Mr. Krishendeholl, sitting beside you, made a very strong case about the need to adequately fund health care. But one that I asked a previous person from Brampton is, do you feel that the elderly in the area that are driving and own a vehicle are being charged a fair rate for auto insurance in Brampton?

Mr. Terry Miller: Well, the answer to that, of course, is no, they're not being charged a fair rate; they're being charged more. But that's one of the things about living here and having a Brampton address: You get to pay. Why? God only knows—

Mr. Tom Rakocevic: Would you hope that the government would take some leadership on this? I mean, it's definitely a pocketbook issue, right?

Mr. Terry Miller: Absolutely. They should also take some leadership on long-term care. They have done some good work, but not enough. They should also take leadership and do some work on health care. My colleague here has pointed out to you the story of health care. It's quite bad here. You need to have more hospital space. You need to have more health care delivered here. Those are the

things that matter to people here, and especially to seniors. They really do.

Mr. Tom Rakocevic: Thank you for that.

Mr. Krishendeholl, is there anything else that you wanted to mention that you haven't had a chance to or any other questions you would actually like to be asked on behalf of those you represent, who come to your association for help and whatnot?

Mr. Arvind Krishendeholl: I think the overall need to underscore, once again—and I have said this quite a few times, but I think the most significant issue facing us is this underfunding problem. The numbers there just can't continue. It doesn't make sense. There's no reality behind it. It's not based on evidence-based solutions. If you're going to make a large governance change, do the research, do the homework behind it. You can't just come out of the gates willy-nilly and create stuff out of thin air. You need to do the research behind it, and we do in Ontario have the capacity to do really good research, especially when it comes to policy and governance changes—the one the government initially proposed.

Mr. Tom Rakocevic: I know that you didn't take a position with regard to whether the dissolution should or should not happen. In fact, we had a representative from the Metamorphosis Network actually speak and take a similar position.

We've had elected representatives speaking primarily on the side of Brampton and the needs of Brampton, as well as staff—who are not elected, of course—as well as a paramedic, who had suggested that the dissolution would in fact lead to funding issues in Brampton. So you haven't taken a position on whether it's a good or bad idea, but from the other members, the basis, from what they had to say, was that it would actually affect—basically, it would be harder financially for Brampton itself. Do you have any comments on that?

Mr. Arvind Krishendeholl: Sure. I think one can allude that it can certainly affect the funding process. A large number of non-profit organizations rely heavily on core funding that's available from the region of Peel, and it will also affect advocacy links, as I alluded to earlier. These advocacy links with these local players are quite significant. They help us move the needle forward and advance our mission, working in close partnership with you and your provincial and federal counterparts.

So certainly, if we didn't know the details of dissolution, one could only guess as to what exactly that might have looked like, what Bill 112 would have entailed. But through speculation, one can reasonably assume that the landscape will look very different, and without adequate consultation, the big question mark in the air just adds to the confusion, and it really affects our day-to-day operations.

1340

Mr. Tom Rakocevic: Okay.

How much time do I have left, Chair?

The Acting Chair (Mr. Billy Pang): One minute.

Mr. Tom Rakocevic: Well, then, I simply want to say thank you to both of you. Thank you for your advocacy.

Thank you for taking the time to come here and speak before this group of members of provincial Parliament, to talk about the needs of your communities, your neighbourhoods and those that you're representing. You both did a fantastic job, a thoughtful job, and made some very convincing points today. So I just wanted to thank you very much for your time and for your advocacy.

The Acting Chair (Mr. Billy Pang): The independent member, MPP McMahon.

Ms. Mary-Margaret McMahon: Part of this review—we're looking at efficiencies, streamlining services, better co-operation and whatnot, and what can be done on that. The other part, really the crux of the matter, is getting shovels in the ground and building housing, and how we can facilitate that and ensure that that is done as properly, quickly and sustainably as possible.

In your experience and your knowledge with your organization and living here, how do you think Brampton is doing on the housing front, on housing starts and addressing the housing crisis? Terry?

Mr. Terry Miller: Maybe I could answer that by saying: Do you know how many building permits are out here?

Ms. Mary-Margaret McMahon: Sorry?

Mr. Terry Miller: Do you know how many building permits are out here, building permits that are issued but not built? I'd say there are probably around 22,000 of them. The housing program will speed things up—it really will—and how we reach 113,000 units in 10 years is really a guess, but you have to remember that we've grown at 3% each and every year for the past 50 years. Some years, in some spans, we've grown 10% or 12%. Brampton has done its duty many times over.

That's probably what got Arvind going, because we've done so well that we've forgotten that growth causes a problem. It causes a problem for people coming through the door.

Ms. Mary-Margaret McMahon: Okay. Thank you.

Arvind, did you have anything to say on that?

Mr. Arvind Krishendeholl: I think my colleague perfectly encapsulated what I was going to address. The housing problem could have been easily—it was forecasted. Academics saw this problem coming, policy experts saw this problem coming, so the situation that we are in right now shouldn't be a surprise to anyone, and it shouldn't be a surprise to our decision-makers and those who are responsible for putting shovels in the ground.

Right now, we need a quick fix. The big question I have is, if we do get that quick fix as promised, would that lead to really good, sustainable housing for especially the most vulnerable and traditionally under-represented communities? That's my question.

Ms. Mary-Margaret McMahon: Great. Well, as a green girl, I'm right behind you on that. There are cost savings and more affordability when you make things energy-efficient, and thinking long-term, for sure.

Okay, and my final question, as my theme for the day is—so we have the transition board. We're going ahead with the divorce now, backtracking on that, and we have this transition board. What is your level of frustration with

the overall situation, and what is your level of hope and optimism? In a minute, so 30 seconds each.

Terry?

Mr. Terry Miller: I think the transition board should be here, like you're here. They should be here listening to people talk about growth. They should be. And then they should get down and do all the work they need to do. That transition board is a good idea.

Ms. Mary-Margaret McMahon: Thank you.

Mr. Arvind Krishendeholl: I think public consultation—it's not that hard, right? Like, do the public consultation. Do your homework when you're making large-scale governance decisions. It's not that hard. This was available. This was publicly accessible—

The Acting Chair (Mr. Billy Pang): You have 30 seconds.

Mr. Arvind Krishendeholl: That's all.

Ms. Mary-Margaret McMahon: Okay. Thank you so much.

The Acting Chair (Mr. Billy Pang): Thank you.

This round goes to the government. MPP Kusendova-Bashta.

Ms. Natalia Kusendova-Bashta: Thank you to both of our presenters. I'm going to start with Mr. Terry Miller from CARP, Brampton chapter.

I wanted to let you know that I have a wonderful relationship with your Mississauga counterpart, Murray, because I have been working on a private member's bill. It's called Improving Dementia Care in Ontario Act. And I know that, as part of CARP's advocacy, certainly improving the lives of those living with dementia is a very important topic.

I wanted to ask you, in your chapter, have you done any work or consultations specifically on dementia, and how can the government improve services for those living with dementia?

Mr. Terry Miller: No, we haven't, but we've been talking with Murray and that's a really good thing that you're doing. Dementia is a big problem for us as well, as you can imagine. One of the things we'll be looking at when we meet with Murray—we're having a session of five or six CARP chapters in March, I think; March or April. That's one of the things we'll bring up. So thank you for your work on that. That's terrific. I really do think it's important.

People don't realize that, when you're young. But when you get to be 85 years old, you start looking around and you look to see who is around. An awful lot of your friends have dementia; they're not around.

Ms. Natalia Kusendova-Bashta: Certainly. I am very proud to say that, to this date, CARP's Mississauga chapter has provided 228 signatures, on paper, for a petition to ask the government to pass my private member's bill. Seniors are really a force to be reckoned with, and so maybe we can chat after as well. I can send you more information about my private member's bill.

I wanted to turn to the topic of long-term care because I know that's also a really important topic of advocacy. Prior to our election in 2018, the previous government had

only built about 614 beds across the province of Ontario in about 15 years. We have taken a different approach. Our goal is to build 30,000 beds over the next 10 years, and I think we're more than 50% on our way there.

In my city of Mississauga, we recently opened Wellbrook Place, which was built in 32 months using the accelerated build. Through the pandemic, we built a state-of-the-art facility, shovels in the ground until full opening and completion, in less than 32 months. We're really looking at innovative ways of building long-term care because we realize these are homes. We call them homes for seniors because people don't like to be institutionalized and we really need to be respectful of the fact that these are our seniors' homes.

Have you seen, in the city of Brampton, a similar approach? I know that we've built the Guru Nanak centre and many other long-term-care facilities in Brampton. Have you seen a shift in the approach to building long-term care?

Mr. Terry Miller: As a matter of fact, we have. We've seen a number of people who have been granted, through the government, monies to build enormous homes and those are on the Great Lakes Boulevard; there are additions going in there. There's another one on Highway 10 north of Bovaird.

I think people have gotten to the notion that long-term care is an option. It's not an option for everybody, but it's an option for some, and some people need it. I'm mindful of the county homes that existed prior to the private sector being involved. They were good, but they couldn't provide all the services. So I really think that the regional homes that are built now and the long-term-care homes that are built by private enterprise are doing the trick.

Ms. Natalia Kusendova-Bashta: Certainly, we've seen the complexity of residents in our long-term care become much higher, complex needs. When we think of a long-term-care resident 20 years ago and today, the level of care required is a lot higher, and that's why we're training a lot of staff to go into long-term care and we're actually leading the country as the first jurisdiction that has increased the amount of care to four hours of direct care per resident per day. Just to give you context, previous to that, the Ontario average was about 2.5 hours of direct care. So this is billions of dollars of investment into operational funding of long-term care, both for-profit and not-for-profit homes. And you know what? We have an aging population, and we need everyone at the table.

So thank you for saying that this is important work—

Mr. Terry Miller: Could I just say one thing? I was the vice-chair of the local health integration network for central west, which was Brampton and Caledon. And the only thing I would suggest that you add in your bill, if it's not already there, is the ability to go into the homes and to inspect them more regularly, because that's very important. We never had that power in the local health integration network,

and we should have, I think, because there was a need for that.

Ms. Natalia Kusendova-Bashta: Thank you.

How much time do I have, Chair?

The Acting Chair (Mr. Billy Pang): Two minutes.

Ms. Natalia Kusendova-Bashta: Okay. I just wanted to state on the record that I think we have doubled the number of inspectors in long-term care. Don't quote me on that; I know we certainly have increased them. I believe we have doubled them, certainly as a result of the pandemic. Obviously, it has exposed some of the vulnerabilities and that is why, going forward, we're no longer building triple or quadruple occupancies as a precaution for further pandemics.

I wanted to ask a few questions for Arvind. Thank you for the important work that Indus Community Services does in our community. You keep on referring to numbers, so I just wanted to ask you, again for the record: Do you know how much money Indus Community Services received from the province of Ontario in the last operational budget?

Mr. Arvind Krishendeholl: My role today as a middle manager is not to discuss how much funding we've received. That question can be directed, and I can certainly answer that at a later time, but that's not my role.

Ms. Natalia Kusendova-Bashta: Okay, sure. A simple Google search will tell you—your financial statements are available online, so I'll just give you an example. For example, from the Ministry of Health, you have received \$2.9 million this past year from the Mississauga-Halton area, and for the central west area, \$1.1 million. And if we compare the same numbers to 2018, when we were first elected, that number was \$1.6 million and \$1.2 million. So, year over year, your community service provider—

The Acting Chair (Mr. Billy Pang): You have 30 seconds.

Ms. Natalia Kusendova-Bashta: —has received increases, and we will continue to do that work because we know the region is growing. But next time, I believe it would be helpful, if we're speaking about numbers, to come and give us some idea of numbers of where you would like that budget to go and which aspects of the services, because you provide many services, including the Ministry of Children, Community and Social Services and Ministry of the Attorney General. It would be helpful for us to know which of the services you think would need to be strengthened for your community organization.

Mr. Arvind Krishendeholl: Excellent, and I recommend that the first step is to increase the per capita costs across—

The Acting Chair (Mr. Billy Pang): Thank you, everyone.

The committee is now adjourned until 10 a.m. on Tuesday, January 16, 2024.

The committee adjourned at 1353.

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