

Legislative
Assembly
of Ontario



Assemblée
législative
de l'Ontario

**Official Report
of Debates
(Hansard)**

HE-45

**Journal
des débats
(Hansard)**

HE-45

**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

Wednesday 17 January 2024

1^{re} session
43^e législature

Mercredi 17 janvier 2024

Chair: Laurie Scott
Clerk: Isaiah Thorning

Présidente : Laurie Scott
Greffier : Isaiah Thorning

Hansard on the Internet

Hansard and other documents of the Legislative Assembly can be on your personal computer within hours after each sitting. The address is:

<https://www.ola.org/>

Index inquiries

Reference to a cumulative index of previous issues may be obtained by calling the Hansard Reporting Service indexing staff at 416-325-7400.

Le Journal des débats sur Internet

L'adresse pour faire paraître sur votre ordinateur personnel le Journal et d'autres documents de l'Assemblée législative en quelques heures seulement après la séance est :

Renseignements sur l'index

Adressez vos questions portant sur des numéros précédents du Journal des débats au personnel de l'index, qui vous fourniront des références aux pages dans l'index cumulatif, en composant le 416-325-7400.

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
111, rue Wellesley ouest, Queen's Park
Toronto ON M7A 1A2
Téléphone, 416-325-7400; télécopieur, 416-325-7430
Publié par l'Assemblée législative de l'Ontario

ISSN 2816-7252

CONTENTS

Wednesday 17 January 2024

Regional governance	HE-987
Regional Municipality of York; Friends of the Golden Horseshoe; County of Simcoe ...	HE-987
Mr. Wayne Emmerson	
Mr. Victor Doyle	
Mr. Basil Clarke	
City of Richmond Hill; Town of Bradford West Gwillimbury; City of Vaughan.....	HE-997
Mr. David West	
Mr. James Leduc	
Mr. Steven Del Duca	
Town of Collingwood; Mr. Jonathan Scott; City of Markham.....	HE-1006
Ms. Yvonne Hamlin	
Mr. Frank Scarpitti	

LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY OF ONTARIO

ASSEMBLÉE LÉGISLATIVE DE L'ONTARIO

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

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

Wednesday 17 January 2024

Mercredi 17 janvier 2024

The committee met at 1000 in the SpringHill Suites Toronto Vaughan, Vaughan.

REGIONAL GOVERNANCE

The Chair (Ms. Laurie Scott): Good morning, everyone. Happy new year. The Standing Committee on Heritage, Infrastructure and Cultural Policy will now come to order. We are meeting in the beautiful city of Vaughan 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.

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

Are there any questions?

**REGIONAL MUNICIPALITY OF YORK
FRIENDS OF THE GOLDEN HORSESHOE
COUNTY OF SIMCOE**

The Chair (Ms. Laurie Scott): I will now call on the regional municipality of York, Friends of the Golden Horseshoe, and the county of Simcoe to come up and take a place at the table. When you're all settled, I'll start in the order that I announced you.

I will now call on the regional municipality of York to begin with a seven-minute presentation. Please state your name for Hansard's purposes, and you may begin.

Mr. Wayne Emmerson: Thank you, Madam Chair. My name is Wayne Emmerson. I'm chairman and CEO for the regional municipality of York. I'm here today representing York region along with our chief administrative officer, Erin Mahoney.

York region is located between the city of Toronto and the southern shores of Lake Simcoe. We are home to a

vibrant mix of urban and rural communities, and a natural landscape that includes the Oak Ridges moraine and the greenbelt. Our region consists of nine cities and towns: Aurora, East Gwillimbury, Georgina, King, Markham, Newmarket, Richmond Hill, Stouffville, and Vaughan. We are one of the fastest-growing and most diverse municipalities in Ontario, with 1.2 million residents representing 238 distinct ethnic origins.

For 25 years, I have served the residents of York region, first as mayor and regional representative for the town of Whitchurch-Stouffville, and as regional chair and CEO since 2014. Over this time, I have seen many changes across our communities. This includes stronger and more efficient municipal, regional and senior government relationships that have led to productive collaborations and cross-jurisdictional efficiencies. These relationships have facilitated development of infrastructure required to meet the needs of our growing populations.

York region's total population is expected to grow to over two million people and one million jobs by 2051. To support this growth, York region remains committed to investing in the services and infrastructure residents will rely on for generations to come.

For 52 years, we have collaborated with local partners and all levels of government to provide our residents with high-quality services that respect taxpayers and deliver value for money. Our success in collaboration has made York region a destination of choice for individuals, families and businesses.

Our focus is on a two-tiered model of municipal governance that is fiscally responsible and that ensures cost-effective delivery of services across all nine cities and towns. This includes regional delivery of policing, paramedic services, transit, waste, long-term care, public health, social assistance, court services, forestry, children's services, economic development, and development services. York region is also responsible for constructing, operating and maintaining regional roads, community housing, water, and sewage plants.

Our commitment is to build strong, caring and safe communities where residents can live to their full potential. And we see this vision reflected in feedback from our residents. Our community polling consistently tells us that about three quarters of residents are satisfied with regional government and the quality of York region programs and services.

In terms of value for tax dollars, three quarters of residents believe they receive good value with paramedic services, waste management, water, and police services. At the same time, they have identified housing, traffic and public safety as top concerns, and our polling has found that about 70% of residents are confident in York region's ability to address these issues. As an organization, we view these same areas among our top priorities, and we are confident we are best positioned to address them.

York Regional Police, which serves all nine cities and towns in our region, is rated amongst the top police services in Canada and is an international leader in policing.

Since York region's establishment in 1971, investments in our regional transportation and transit systems have supported our growth. Continued investments in transportation and transit will play a vital role as we continue to grow. Today, York region operates 34 kilometres of dedicated bus rapidways on Highway 7, Yonge Street, plus Davis Drive in the town of Newmarket.

We are responsible for maintaining over 4,300 lane-kilometres of roadways across all nine local cities and towns.

We have completed most of York region's portion of the 121-kilometre walking and cycling route linking Lake Simcoe to Lake Ontario.

Even while we are implementing our \$11-billion 10-year capital plan, we want to do even more. That has included creating a roads capital acceleration reserve dedicated to advancing construction of our priority road projects.

In partnership with the federal and provincial governments, and through a \$1.12-billion regional commitment, work continues to advance the critical Yonge North subway extension. This project remains York region's number one transportation priority and is critical to ensuring we meet the needs of current residents while preparing for population growth.

Through York region's housing company, Housing York Inc., we provide affordable housing to more than 4,000 tenants across 36 housing properties. Work also continues to increase community housing supply, with 265 new units under construction in the city of Markham and 97 new units planned for the town of Whitchurch-Stouffville.

York region and York regional council remain committed to addressing housing and housing affordability issues. We are aligned with the provincial goal to build more homes and increase the speed of approvals. However, to meet the demands of provincial housing targets and our growing populations, collaborative investment in critical infrastructure is needed. This includes more than \$2 billion in increased investments to develop water and waste water infrastructure, roads, transit and housing.

Our two-tiered governance system ensures the interconnected nature of municipal services can meet the demand and growth. Economies of scale are realized through regional management of public amenities such as water, roads, waste and transit infrastructure. This regional-scale approach to implementing and sustaining over \$25 billion in capital infrastructure supports efficient service delivery across a range of legislated programs. Regional oversight

and delivery of these cross-jurisdictional services helps ensure that the right infrastructure is in place to support local municipality housing pledges and our overall population growth.

We have a strong track record that demonstrates we not only know our work, but we know how to make it work within our two-tiered governance system. This is evident through such work as the York-Durham sewage system forcemain twinning project, expansion of TTC Line 1 in Vaughan, and innovative housing solutions in East Gwillimbury and Georgina.

We maintain the two-tiered governance model that has been in place for more than half a century is best positioned to help Ontario realize its ambitious housing goals. Our vision demonstrates regional council's commitment to strong, caring and safe communities.

Over the last decade, our strategic plan has driven greater accountability in tracking and reporting on key objectives and performance measures, to achieve the priorities of council and our communities.

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

Mr. Wayne Emmerson: Okay.

In 2019, the government of Ontario confirmed support of York region's two-tiered government structure. At that time, the province viewed this structure as the most efficient means to deliver critical infrastructure and services to our communities. Today, this structure remains the most viable option to ensure continued delivery of exceptional programs and services that support the economic strength, viability and community well-being.

Through partnerships with the province and our local cities and towns, we are confidently positioned to enable growth in York region.

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

Mr. Wayne Emmerson: Thank you for the opportunity to share my view with you in support of our effective and efficient two-tiered governance model in York region. The work we do as an upper-tier municipal government to support—

The Chair (Ms. Laurie Scott): I'm going to have to cut you off. Thank you very much.

Interjection.

The Chair (Ms. Laurie Scott): I was kind of generous at the end, I know. Sorry about that.

Mr. Wayne Emmerson: I didn't hear it.

The Chair (Ms. Laurie Scott): So sorry.

Just a reminder that these lovely people over here in the red are going to control your mikes for you, so you don't have to worry about pushing down the buttons.

The next up are Friends of the Golden Horseshoe, for seven minutes. Please begin.

1010

Mr. Victor Doyle: My name is Victor Doyle. I'm here on behalf of Friends of the Golden Horseshoe. We're an advocacy group for healthy, prosperous communities that are well-housed [*inaudible*] housing for 30 years. I was directly involved in regional land use planning and governance frameworks during that entire time. So I'm going to give you my view and the group's view from sort

of a provincial perspective, because that's where a lot of us came from. It's going to focus on the greater Golden Horseshoe, and we're going to focus on upper tiers and regions, in particular.

Chair Emmerson mentioned that they were created 50 years ago—and they were done so because they provide the critical mass of resources and financial capacity to be able to deliver a whole bunch of provincial priorities, which are the responsibility of the provincial government. So the province has relied on upper tiers for the last two generations to deliver its responsibilities, whether it's on health, transportation, protection of farmland, green lands, housing etc. They're the key partners, and they need to remain so.

These regions own and operate hundreds of billions of dollars worth of infrastructure. They have multi-billion dollar annual budgets. They're highly sophisticated organizations that are integrated vertically and horizontally. They have vast amounts of experience and expertise, both leadership-wise and in their civil service. They were originally created to deal with sewer, water and roads, but they've evolved. Chair Emmerson mentioned some of the other things that they do. Now they do have their own transit authorities, public health units, housing corporations, which are critical in terms of the government's, and society's, priority on delivering affordable housing; non-profit housing, in particular. They've done a fantastic job in planning the housing we're going to need to accommodate the five million people we're expecting here over the next 30 years. They've done this heavy lifting through their official plans, integrating it with master infrastructure plans, and aligning it with the provincial regional transportation plan worth \$60 billion to \$80 billion. They are forming the glue that brings all these provincial priorities together and delivering them on the ground.

The loss, if they were to be dissolved, is crucial, and we've seen some of this come out in the discussion around Peel. We'd lose this leadership and that expertise. There is no way that 89 lower tiers in the greater Golden Horseshoe could ever deliver what the upper tiers deliver. They don't have the capacity, resources or mandates. Replicating these roles through boards and commissions would lead to political unaccountability and lack of coordination, because the regions and counties do this in-house.

From a housing perspective, the regions, through their official plans, have planned for two million units within the greater Golden Horseshoe, and 1.2 million of those units already are either under construction, approved or in process. We've got decades of housing in the pipeline and coming on stream. They are in no way responsible for the housing supply crunch that we've faced; in fact, they're the opposite. Removing them would lead to obstacles and slowing down in delivering the housing we need.

Three recommendations: First, keep the upper tiers in place and keep upper-tier planning in place. Second, advise the government not to proclaim the provisions in the Planning Act that abolish regional planning in the Golden Horseshoe in six of the 11 upper tiers. Third, advise the government not to repeal the growth plan. It is

the single integrated policy document the province has issued to provide guidance to their partners at the upper-tier levels to deliver on all the key provincial priorities, which you're all responsible for.

A couple of options, just to end: If one is really looking to reduce government, then the answer is not to remove the upper tiers; it's to move to single tiers. And we have a great track record of that—Ottawa, Sudbury, Hamilton as big urban ones; Haldimand county, Kawartha Lakes, Chatham-Kent as more rural single tiers. These have been around for 20 years, and they're working really well. While that may not be politically palatable, there are all sorts of opportunities to have the upper tiers and lower tiers work more closely together, coordinate their decision-making, reduce any duplication and streamline processes.

From a policy perspective, rather than repealing the Growth Plan for the Greater Golden Horseshoe and weaving it into a province-wide document that applies to even northern Ontario, the provincial policy statement, take the few policies that aren't already in the growth plan from the PPS and make it the provincial policy for the greater Golden Horseshoe—the PPS wouldn't apply—and then roll all the provincial plans into a single plan. I think even the upper tiers would support that.

The Chair (Ms. Laurie Scott): You have 60 seconds.

Mr. Victor Doyle: That's all I have to say. Thanks very much for your time.

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

Next up is the county of Simcoe. Please state your name and begin.

Mr. Basil Clarke: I am Basil Clarke. I'm the warden of the county of Simcoe. I'm here today with my CAO, Mark Aitken.

In short, county council endorses the current upper-tier governance structure, as it provides a wide range of efficient and effective services to 18 municipalities.

We are a regional designated service manager that has built over time meaningful services and systems to provide critical services to our residents seamlessly across municipal boundaries. Our municipalities are not large and complex, and the county-wide service systems, innovative programs and infrastructure supports are efficient, help maintain responsible tax rates and, quite frankly, are absolutely necessary to meet the provincial growth targets.

This does not mean that some changes couldn't be considered and other efficiencies couldn't be gained by coordinating more services. We would like to have a meaningful dialogue on these with the province, and we promote the idea of a facilitator to ease through some of the local politics and local agendas. As a prominent growth county in the province, we continually look for opportunities to streamline services, alleviate taxation pressures on our residents, and cut red tape. This regional review could offer Simcoe county and its municipalities further opportunity to reimagine how we can further support growth and infrastructure coordination to meet our common goals, all in a way that aligns efforts rather than duplicates them.

Our position is that the upper-tier governance structure and regional system approach is effective in Simcoe county and provides service systems and economies of scale to the residents of our 18 municipalities. There is always room to consider other services and efficiencies as we evolve and move forward into the future.

We believe our regional system is effective because Simcoe county is unique. We are at a different point of time in growth and evolution than other large regions. Our county-wide systems operate efficiently, and taxation and infrastructure pressures that often come with growth are best handled at a regional level with a broader financial base. We remain one of the fastest-growing regions. We are facing significant infrastructure demands and need to be coordinated. Many of the infrastructure and environmental systems don't stop at municipal borders. We need to maintain coordinated planning across the region.

Our council believes that we have an effective structure in Simcoe county. Firstly, our area is unique. As a collective of 16 municipalities and the two separated cities of Barrie and Orillia, we are unique in our regional governance, but also different from our other cousins and counties. We are experiencing growth rates at or higher than our other regional counterparts, but infrastructure service delivery has always remained at the local level, hampering our regional capacity for planning. Similar to regions, we've experienced much of the issues that come with high growth but remained within the county governance structure. We have a very diverse mixture of rural and urban landscapes, which means many of our communities don't have the municipal tax base to take on the growth being allocated to them.

Secondly, the county has proven time and time again that efficient regional services assist our taxpayers. The county of Simcoe has a tradition of being efficient and effective stewards, and many of our systems are built up in our region, from health care, such as our paramedics and our award-winning long-term care, to social and community services such as housing targets—we've surpassed our affordable housing targets over the last 10 years—and, of course, our core services like busing, transit, waste collection. By the way, we're number two in diversion now in the province of Ontario, and we're quite proud of that, when you look at the different demographics across Simcoe county. We support our economy with the Lake Simcoe Regional Airport. We've got a robust tourism and economic development department. These are efficient and effective regional services that aren't bound by any municipal borders.

1020

Finally, costs can be better shouldered at the county and regional level. With taxation pressures growing and the future estimated costs rising, we believe investments for the future would benefit from the broader tax base to support the weight of future infrastructure investments. It's a simple truth that several of our 16 municipalities and separated cities are struggling to sustain and shoulder the massive infrastructure projects and maintain the funding required just to keep them operational.

Our upper-tier system allows taxpayers to give less individually so we can achieve more collectively. Coordination of these could bring the same successes we've seen in other services. That's why the majority of county council strongly believes our current county structure works. However, as I've stated, there's always opportunity to review some of the services we provide.

On infrastructure: We believe there should be a larger coordination role for the county. We estimate that there is over a billion dollars in infrastructure deficit in Simcoe county to serve the anticipated growth to meet the provincial targets. We currently have 79 municipal water systems and 27 municipal waste water systems spread across the county. Coordinated approvals and coordinated pipes can equal more homes faster. There's a critical need for regional-scale infrastructure and planning to deliver and unlock environmental systems' fiscal and technical limitations. We also believe that regional growth planning in the 16 municipalities is imperative to guide infrastructure investment, and that there can be efficiencies through streamlining, but not eliminating, the two-tier partnership. Macro-growth strategic systems that cross municipal boundaries and support future growth are necessary. It's the only way you can properly protect the environment, the much-needed farmland, and get the growth where the growth needs to be.

The Chair (Ms. Laurie Scott): You have 60 seconds.

Mr. Basil Clarke: With a growth and infrastructure plan coordinated at a macro scale, local municipalities can build their communities as they wish, with the local services they need and desire. A new framework for an evolved planning partnership would provide clarity and stability in the housing system and reduce overlap, while syncing investments in the future.

I don't envy this committee, in that you have to try to figure out how to deal with all these counties. I've been in municipal politics for 23 years, 18 years at Simcoe county. I found out in one year as a warden how little I knew in 18 years as a county councillor, when you actually delve into the systems that we supply and how efficient they are. I really am the new guy on the block, one year in. It has completely overwhelmed so many people.

We have sent you some studies that were done in the past. Please take a look at them. There's some good information in those documents, as well.

I look forward to seeing you when you come up to Simcoe county.

The Chair (Ms. Laurie Scott): Thank you very much. You're my neighbour. I cross the border occasionally.

We'll now go to questions and answers. We're going to start with MPP Burch, for seven and a half minutes. Please go ahead.

Mr. Jeff Burch: Thank you for your presentations this morning. We appreciate you being here.

I want to start with Chair Emmerson. One of the mandates of this committee is to determine if regional government works, if two-tier government works. You talked about some polling stats on citizen satisfaction with the region, and I'm just wondering if you want to repeat those

17 JANVIER 2024

and expand on that. Obviously, we need to listen to the folks who pay the taxes, and if they're satisfied with regional government, we need to listen to them.

Mr. Wayne Emmerson: We do polling probably about twice a year, just to get a feel for what the residents are looking for. A few years back, policing was the big one—there were concerns about the policing part of it—and then lately, as everyone knows, it's housing. When we do the polling, three quarters of our residents are satisfied with regional government and the service that we provide, and they know the service is everything from paramedics to policing to roads, and then the heavy lifting in the water and sewer. Also, three quarters of them—in the form of the tax dollars—believe they receive good value for what we provide to them.

I would say there are quite a few members of our public who don't realize what the regions actually do. We're not out in the front. We do the heavy lifting. We make sure the major roads are done. We make sure that there's water and sewer. When they come home at nighttime, they want to be able to turn the tap on, flush the toilet and make sure their garbage is gone. If they call 911, they want to make sure there's an ambulance, a police officer or even a fire truck—we haven't got into the fire, but we operate two of the major emergency services.

They have identified housing as another one that they really feel—because it's out in the newspaper, it's out in the public—is needed for people, and we're working on that. But we won't build houses. They've got to go to the rental. There's no way we can build the amount of houses, and we're going to have to do more rental. In all the bylaws and the plans that we do in York region, if they do 500 units, they need to at least do 100 affordable units. That's the question that's going to be needed from the local level—how are you going to do that? I think it comes back to building rentals.

Mr. Jeff Burch: Let me ask you about housing and the effects of Bill 23. Maybe you could talk a little bit about how the region handled the planning changes with respect to who does the planning between the region and the lower tier, as well as the criteria for housing targets.

Mr. Wayne Emmerson: When it gets to planning, over 80% of all the applications that come in are dealt with at the local level. We only deal with the planning issues when it gets down to if we can service water and sewer. We want to make sure when they do the roads that the entrances don't end up 50 feet from a corner, and they want to make sure the roads are going to be wide enough in the future to do it. And the next step is, are they allowing for transit to go by? So when we get to planning, I have no issue, and I think the council has no issue, and I think we're working towards the transition of planning to go to the local level, but they already have 80% of that now. If they build 80 storeys or 20 storeys, we just have to make sure we have the servicing so that we can do that, and they'll do that with their engineers.

I don't sit at their local council when they have a public meeting on if they're going to build 500 units there or if they're going to build a high-rise. They do their own, and

that's where it should be done. The local residents should have their say. But the region only provides the hard services, the ones that they need to know they have.

So, Bill 23—yes, we're concerned about the DC charges and that, but that's another issue going forward.

Mr. Jeff Burch: Well, I'm going to ask you about it.

Mr. Wayne Emmerson: Go ahead.

Mr. Jeff Burch: The province costs municipalities between \$3 billion and \$4 billion in revenue. They set up a program of \$1.2 billion and, to qualify, you have to meet housing targets, and to meet the housing targets, the criteria is foundations poured, technically, which the municipalities have no control over.

What do you hear from your member municipalities about having that kind of criteria to meet in order to attain those housing targets?

Mr. Wayne Emmerson: They're struggling, and the developers are too. They're not going to build houses that they can't make money on, and they're struggling to get them built now. The locals are doing what they can to promote and get the plans passed, but it's tough sledding out there.

And the DCs—I don't think anyone around this table or anywhere would want me to take money from the existing homeowners to pay for a new road that's going in front of the new subdivision. They don't want me to do that. They want the development industry to pay for that, and that's what should be done. Some of those things in Bill 23—we're still going through it; we're still waiting to see what happens with it. But that's where the issues are. We need the DCs, if you want us to build, and I've told that to developers, too. I've said to them, "I can't build infrastructure if I don't have the development charges to build it."

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

The Chair (Ms. Laurie Scott): One minute and 20 seconds.

Mr. Jeff Burch: Great.

Let me ask you about one of the things we keep hearing from municipalities across southern Ontario, which is that municipalities have been told that they have to have permits and approvals go through the system in a certain period of time, but developers don't have any restrictions on them.

Would a use-it-or-lose-it policy on approvals be something that the region and most municipalities are in favour of, since there are approvals out there that are not being acted upon—shovels not going in the ground? There are economic issues, clearly, but there are also developers that are just not moving; they're land banking.

1030

Mr. Wayne Emmerson: Yes. It would have worked five years ago; not now, because there's nothing happening.

Do you know how many houses we built in 2023? Ten thousand in York region. Ten thousand houses across the region is nothing.

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

Mr. Wayne Emmerson: But if I get to 2025-26, yes, I use that—use it or lose it. Some will say, "Yes, take it away, because I know I'm going to get it back in three years."

The Chair (Ms. Laurie Scott): We'll now move on to MPP McMahon for four and a half minutes. Please begin.

Ms. Mary-Margaret McMahon: I have half the time, so it's going to be rapid-fire. Get ready. It's going to be for all three of you. I have a question—first round—based on the housing theme.

First of all, thank you for coming. I appreciate your time and energy.

Full disclosure: I do have a soft spot in my heart for the county of Simcoe because I grew up in Collingwood. I'm just letting you know that. But they'll all get the same time as you—so probably about a minute to answer.

Housing—because this is what the key question is here, and we all want to do something to tackle this crisis. Are you meeting your targets? I know there are three sides to every story. We hear this target number, but what are the holdups? We heard from the Burlington mayor, quite frankly, about the holdups, and the holdups are because of us. So are you meeting your targets and why or why not—because of the holdups? And the types of housing that you're looking at building and you're building—because we know it's not the Beaver Cleaver single-family homes with the white picket fences that are going to solve this.

We'll go with Friends of the Golden Horseshoe. Victor?

Mr. Victor Doyle: Well, I don't know about the targets, but I think the targets should be for development interests and companies, because municipalities don't build this housing.

Secondly, the role the upper tiers play, particularly the regions where the transit investments are—that's where the purpose-built rental needs to be concentrated. They are taking great steps to align their plans, to drive growth to these key transit corridors and transit stations. That is the key to unlocking housing affordability and the most units coming on stream, because single detached have dropped precipitously, mainly because people can't afford them.

Ms. Mary-Margaret McMahon: Thanks for being succinct. You must have gone to Toastmasters.

Wayne?

Mr. Wayne Emmerson: We'll only get out of the housing problem with rentals; it's the only way we can, because it's affordable. The targets that the municipalities are—we've got about 80,000 units sitting in the hopper that they can build on, but the developer has to pull the permit. So we've got an accommodation of about 300,000 people.

The economy is driving quite a bit of this; the developers will tell you that. The interest rates are terrible right now, and I heard this morning they're not going to go down for the foreseeable future, so that's the issue.

But the locals are doing whatever they can to get their housing started.

Ms. Mary-Margaret McMahon: What types of housing are the developers and the municipalities looking at?

Mr. Wayne Emmerson: I think they look a lot at the row housing and the townhouses and things, but I still stress that they're trying to get—

Ms. Mary-Margaret McMahon: Rental.

Mr. Wayne Emmerson: —purpose-built rentals.

Even around the subway coming up Yonge Street, that's those—intensification. The province has already approved some MZOs on intensification along the subway.

Ms. Mary-Margaret McMahon: Any talk about co-ops or anything like that?

Mr. Wayne Emmerson: Not with myself. At the region, they might. At the local level, we've not talked about that.

Ms. Mary-Margaret McMahon: And best to last is Basil.

Mr. Basil Clarke: As far as the housing, we have more than enough approved to meet the targets. The problem is the lack of critical infrastructure. It's a sewer and water—and I even look at Ramara township, where I'm from: I've got enough housing approved to increase my stock by 40%, and they all have that big H on it—"hold"—until there's servicing in the area. That is clear across Simcoe county. It cannot afford the infrastructure for the developers to go ahead, even when the developers are willing to pay their share.

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

Mr. Basil Clarke: You need a thousand homes to make a system sustainable. They've got their 40%; the local municipality doesn't have the 60% to match it, to build the service, so that future growth can come online. It's just a lack of funding for those services.

Ms. Mary-Margaret McMahon: Yes, we're hearing that over and over again. It's taps-to-toilet infrastructure—not just the units, but we need to look at building whole communities with access to community services, transit, green space and whatnot, and proper infrastructure funding.

The Chair (Ms. Laurie Scott): We'll go to the government side. MPP Rae.

Mr. Matthew Rae: Thank you to all the presenters for your remarks this morning.

I do know, as my Liberal colleague mentioned, that waste water infrastructure comes up often at these meetings. We heard it in Burlington. And I know, provincially, in the fall economic statement, we did allocate \$200 million for a program. I know York could spend all of that, and I'm sure Simcoe could as well. We are choosing to take action because, unfortunately, the federal government has decided not to fund waste water infrastructure for whatever reason. Provincially, we always look forward to, essentially, another ICIP program where it's a third, a third and a third, which it was traditionally. We would be very much in support of that, and the province will be there with our money to support that. But we will start with \$200 million and see what more we can find, because we know the need is great.

To Warden Clarke's comment: I have it in my riding, as well. The units are approved, but there's a big H on the list.

This committee, as you all know, was sent around the province by Minister Calandra—in January; he really loves us—to do a study on regional governance. Obviously, the three main things we're looking at are housing, housing-enabling infrastructure, and providing services in an efficient and effective manner.

As my colleagues will know—I say this often at the hearings—there's only one taxpayer in Ontario. We all

serve the same taxpayer, so we need to ensure that all levels of government are providing services effectively.

Warden Clarke, you mentioned that there are 79 municipal water systems in Simcoe. My question is, are there systems or services that could be provided more efficiently? You alluded to it, but I want some specific examples. Waste water could be one of them, but are there others?

Mr. Basil Clarke: One of the issues we have is when you've got—it's at the local, municipal level, so if you wanted to build a subdivision of 4,000 homes and you went to Ontario Hydro or a gas company and said, "We will put in all the infrastructure at our cost. We will join to your system at our cost, and we will upgrade your system at our cost. Do you want the future customers?", the answer is, "Absolutely. We're going to upgrade the power station. You're going to upgrade our pumping station for gas." Now take the same thing for sewer and water—"We're going to put in all the infrastructure at our cost, a pumping station at our cost. We're going to go to your municipal services in a neighbouring municipality, hook on at our cost and upgrade your systems." The answer, 80% of the time, is no. Why? Because it's political. Maybe that mayor doesn't like this mayor. We've got that across the county, where the sharing of services needs to be coordinated. It doesn't need to be owned by the region; it needs to be coordinated. If that service is there, we should be able to tap into it so that these homes can get built. You've got to take the politics out of the pipes. This is infrastructure paid for by the users, owned by the users of those systems. So the new users now become part owners. It's got to be seamless. We've got to be able to get this infrastructure crossing municipal boundaries seamlessly, just like the roads do, just like our ambulances do. That's the holdup we're having.

Mr. Matthew Rae: I appreciate those comments very much.

Chair, I defer my remaining time to MPP Smith.

The Chair (Ms. Laurie Scott): MPP Smith, go ahead.

Ms. Laura Smith: I want to thank everyone for being here today on the recorded coldest day of the year.

The Chair (Ms. Laurie Scott): Seriously.

Ms. Laura Smith: Thus far; let's keep it going.

The Chair (Ms. Laurie Scott): You've got four minutes.

Ms. Laura Smith: Thank you.

Once again, thank you for being here. We touched on a number of subjects.

Mr. Emmerson, you talked about how things have evolved. By the way, thank you for your tenured service to York region. Thank you for all your services. You touched on a few topics: housing; traffic; public safety, which is so crucial for communities; infrastructure; roads; and, most importantly, the Yonge North subway extension, which just happens to be in my riding and is such a critical piece of infrastructure that we've desperately needed for so long.

1040

Could you talk about how roads and transit and streamlining processes can enable better growth and deliver more housing?

Mr. Wayne Emmerson: Well, you can't have the housing unless you put the infrastructure in the ground. You've got to have proper transit, because right now—I'll give you a scenario. We were doing some EAs, and Markham decided quite a few years ago that—the council said, "No, don't do the EAs," so we pulled back and put the EAs into Vaughan. They have a good road system. And we're still doing a lot more. Markham now is five to seven years behind because they pulled us back and told us not to do it. That was a local council decision.

So we try to do the best we possibly can, and we work with the locals. We need to see their forecasts. We don't plan for just 2025; we need to plan for 2030. So we've got to make sure our roads and our infrastructure is in the ground, and we do that—we will plan ahead, as much as we possibly can.

Ms. Laura Smith: Given what you've just talked about, which is—it's a streamlining process that can clog the machine. Can you talk about how two-tier local governance is a benefit or a drawback for what you do?

Mr. Wayne Emmerson: I think the benefit that we do—we do the heavy lifting because I think that they like to see us do that work. They want to see it done, and we know we can move it.

The locals sometimes don't want to see their roads improve, because the neighbours sitting and the people living on those roads don't want to do it—from a two-lane highway to a four-lane highway. But we can see the future—what's planned for Markham and any municipality. In 10 years, they're going to grow substantially. You can't have a two-lane road if you're going to put another 5,000 or 6,000 units there.

We need to be ahead of the growth as best we possibly can, and that's why the critical infrastructure, like that subway—no disrespect; it's going to be not till 2036. That's how long it's going to be before we actually see a subway up to Richmond Hill. Metrolinx may say no, but they're not going to get the shovels in the ground until 2026—give me the math and it's 10 years, at least, before you actually see something, I believe. I probably won't be around. I hope I'm alive, but I know I won't be around in politics. That's what that is.

Ms. Laura Smith: Mr. Emmerson, you will be here.

Mr. Wayne Emmerson: Oh, I hope so. I would like to ride the subway.

Ms. Laura Smith: Once again, I'm grateful for all of your contributions.

The Chair (Ms. Laurie Scott): You have 40 seconds.

Ms. Laura Smith: Just to jump back, what do you suggest could enhance effective local government?

Mr. Wayne Emmerson: I think what we're doing now is right. I really do believe in regional government. I believe in the locals. I still believe people—when I was the mayor of Whitchurch-Stouffville—they want a mayor, they want a council, they want them to go to. I do believe

in that. And I believe we continue to do what we do best—provide the heavy lifting at the region, and that the locals decide how they want their communities so they're safe and sustainable.

The Chair (Ms. Laurie Scott): MPP Burch, you can start the second round, please.

Mr. Jeff Burch: I have a couple of questions for Victor from Friends of the Golden Horseshoe.

Impressive work experience—you said 30 years dealing with regional governments and watching the evolution of regional governments in Ontario.

I agree with your conclusions to keep the regions—to not abolish regional planning and to keep the growth plans.

Is it a surprise to you, what happened in Peel region, with the surprise or sudden announcement of dissolution? And then, with the government backtracking on that, when it was discovered—it turns out it's very expensive to dissolve a regional government. There was, I think you could say, a mass exodus of staffing—I believe the report was, 250 employees a week were leaving—just on the announcement that Peel was dissolving. Did that surprise you, after watching regional government evolve over the years—that a sudden announcement like that would create that kind of chaos?

Mr. Victor Doyle: No, it did not. I don't know all the details about the financial analysis, and there are debates about them, but the overarching one, that it was going to cost a lot more, is not surprising. I mentioned some of the challenges going to boards and commissions, trying to replace the functions the region did. I talked about the loss of expertise, and the uncertainty is going to lead to more, so I think it's prudent that the government deal with this sooner rather than later to stop that outflow.

With respect to Chair Emmerson, I do think regions need to be involved in planning. Even at that high level, let the locals do the detailed stuff, but they need to set the big footprint of our urban envelopes, tied to our transit investments and the protection of large-scale green space, natural systems and farmland, and particularly our water resources, because they're shared. We can't move to having 89 lower tiers in the greater Golden Horseshoe trying to manage that and coordinate all that. We need the 21 upper and single tiers to continue to do that in a more streamlined and coordinated way.

Mr. Jeff Burch: Can you explain your concerns around growth plans, and the importance to the creation of housing and funding infrastructure when it comes to having a growth plan?

Mr. Victor Doyle: The key about the provincial growth plan is, it mandated the upper and single tiers in the region to plan for the next 25 to 30 years, and they integrated this all with very detailed financial plans, sewer and water plans, transportation plans, and brought it all together. So these two documents work hand in glove. And the province needs to express its vision for the entire region in order to allow the 21 upper and single tiers to work collectively towards that overarching vision. We're 10 million people, with another five million coming. The growth is massive,

and it takes all hands on deck to look 30 years out to do that work.

Mr. Jeff Burch: Thank you.

I have a question for the county of Simcoe. We heard from Barrie about an issue with respect to annexing land. We heard from Oro-Medonte yesterday, and one of the things that came out in that conversation was that many regions struggle with the mix of urban and rural, and the pressure on farmland. We know that we're losing a shocking amount of farmland every day in Ontario, and there are a lot of farmers who feel that pressure of urban sprawl, and the pressure to attain housing targets, and the pressure that puts on farms. Can you talk a little bit about that and the pressures in Simcoe county, and how important it is to have an upper-tier government to try to coordinate that planning with respect to farmland?

Mr. Basil Clarke: You happen to be talking to a farmer. That is my day job.

I can't say it better than some of my colleagues have said it. You need that overreaching, somebody planning for the 30 years out to protect the farmland.

One of the issues—you mentioned it: Barrie wanted to annex. Why? Because we have the servicing.

Again, sewer pipes aren't cannons. You're not supposed to point them at the land you want to conquer and then move out and take over that land. It needs to be planned intelligently, should this land even be developed. That's why we need the overreaching. That's why we need it at the higher level. We don't want to be bothered at a county level with a severance, or even a small 10-home subdivision. If it's an area where a subdivision belongs, let the local municipality have the planning authority to deal with the local stuff and form the community the way it should be. But somebody needs to be looking from the lens from above to make sure that we're protecting the land that needs to be protected.

We also need that coordination—that if there is sewer capacity somewhere, you should be able to T onto it, as long as you pay your way. It should be accessible. It shouldn't be held hostage so that we can grab land down in the future. That's the coordination role we would like to see, to direct the growth where it needs to be, and make cheap, rentable land for me so I can carry on farming.

Mr. Jeff Burch: How would the upper tier facilitate the preservation of agricultural land?

Mr. Basil Clarke: Well, of course, we have a very large green space that we've protected in Lake Simcoe. We have the largest municipal forestry system in all of Canada, so Simcoe county does a good job of identifying the land where the prime agriculture area is.

Sometimes it makes sense to chip away at the edges a bit, because not all land is grades 1, 2 and 3. That's why you need that coordination, coming from the local municipality through their official plans, and then the oversight from the county to say, "That is a prime area. It must be protected. We have to build critical infrastructure elsewhere." There comes a point when we just cannot have the urban sprawl any farther heading in.

1050

One of the issues we have with annexations, especially if it's from a separated city, is that we no longer have control. Once that farmland is annexed, we have no oversight. They could change the zoning to whatever they want it to be—including that the green space can disappear. That's our concern. That's why we need to have that oversight. Quite frankly, boundaries should stay where boundaries are.

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

Mr. Jeff Burch: That's it for me, Chair.

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

Ms. Mary-Margaret McMahon: Can I take those 20 seconds?

The Chair (Ms. Laurie Scott): I was generous last round.

Ms. Mary-Margaret McMahon: I have another rapid-fire with two different themes, so it's going to maybe put you in two different mindsets.

Basil said he does not envy this committee, and I had to laugh because I don't think—well, I don't envy us either. It's kind of a homet's nest, and we're hearing from everyone all different stories and whatnot. This government has done a lot of reversals.

What's your level of hope and optimism, and what's your level of frustration with this whole exercise? Do you think anything will actually come out of it, or will we just reverse this whole process? That's number one.

Number two, planning: This is interesting today. We've heard from lower-tier municipalities, "Give us all the planning. Tweak it so that the region doesn't have anything to do with planning." Today is the first day in the committee that I'm hearing to keep a little bit at the regional level. So just your thoughts on that—I guess, 30 seconds each or whatever you want to divide it up.

We'll talk with Basil first.

Mr. Basil Clarke: We did touch on planning, but remember, the county's role is your role. We enforce your policies. So if you're going to get rid of the county planning department, are you prepared to hire all the planners to enforce your policies over the municipalities, to make sure you have that oversight position? The county department was set up to make sure provincial policy was followed. Unless you're going to put boots on the ground, that's a daunting task. I don't know how you would ever do it.

I'm sorry; there was a first part of that question—

Ms. Mary-Margaret McMahon: Your level of hope and/or frustration—hope, optimism, frustration.

Mr. Basil Clarke: I never get frustrated if you reverse your decision based on science. You looked at Peel and said, "Yes, this will cost the taxpayers." So I never find that frustrating.

I do hope we can move forward with some efficiencies, streamline the process and see some changes—that we have that coordination piece that we can handle at the county level. There are always efficiencies to be found, so we would like you to take a look at the reports that we've

sent you in the past and that have been done and see if you can find efficiencies there that you can help us put into place.

Ms. Mary-Margaret McMahon: Yes, especially like water and waste water—it's pretty crucial to get that right.

Interjection.

Ms. Mary-Margaret McMahon: Yes, thank you.

Wayne?

Mr. Wayne Emmerson: Planning—when I meant that we downloaded it and that 80% of them were done by the locals, that's just how it folds out. We really are concerned more about the water and sewer, to make sure we can actually plan for the future. I can't put water and sewer—no disrespect to the province—when they do an MZO 10 kilometres away from any water and sewer. So we need to make sure that we're involved in what the planning part of that is.

Are we frustrated? No, I never get frustrated. Change is not a bad thing. I think change is good. But we all look for efficiencies, and I've got to think it's the same as the province and the federal government—you must go through yours to look for efficiencies, so we do too; the locals do too. You may not see it every day, but it's behind the scenes that you'll see the efficiencies working together.

We have a great track record with our locals now, nine municipalities—when I said I've been there 25 years, I've had no issues whatsoever, asking what I needed at the region. We are very successful in getting things for the local municipalities.

The Chair (Ms. Laurie Scott): You have 45 seconds.

Ms. Mary-Margaret McMahon: Victor?

Mr. Victor Doyle: Two hopes: I hope that the committee will recommend that the government reserve the things they talked about, in terms of regional planning. I hope you will recognize that there is no urgency to have massive structural change in the governance frameworks for Ontario. There is so much happening over the last few years. This isn't needed to address the primary housing priorities of the government; it will hurt it.

In terms of a little anecdote, back to the chair of the county—we went to 21 upper and single tiers in the late 1990s, under the Harris administration, to get the benefits of streamlining so we didn't have to deal with 89 lower tiers. Imagine all the provincial parcels we'd have to deal with, all the parcels [*inaudible*] these focal points—

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

Over to the government side for the final round: MPP Gallagher.

M^{me} Dawn Gallagher Murphy: Thank you for being here today, everyone. My question will be for York region, for Chair Emmerson.

Thank you very much for everything York region does. I've been a resident of York region for more than 23 years—Woodbridge, then Aurora. I appreciate all the services I get here in York region.

I want to talk specifically about the down and dirty, and that's water and waste water. Specifically, I know that 80% of the applications you've noted that come in are dealt with on the local municipal level, but the planning

for water and waste water is really with the region. We also know that, right now, we need more waste water capacity in York region—and thus the going south solution to add capacity, and that's going down to the Durham-York region treatment centre.

There are implications when it comes to building homes regarding waste water. For about 20% of those applications that are coming in from the local municipal area, I am guessing, the region has a major say in how to allocate what amounts we have in water and waste water capacity. I know it's a big implication; specifically, for my riding of Newmarket–Aurora and East Gwillimbury.

My question to you, Chair Emmerson: How does this get distributed to minimize the impact for lower-tier land planning, and what do you feel is a solution that can help move this faster so we can get more homes built faster?

Mr. Wayne Emmerson: The southern solution—it's a long story, but we have, for over a decade, been wanting capacity for Newmarket, Aurora and East Gwillimbury—over a decade for approval. I've gone through about 10 ministers of the environment. One even declared a conflict of interest; they couldn't make a decision. So we've been planning for this to go to Lake Simcoe. The province told us about a year ago, "No, you're not going to Lake Simcoe. You're going south." So when they pushed us south, they said that it would be less time and it would be less money. I'm asking the province of Ontario for \$1 billion—that's how much more it's going to cost me to go south than it would have to go to Lake Simcoe. And I need \$500 million or Newmarket, Aurora and East Gwillimbury will come to a complete halt.

This is the issue that we're dealing with. I was promised that I would get approval to go ahead with the plan to go south before the end of the year; now I may not get it until the end of March. Every time it's delayed, it costs us, and we're not going to get it done.

MPP Gallagher, all we do is put plans together, and the locals provide what planning they want to do and where they're going to plan. We look at the numbers, and then we provide the water and sewer. They delegate the water and sewer to whatever site they want to. We don't dictate. We only say how many you need, and then we will try to accommodate that in the timing of it. So the locals have the authority to delegate where the water and sewer goes.

You have to look at the 80% that the locals actually approve. They're all local things, like they talked about. Like the warden said, it's not worry about a 10-unit subdivision or housing or some severances—no, that was all done, even though it's on a regional road. They would have asked us for a comment, and we said, "No, you go ahead and do it on your own." But when it gets to the big areas, the big subdivisions of 4,000 and 5,000 units, that's where the issues come. My staff will size the pipes. I can't size a pipe this big when I need it this big, and I don't size a pipe this big because I've got to size it for 30 years down the road. I don't want to come back and dig it up again. So it's not as if to say we want to walk away from the planning; I want the locals to do more, but we can be part of that and we can help them with it.

1100

If you talk about frustration for this water and sewer for Newmarket, Aurora and East Gwillimbury—it has been frustrating; over a decade, 10 Ministers of the Environment, and I still don't have a decision. I'm telling the province of Ontario—I've told them all—I need a billion dollars.

M^{me} Dawn Gallagher Murphy: I want to move from that note and talk a bit more about our forward-looking zoning for transit-supported densities, specifically around transit stations.

I feel that Vaughan has done a really great job here in replanning based on the subway stations and, obviously, all the new buildings that have gone up here.

I hear from my constituents right in Newmarket who are saying that they want to see more densification around transit.

However, does the upper tier influence whatsoever across York region to ensure that this type of planning for densification around transit is done in that forward-looking manner? I see it's happening in the southern part; in the northern part, in our area, not so much.

I hear what you said, that we need more rentals. Rentals are what is going to help us with this affordability-of-homes issue, but I see rentals around transit as a solution. How can the upper tier help push that with our lower tiers, if at all?

Mr. Wayne Emmerson: I don't think we can. I think it's up to the locals to actually see what their community wants.

As you would know, in Aurora, I think their height limit is six storeys. Stouffville just did a new official plan, and they've gone to 20 storeys. For Vaughan and the Yonge North subway extension, the MZO came out, and they can go as high as 80 storeys. That was planned from the province of Ontario, who helped pay for the subway.

And that's right—we will do those transit-oriented centres with the local municipalities. I won't dictate to them and say, "No, you should build 50 storeys." You decide that from a public perspective, and they have to decide for their own communities.

There are lots of opportunities in the north—I look at along Mulock as one that could very well be, and I think the mayor is looking at a transit-oriented station. But it won't happen overnight. It takes some planning—

The Chair (Ms. Laurie Scott): Thank you. We're out of time for that.

Mr. Wayne Emmerson: Sorry, Madam Chair.

The Chair (Ms. Laurie Scott): Well, I didn't give you proper warning. Anyway, there is always lots of conversation.

Thank you, all. That's the end of the discussions for this first round of presenters. I'll give you a minute to leave the table and then ask the next group—the city of Richmond Hill, the town of Bradford West Gwillimbury, and the city of Vaughan—to come forward.

CITY OF RICHMOND HILL

TOWN OF BRADFORD

WEST GWILLIMBURY

CITY OF VAUGHAN

The Chair (Ms. Laurie Scott): We'll move on to the next round of presenters. We will start with the city of Richmond Hill.

Mr. David West: Thank you very much, Madam Chair and members of the heritage, infrastructure and cultural policy committee. Welcome to York region. My name is David West. I'm the mayor of Richmond Hill. I'm here presenting, obviously, today on behalf of the city of Richmond Hill. I'd like to thank York region chairman Wayne Emmerson and to acknowledge my other York region colleagues and city neighbours—Mayor Del Duca, in particular.

For those of you who don't know, Richmond Hill is in south central York region. It's located between the city of Toronto and the southern shores of Lake Simcoe. Like much of York region, Richmond Hill has a tremendous diversity of both urban spaces and greenbelt lands, and also has the headwaters of the Humber River, the Rouge River and the Don River feeding into Lake Ontario. We take that responsibility very seriously. We have six wards, and we have a population of 208,000—although it depends which sign you come into Richmond Hill on, for our population; they're all a little different. And we are strategically positioned in the heart of York region.

Our population is quite diverse. From the 2021 census data, English is the mother tongue of 33.8% of the residents of Richmond Hill. Native speakers of Mandarin consist of about 13%, closely trailed by those of Persian and Cantonese-speaking mother tongues.

As a very long-time resident of Richmond Hill and a small business owner in my past life and, now, a public servant, I've certainly gained a very deep appreciation for Richmond Hill and the unique and vibrant culture I think that we have in our community. I've been on Richmond Hill council since 2014, first as a ward councillor and then more recently as the mayor.

I do thank everybody for the opportunity to share my perspective with you in support of our effective and efficient two-tiered governance model that we presently have in York region.

Richmond Hill remains very focused on continuing the excellent delivery of key services that our residents have come to expect. I would continue to state that the current two-tier model of local governance preserves the distinct character of each municipality in York region, but it also ensures efficient delivery of services where that is required.

1110

That said, I also acknowledge, though, that effective service delivery is important and that we always need to be finding ways to plan our communities efficiently and effectively. For example, when new provincial legislation is passed, like Bill 23, we are called on to be nimble and

change our approach, which we've done our best to do up to this point. We all agree that big challenges like building housing right now are upon us and that we need to be working together. That's why the region is coordinating this approach in an effective way. It is as crucial now as it was in 1971, when it was formed.

In support of this particular requirement for us to respond and react to Bill 23 and the related legislative changes, we've established a more streamlined development application review and approval process, in collaboration with other York region municipalities, to build homes faster. We thank the province for the funds to be able to do that. This is just one instance where municipalities have found opportunities to work quickly and collaboratively with the region and other area municipalities for the betterment of all of us.

The region of York is a strong supporter of Richmond Hill because, like all municipalities in our region, on so many of the larger cross-jurisdictional issues that come up, we need a coordinated approach and one that's focused on the whole rather than on individual municipalities. Regional issues like social services, water, sewer, regional transit, roads and public health are best at a regional level. As time has gone on and our policies and cities have changed, so too has how we deliver those services to our residents. I think that's an important part of why the region is a part of our landscape.

A small example that I can use is the fact that, as our cities continue to grow at very significant rates, unfortunately, an issue such as a vulnerable, unhoused population is growing at the same rate. This is one example which has evolved over time, and we now find ourselves having to change how we interact and provide programming for these groups. This is an issue that requires a coordinated regional approach and, in fact, we're right in the middle right now of coming up with that approach at the region. This is a common concern across cities and municipalities around the province and one that we collectively need to address, engaging all levels of government, including the region, who is the current main actor on this situation, as we seek better and different solutions for our homeless population.

As we inch closer and closer to 2051, we are forecasted to see an incredible population growth of up to two million people and one million jobs. We will need the region and our cities firing on all cylinders to ensure that government is ensuring that taxpayers have the services that they need and that can accommodate that growth, regardless of which city in York region they live in.

I strongly believe there are areas where the region along with municipalities can work better together to ensure that taxpayer dollars are being spent as effectively as possible. I have spoken to our staff already in the city of Richmond Hill, and we all agree. We've been starting to put together some opportunities for us to sit down and work more collaboratively, to streamline the process, and make everything more conducive to the environment that we're going to be seeing in the future.

One of the things I notice, especially as mayor, is that the average person—

The Chair (Ms. Laurie Scott): You have 50 seconds.

Mr. David West: Okay—really isn't quite as aware as maybe they should be of what the region actually does. I think this is an opportunity, right now, where we can see some greater public awareness and understanding of what the region does and the important work that they do.

In summary, I feel that the current two-tier system works quite well for us in Richmond Hill. I think there are opportunities for us to make that process better, and now is probably a good opportunity to do that.

I want to thank you for the opportunity. I look forward to the questions that follow.

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

We'll now go to the town of Bradford West Gwillimbury.

Mr. James Leduc: Thank you. My name is James Leduc. I am mayor of Bradford West Gwillimbury. I'm also joined today by members of the town's working group on the regional governance review.

We appeared before this standing committee on November 6 to share some information about our municipality and Simcoe county, expressing our appreciation for your work on this review and encouraging the committee to seek improvements towards ensuring there is fair democratic representation for all member municipalities; structures and practices are in place that deliver efficient decision-making and good governance; service area responsibilities are clearly defined, aligned and avoid duplicative or overly cumbersome processes; and lower-tier municipalities possess greater autonomy.

I'd like to take this opportunity today to offer further comment on equitable representation of municipalities across Simcoe county and the need to rethink the manner in which we plan, deliver and manage the infrastructure required to support our growing communities.

As I explained on November 6, each of the county's 16 member municipalities have two representatives, equating to two votes, unless a recorded vote is called for, which triggers a weighted vote system based on eligible voters. This results with 32 voices around the council table attempting to find common ground for a very large area comprised of scores of communities, each with a distinct and diverse set of challenges and aspirations. Meeting the needs of those diverse communities is a challenge under the county's current governance structure. That means there are, in fact, seven more councillors on Simcoe county council—total population of 530,000—as the city of Toronto, with a population of three million.

Just three municipalities, the towns of Bradford, Innisfil and New Tecumseth, situated in south Simcoe county, form one of the fastest-growing regions in the country. Together, taxpayers within these three municipalities contribute 37% of the county's tax base but are represented by only 32% of the weighted vote and only 19% of the faces around the council table—that's nearly 40% of the budget represented by less than 20% of council. With this disparity between financial contribution and political representation, it can be a challenge to ensure that county invest-

ment, program and service delivery meets the needs of the rapidly urbanizing south Simcoe area that is planned to be home to a significant portion of the county's population and employment growth. A reduction in the number of county councillors would provide for more timely and efficient decision-making. A switch to representation by population will provide for fairer and more effective decision-making. Achieving both of these critical goals will be difficult given the current lower-tier structure in Simcoe county. We encourage the committee to keep an open mind when considering options to solve this dilemma, and to not feel constrained by the status quo.

Governance has been reviewed previously within Simcoe county, and I invite you to look into this previous work. As an example, the county retained the Berkeley Consulting Group in 2010 to review its governance structure. Several of Berkeley's recommendations have been implemented over the years, but key changes pertaining to reducing the size of county council and eliminating the weighted vote system have not.

Similarly, county council struck a governance review committee in 2022 to self-reflect on its size and structure. Several options were discussed, but a consensus on anything other than the status quo was not reached.

That's why this regional review is so important. Reform to Simcoe county's decades-old governance structure is required to best position county council for success as it faces today's challenges. We look forward to working with your committee and the province to define and implement that optimum structure.

With a more effective and efficient governance structure in place, better decisions can be reached on key challenges, including delivering the infrastructure required to support housing production and employment growth. Given the urgent need for this infrastructure, particularly water and waste water systems, I believe that a better approach can't wait for a new governance system to come into place. This is why infrastructure is the second critical matter I want to bring to your attention.

Each of the 16 lower-tier municipalities in Simcoe county are responsible for water and waste water collection, distribution and treatment systems. Each municipality develops master servicing plans, environmental assessments, detailed designs, and then constructs and maintains these assets within an always-evolving and complex regulatory environment. We compete for consultants, grants, financing, staff, and upper-government support.

While there are a few partners involved, like Ontario Clean Water Agency, and a few partnerships that have been struck—between us and Innisfil—there is very little to no regional-scale coordination of water and waste water systems within Simcoe county.

Collectively, we independently invest hundreds of millions of dollars on this infrastructure, and I'm not confident this is the best approach.

This is another topic that has been studied several times with no helpful outcome. In 2006, the Ministry of Municipal Affairs commissioned the Intergovernmental Action Plan for Simcoe county, Barrie and Orillia. The purpose of

the IGAP report was to advise on an optimized urban structure and coordinated servicing plan to accommodate our planned growth and minimize impacts on Lake Simcoe. The final report was delivered after an extensive 16-month process. I'm unaware of any recommendations that were implemented.

In 2012, Simcoe county developed a water and waste water visioning strategy, which looked at planned growth and servicing capacities of its member municipalities. This strategy identified several servicing gaps across the county and recommended that a coordinated approach be explored to address some of those gaps. No further action was taken.

That work was followed by a request from county council to the Provincial Development Facilitator in 2015. The request led to a review of water and waste water systems, with the intent of providing recommendations on a coordinated approach to servicing in the future. The outcome of that work has not been released.

1120

Subsequently, the province initiated a review of regional governments and Simcoe county in 2019. Through the Bradford West Gwillimbury submission to the review's special advisers, Ken Seiling and Michael Fenn, we stressed the importance of improving the delivery of growth-related infrastructure. The Seiling-Fenn report has not been released.

Timely delivery of core infrastructure is a key enabler in the production of housing. We must move beyond studying these matters and implement a better system.

I want to conclude my comments by stressing that the two-tier system of governance remains the best approach for Simcoe area. However, it's conceivable that a uniform two-tier system applying to the whole of the area may not be the only approach.

This is all to say that we should be open to the prospect of regional governance structures and service responsibilities that vary across the current Simcoe county. One approach does not necessarily suit all; there may be a two-tier solution that fits the needs of certain geographies or low-growth areas, and an entirely different approach that best suits other areas.

I don't envy the challenges in front of you, but I am completely confident that, together, we will find effective solutions that will be implemented. We look forward to our continued work together. Thank you.

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

We'll now move on to the city of Vaughan and welcome my former colleague Your Worship Del Duca.

Mr. Steven Del Duca: Good morning, Madam Chair and members of the committee. Thank you for taking on this important work in response to the request made by the Minister of Municipal Affairs and Housing back in September. And, of course, thank you for choosing to hold today's meeting here in the beautiful city of Vaughan.

I am here with two of my colleagues from the city of Vaughan: our city manager, Nick Spensieri, and our city treasurer and deputy city manager, Michael Coroneos.

Together, we are here, technically, to represent council, of course, but I'm also here in an additional capacity, one that I believe is at least equally important, if not more important, than my role as mayor: I'm a dad to two young daughters: Talia, who just turned 16, and Grace, who will soon turn 13.

When I think about the four questions that the minister referred to this committee—questions that were created against the backdrop of an acute housing affordability crisis—I ask myself, “What can I do? What can all of us do to make sure that Talia and Grace, and all others like them in this city and across this region and beyond, have a reasonable shot at the dream of home ownership in their lifetime?” Every single one of us in leadership positions has a role to play in answering this question and giving our constituents, particularly young adults, a sense of hope and optimism that, in fact, we do have solutions.

Fundamentally, for me, your evaluation of the two-tier governance structure here in York region should not focus on whether or not the upper-tier level of government does a good job in a general sense. Rather, your focus should be: “Is our status quo governance structure able to meet the particular challenge that we face in housing?” and, further, “Will minor tinkering with the status quo be sufficient to get the job done?”

I want to be clear: York region does many things well. We have, here in Vaughan and across the region, through a number of years, been well served because of the dedication of the staff who work there on our collective behalf. However, the gravity of the crisis we face requires that we leave no stone unturned as we modernize a governance structure that was created several decades ago. We will not get a second chance to get this right, and our residents are counting on us to deliver relief and restore what until recently was seen as a birthright of someone growing up in this province.

Here's some local context that will help to illustrate how grave the situation is. I recently provided my city council with research that showed the median price of a housing unit here in Vaughan was roughly \$1.2 million. Assuming the minimum down payment, the annual household income needed to buy this home would be \$250,000 with a fixed rate mortgage, or \$274,000 with a variable rate mortgage. And yet the median annual household income in Vaughan is approximately \$120,000. That's an enormous and, frankly, unfair gap.

So, from my perspective, the answers to the two fundamental questions that I posed just a moment ago are “No.” If we are serious about dealing with this crisis, we do need to take this opportunity to make serious and substantial changes, because tinkering would really be the equivalent of just kicking this ball further down the field. Any abdication of the responsibility that we have in this moment, with everything that we know, would be condemning an entire generation of Ontarians to a life that fundamentally gives them less opportunity than previous generations have had. I, for one, don't think that's good enough. So I'm urging this committee to recommend to the minister

that governance changes be made to speed up approvals, eliminate duplication and deliver better value for taxpayers.

For housing, the two most important considerations are land planning and infrastructure. In short, we can't get more shovels in the ground if applications aren't approved, and we can't build homes if people can't physically get to them or flush their toilets once they're there. To that end, I recommend that all land-planning matters be assigned exclusively to lower-tier municipalities. This is consistent with the intent of laws previously passed by the Legislature, and it is now time for all relevant sections of this legislation to be fully proclaimed so as to provide complete clarity.

Next, in terms of housing-enabling infrastructure, I recommend that the responsibility for all roads should be downloaded to willing lower-tier municipalities. From both an infrastructure delivery as well as a maintenance perspective, it no longer makes sense to have two separate levels of bureaucracy be responsible for different categories of roads within one city.

For example, for those who aren't familiar with the current situation, consider that Applewood Crescent, the street that you took to get to this hotel this morning, is the responsibility of the city of Vaughan, and yet Jane Street, which not too far from here intersects with Applewood, is the responsibility of York region. Trust me when I tell you, our residents don't understand that this situation exists, and if they have concerns, for example, about snow being plowed, even on a regional road, they call Vaughan city hall to complain.

Aligning the responsibility for land planning and housing approvals to the decision-making related to the roads that are required to deliver that housing only makes sense. Here in Vaughan, we have both the interest and the capacity to take on this responsibility and would welcome the chance to do so.

The next aspect of infrastructure that the committee should consider is water and waste water. This is perhaps the biggest stumbling block that exists in terms of achieving our housing targets. The financial investment needed in the fastest-growing regions of the GTHA is huge. To my knowledge, no level of government has a plan to provide all of the funding that's necessary to get the pipes in the ground, and to get those pipes in the ground where they're needed and when they're needed to build sufficient housing. It is on this point, in particular, that I'd recommend that the committee encourage the minister to embrace innovation by creating a municipal corporation that could take on responsibility for the delivery of water and waste water infrastructure in, at a minimum, York, Peel, Durham and Halton. This corporation could potentially leverage private sector investment while relying exclusively on evidence-based decision-making.

As I come to a close, I do want to touch upon a couple of other items that should be considered.

The Chair (Ms. Laurie Scott): You have 15 seconds.

Mr. Steven Del Duca: I'll go really fast.

I mentioned earlier in my remarks that York region does do a good job of delivering essential services—services

like policing, transit, community and social services, and more. As part of providing better value to taxpayers, it could very well be time for us to consider uploading responsibility for fire and rescue services to one regional entity, just as we do currently with policing and paramedics.

I did have one more point, but I don't want to anger the Chair, so I will stop here.

I really appreciate this opportunity, and I look forward to any questions you might have.

The Chair (Ms. Laurie Scott): I'm sure someone will give you the opportunity to finish up.

I'll start with MPP Burch for seven and a half minutes. Please go ahead.

Mr. Jeff Burch: I think I'll do that, Mayor Del Duca; I'll give you some opportunity to wrap up. And maybe you could also talk about—you seemed to be talking about a reorganizing of responsibilities between the two tiers rather than a massive reform of the structure.

Mr. Steven Del Duca: Thank you very much for the question.

Yes, that's true. I don't doubt, and I know, and our residents know—as others here this morning have referenced—there are a lot of really great things about what York region does. When you think about the nine lower-tier municipalities, we have so many services that we do need to share in common, and we need to fund those in common. So this is not, from my perspective, about dismantling or dissolving or breaking the whole thing apart.

I read through the minister's letter to this committee, to the Chair, and I look at those four questions that the minister did pose to this committee, and therefore to us. Again, the focus is delivering housing that's needed because of the affordability crisis, but also driving maximum value for taxpayers. And against that backdrop, those four questions that were posed, I think there's a better way to do it.

1130

The regional level of government has been around for as long as I've been alive—50 years, give or take—and I think we are in this moment where that affordability crisis is acute. I gave you some local stats. We can talk about this all day long, and the ramifications, again—and particularly for young adults who feel a little bit hopeless that the system has let them down—are considerable.

I read an article just this week in the international Financial Times that talked about, from a UK and US perspective, how increasing numbers of young adults, because of housing unaffordability, are putting off the idea of starting families or are deciding not to have kids at all.

So when I talk about the removal of the birthright that we have in this province—that opportunity my parents had when they came here and that me and my siblings have had, and that opportunity my wife and I want to provide to our daughters—I don't understand how anyone can sit here with a straight face and say the system, as it currently stands, is good enough to get the job done, because if it was, we would already have the job done. I don't want to blow it apart. I don't think that makes sense. But I think it

would be irresponsible for us not to take this opportunity to do it better.

Mr. Jeff Burch: Thank you very much.

I want to turn to Mayor West of Richmond Hill. I found it interesting that you started your presentation talking about the three headwaters, which are a huge responsibility for the municipality and the region and the province. There were changes made to conservation authorities. We're talking about looking at regional government.

Can you talk a little bit about the effect of changes that have been made over the last couple of years and the importance of both tiers and the conservation authority working together to protect those three headwaters in Richmond Hill?

Mr. David West: I think anybody who even knows a little bit about high school science will know that when it comes to protecting water resources, geographic human-made boundaries are not going to be the most effective solution.

One of the things that TRCA and Lake Simcoe—which I'm not quite as aware of in Richmond Hill, but I'm certainly familiar with them—have in common, as other conservation authorities have, is that they're watershed-based, and I think that's really important. I think that a strong role for a watershed-based approach to water quality is incredibly important. As I said in my opening remarks, given that we're the headwaters of many of the rivers that flow into Lake Ontario in this area, we have strong environmental protections in place, and we take that very seriously. I think that's a good example, from a natural perspective, of a systems approach being taken to something that's a cross-jurisdictional issue like water quality. Having a role for the conservation authority to protect that resource and having a coordinating role for the region itself—I think also has a role to play in a broader issue than one individual municipality. That's basically the principle where I think the region and some of the larger entities work well.

As Mayor Del Duca said, I think we need to be careful that we're not unduly obstructing the ability to create infrastructure, to create housing. We are in a crisis right now, and there's no question that we need to do that. I get that there's some red tape that was happening with conservation authorities, but on the other hand, the core thing that I think all conservation authorities are trying to achieve is to protect the natural environment and make sure that we're building communities in ways that are not going to put housing in jeopardy.

I visited German Mills Creek in our community and saw some of the things that we've historically done to try to harness that creek, and it's unbelievable. A lot of these things that were done were done before we fully understood what watershed planning looked like. We need to avoid that type of thing at all costs because, with climate change, there could be really significant implications for homeowners who are building in places that are flood-prone.

The Chair (Ms. Laurie Scott): A minute and a half.

Mr. Jeff Burch: Just changing gears quickly: Can you identify, if you know offhand, the revenue gap that was created for Richmond Hill from Bill 23—the revenue that was lost by municipalities—and how much money it would take to make your municipality whole, as has been promised by the government?

Mr. David West: The number is somewhat theoretical at the moment, because the full slate of Bill 23 has not been implemented, but it's probably in the \$700-million range.

I will say that the rubber has hit the road in a much more meaningful way, in a real way, at the region right now. We were told the other day that we're losing somewhere in the neighbourhood of \$5 million a month, and that's real. That's not theoretical, because the removal of the ability to collect development charges on social housing is in effect. That's huge, and it's very significantly impacting our ability to do that.

Also, Richmond Hill doesn't at the moment have an old DC bylaw, so the phase-ins are not in effect, but they will be—it's just a matter of time—and I lose a lot of sleep over that.

Mr. Jeff Burch: How much time is left, Chair?

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

Mr. Jeff Burch: Okay. Thank you.

The Chair (Ms. Laurie Scott): MPP McMahon, you have four and a half minutes, so—

Ms. Mary-Margaret McMahon: I have half the time, so we're going to do rapid-fire, if you don't mind.

Thank you all for coming in. It's great to be in Vaughan. I didn't bring my passport. I'm happy to be here, and also to hear all the stories from all the municipalities, because you know your areas best.

I just wanted to put it on the record: Someone mentioned the number of councillors in Toronto, and as a former Toronto city councillor, I will unequivocally say that Toronto is not represented to its fullest capacity under what was done to it—this type of model it has now. It was done in the dark of the night, basically, by surprise, in the middle of an election, unfairly, for questionable reasons.

Now we're going to talk about housing—because this is what it's all about—and how we can get shovels in the ground and how we can help you achieve your targets. We found out today how woefully behind we are in housing starts across Ontario, and we've heard from different mayors and CAOs what the holdup is in their neighbourhoods; I'm keen to hear what it is in yours. So we'll just go across—maybe one minute each. What is it? The land tribunal? Site plan approvals? Building permits? You tell us.

Mr. Steven Del Duca: It's hard for me to answer anything in a minute, as you all know, but I would just say—I touched upon the points that were raised before. I stand by the comments. I do think right about now, the biggest stumbling block—and I did reference this—would be the water and waste water infrastructure. I think that's true in Vaughan. I think it's true elsewhere across York region.

Again, I really do believe it's impossible for us to pretend that we are going to fundamentally change the dynamic

and deliver all of the housing that's required, to give us the supply, to lower costs in future years, with just a little bit of, "The status quo is fine; let's do minor tinkering." That's why I've made the recommendations here today on behalf of the city of Vaughan, and that's on behalf of the city that is producing approvals, that is releasing or issuing building permits.

It's still really hard for the shovels to get into the ground for a lot of macro reasons, but our job as local politicians is not to worry about the Bank of Canada or other levels of government; it's to do what's within our domain and our jurisdiction, to do our part to solve the housing affordability crisis.

I'll stop there.

Ms. Mary-Margaret McMahon: David?

Mr. David West: As we were driving up here and seeing all the great development that's going on right here due to the fact that we have a subway here now—if we had a subway in Richmond Hill at this point in time, that would be wonderful. I know it's coming and we're moving as quickly as possible. That would certainly help.

One of the things, though, that's a constant head-scratcher for me is the number of units that we actually have approved, ready to be built, but they're not being built. We have 11,000 units, the last time I checked, that are ready to go, but the trigger is not being pulled by the builder. We're not holding up the process in those cases. We're really ready to roll. I think there needs to be a sunset clause to incentivize builders.

I also think there needs to be, in terms of affordability—we need incentives that are going to change the behaviour of builders, to make sure that they're building what we want them to build, rather than what they're going to be building anyway. There are a number of things that we desperately need in Richmond Hill, including rental and including housing that's more affordable to more people. That's really important. And I think from a regional perspective—

Ms. Mary-Margaret McMahon: I've got to cut you off—sorry—but that's great. And of course, we want sustainable housing, I'm sure.

James?

1140

Mr. James Leduc: In our case, it is about water and waste water. I'm the small person at the table here, so we had 134 starts last year. A lot of factors contributed to that. We are geared up to actually do upwards of 600, 700 units a year if we can. It is about water and waste water. We have hundreds of millions of dollars in the ground right now, but because of those external factors that we can't control, we need to get help from other levels of government to do this.

I think my message was clearly that we need to have a coordinated effort. The county is unique, but I think there are ways that we can work together as upper-tier and lower-tier governments to get these things done, to get these housing starts going. So that's where we're at.

The Chair (Ms. Laurie Scott): Over to the government side: MPP Pang.

Mr. Billy Pang: Thank you, Madam Chair, and through you: [*inaudible*] mayors in York region, so I have the same question for both of you now. I appreciate that you acknowledged there's a housing crisis here, and we are now in crisis mode. That means the status quo is not working, so we need to have some new or innovative ways to get this crisis being built. You also mentioned that you want to upload or download some services to and from the region or the province.

As a mayor, of course—we hear that you've asked the province to do something, so I want to know: What are you doing and what are you going to do for your own municipalities? You mentioned your own jurisdictions. So what are you going to do to deal with this crisis, and especially the housing crisis, in your own jurisdiction? Mayor West?

Mr. David West: As I mentioned before, we've gone through a thorough process of streamlining the application process. I don't think that's a substantial problem in Richmond Hill right now. It's not to say that we can't always improve, but that's where we're at now.

We do have a housing affordability plan that we're still working on; it's always a work in process. We did receive that Housing Accelerator Fund grant from the federal government, which I think is going to be very helpful because it's providing incentives for us to be able to do a number of different things, which I won't have time to get into. I really believe that will be an effective way to accelerate housing.

We've just completed a new official plan which allows for a whole bunch of stuff to happen in a way that's quick. But as I said, we can't do this alone. We don't build the housing. I think it's really, really important that we receive the kind of help and support from other levels of government, including the provincial government, to be able to make that happen. Quite honestly, I think that's far more important than any major changes to the region that we would be doing right now. We're in a crisis, as you said; I agree. We need to be having all hands on deck and keep our eye on the ball. And to me, that's the most important short-term stuff that we can offer.

Mr. Steven Del Duca: Thanks very much for the question.

To echo a little bit of what Mayor West has said [*inaudible*] we continue to try to expedite the approvals on the land-planning side. In 2023, I think that we issued between 6,000 and 7,000 building permits or units of housing. That's about double, in some cases close to triple, what we were doing in each of the individual previous five years. So there's a lot of, if I can put it, production in terms of trying to pave the way for more to be built.

I do think other parts of the ecosystem, other levels of government—the private sector that ultimately is responsible for the actual building, almost always, of the units that we need. I mentioned earlier the Bank of Canada; obviously, the cost of borrowing has gone up significantly. I think all of those factors are really important.

Again, I just want to stress, I'm not the governor of the Bank of Canada, I'm not a private sector developer, and

I'm not a provincial politician anymore, or a federal politician. I'm a local politician. I'm a mayor.

So to your point: What can we do within our sphere of responsibility to recognize how acute the crisis is and to accept and embrace the idea that something has got to give? If something doesn't change, it won't matter if the interest rates come down. Frankly, this housing affordability crisis began when I was still sitting at the provincial cabinet table. The first inklings, the first hints that we were going to have this challenge spiralling out of control began in 2016. That was eight years ago, and we were in a low-interest-rate environment at that point in time, but the challenge was already beginning, and why? Because we have a fundamental supply problem.

So, yes, as I said earlier, York region does a lot of things really well, and I'm grateful as a resident here in this community for that, but we can't be in a world where we pretend that just doing things mostly in the same old way, with a little bit of tinkering, is actually going to produce the outcome that we are all saying we want to see.

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

Ms. Laura Smith: Through you, Chair: Welcome to Thornhill, everyone. I appreciate being here with the mayors and my colleagues.

By the way, MPP McMahon, you don't need a passport. You can simply take the subway right up to the VMC, and maybe even walk over here on a good day.

Ms. Mary-Margaret McMahon: Or bike.

Ms. Laura Smith: Yes, or a bike, absolutely.

I'm going to start off by saying in my very minimal time that I understand completely Mayor Del Duca's vision and his concerns. He talked about his daughters. I share that concern as well, and that's primarily the reason why I got into politics.

One of the things that we talked about was, obviously, the problems with building. I should just mention that the Building Faster Fund provides up to \$1.2 billion which is available to municipalities, which will help us.

Given everything which will help our municipal partners and reach those targets, I know I'm semi-proud of the fact that Vaughan has been very progressive in moving those targets forward. That should be acknowledged, because all you have to do is just look south and see how it has built north, put in density, flipped that switch and gone to another model.

Mayor Del Duca, you talked about the status quo and modernizing the government structure to speed up approval levels, which I think we're accomplishing. You also talked about tinkering. I agree with you. The individuals you speak to are the same individuals I speak to. They don't know the difference between Applewood and Jane. They don't see a difference between the municipal and provincial level. I'm just wondering if you can talk about some of those possible tinkering minutiae, because this is your opportunity to do that and get it on the record.

The Chair (Ms. Laurie Scott): And you have 45 seconds.

Mr. Steven Del Duca: Thank you very much for the question. It's a delight to be in the riding of Thornhill, here in the city of Vaughan.

I did touch upon what I think would be the opposite of the tinkering approach when it comes to the infrastructure. On water and waste water, I really do believe a municipal corporation that goes beyond York region alone—because we have four or five regions across the GTHA that are supposed to be growing rapidly, where we need the lion's share of the housing. Creating that municipal corporation or the utility model, being able to leverage potential private sector investment—we do it with our electricity here in this region. I think it's time for us to examine this, and this is a place where this committee can encourage the minister to be bold and innovative.

I mentioned the roads already. I think in our case, we do have the capacity to take over responsibility for all roads. I think that's something we would welcome the opportunity to do.

The Chair (Ms. Laurie Scott): MPP Burch, please begin the second round.

Mr. Jeff Burch: I'd like to go back to the issue of approvals. I'll start with Mayor West and then give each of you a chance to respond.

It's a real puzzle to me that here in the province—we just heard today that the province failed to meet its own housing targets for 2023. Starts have actually dropped by 7%.

Putting the partisanship aside, when I've listened to mayors and municipalities, whether it's at AMO, other conferences or settings like this, they always talk about the need for some kind of—whether you refer it to as a use-it-or-lose-it policy or a sunset clause for approvals; the reason being, we're all aware of the economic challenges and that builders aren't in it for charity. They run a business. They have to make a profit. I think, Mayor West, you referred to it as trying to influence behavioural changes, and that's like carrots and sticks for developers.

1150

One of the things that almost every municipality I talk to asks for these days is some kind of use-it-or-lose-it policy with approvals. The province wasn't shy about forcing municipalities to do things in a certain time period—and appropriately—to move those things along. I think municipalities have done their job in that respect, but there's nothing for developers—to say, after going through the expense and the time of the municipality for those approvals and permits, something should be done by the developers in a certain period of time, whatever that period is. Can you speak to the importance of having a policy like that and how it could actually make a real difference in the amount of housing that is started?

Mr. David West: We spoke to the Premier, and he seems relatively okay with exploring that, and I think that's great. That's one part of it, and I think it's important because it's an incentive—“If we're going to go to the trouble to hurry up and get your application approved, then you need to put your skin in the game that you're actually going to build it. And by the way, if you don't build it now and you wait

to build it 10 years from now, the cost of that unit is going to be more expensive, so you're actually making the affordability thing worse, not better."

I think it also comes with other incentives that have to happen as a package; so use-it-or-lose-it and also, "By the way, we can offer you an incentive"—to the builder, to say, "You were going to build a condo, but we'd really like you to build rental. That's really needed in this particular location." If we had the capability financially and with other things, as well, to be able to offer those incentives, I really do believe that we would be doing our part in making sure that we're addressing this.

The Building Faster Fund is great, but the concept that we have right now in our DC bylaw where growth pays for growth—that's fine; we need to continue that. That's really important because we can't do it if we don't have that. But we also need some ability to provide incentives to change the behaviour of private sector developers that are doing what they naturally would normally do. I think it's a package. No one thing is going to change the landscape enough to respond to the crisis.

Mr. Jeff Burch: Yes, but that would be one important tool.

Mr. David West: It would be.

Interjection.

Mr. Jeff Burch: Sure. Go ahead.

Mr. Steven Del Duca: On the use-it-or-lose-it concept: I am very, very supportive of the general idea, but there's something that I do want to say here. I'm still a relatively new municipal politician, but I don't think I'm wrong in saying this: Municipalities already have the ability to introduce measures through enacting bylaws, to remove, for example, the assignment of allocation vis-à-vis applications. We did it in Vaughan before I became mayor. Right now, in the city of Vaughan, if you've been assigned sewage allocation or water/waste water allocation and you don't use it within three years of receiving that assignment, we have the ability, through a bylaw we enacted—we didn't need the province to do it for us; we didn't need the feds to do it for us. We enacted it. We have the right, as a city, to withdraw the assignment of that allocation. We passed it. June 2023 would have been the first window when we could have exercised that mechanism. We haven't done it yet. The reason, I think it's safe to say, we haven't done it yet is because we're in an environment right now where—and I can't fault the private sector for this, given the high cost of borrowing—people actually aren't buying housing units, and therefore it's hard to justify starting to build a building or to build a series of homes if nobody is purchasing them. But we do have that ability.

So the concept, generally speaking, of use-it-or-lose-it is, I think, a very sound concept. But I would urge other municipalities to take advantage of the tools that we already have instead of waiting for some other level of government to tell us they're going to do it sweepingly across the entire province. We can do it already if we really want to.

Mr. Jeff Burch: Mayor Leduc?

Mr. James Leduc: I thank Mayor Del Duca for letting us know about that. I'm going to look at that bylaw, for sure.

Use-it-or-lose-it is something that I'd love to see as a policy, but with exceptions. I want to make sure that we have the ability to enact it if we want to. The idea is that I think it's going to take an effort by everybody to make this happen with the housing—and this is where I get into more autonomy at the lower level, because we need to use our creative juices at our table to make sure that we can incentivize and create this housing opportunity for people.

We have large developers that are sitting there waiting—and you're right; I have a build right now with a 100-condo unit, and he can't sell a unit. He was ready to get a shovel in the ground and he has been now sitting there for a year and a half, waiting. So we need to have that "use it or lose it" of some sort—but that's where I get back to the autonomy of the lower levels, so that we can actually create some creative juices to make sure that we can deliver those housing needs that we need to get for the province and for the country overall. We need housing right across this country.

Mr. Jeff Burch: Back to Mayor West: The issue of the \$1.2-billion fund that is accessed when housing targets are met—the criteria for that is foundation support, shovels in the ground, which municipalities have no control over. Is there a better way to do that so that the efforts of municipalities are recognized in terms of things they actually control?

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

Mr. David West: That's a real problem, because we don't build houses, and if the developer chooses not to pull the trigger, then the foundation doesn't get poured. That is a significant problem, and we've talked about it at OBCM and at AMO.

I'm not sure that in probably about 10 seconds that I have an opportunity to outline what I think would be a better opportunity. I think that the idea of an incentive-based program with the Building Faster Fund works great, but we can't be having that as the "making us whole" piece that's making up for the shortfalls, potentially, under other legislation. That's where I'm concerned, because we need to build the infrastructure.

The Chair (Ms. Laurie Scott): MPP McMahon, with the final round of four and a half minutes.

Ms. Mary-Margaret McMahon: Another rapid-fire here.

We know that this government has governed in reverse a lot—making a decision and then getting everyone all keyed up and maybe excited or upset, and then reversing that decision. And here we are doing this regional review. We know what happened with Peel—we're divorcing, we're not divorcing. Here we are, asking you questions and taking your valuable time—and we really appreciate you coming in and sharing. I'm learning a lot about Ontario this way. I was moving to Pelham last week, and Burlington—maybe Vaughan today.

What is your level of frustration with this process, what is your level of hope and optimism—because I do have to

be positive—and then one key piece of advice for us. One minute each.

James?

Mr. James Leduc: My level of optimism is that I'm hoping and excited that we do come up with some new outcomes. I think it has been expressed by the mayors at the table here that there are some good things here and there is some room for change. We did amalgamation in 1991, and we did the regional governments 50 years ago, I think. It is time for Ontario to revisit some of the new areas where we can be better.

Affordability: I listened to the story by Mayor Del Duca. I bought my first home for \$55,000, and today I bought—not today, but a little while back, I bought my daughter's first home for \$300,000. I had to help her with that investment. So it is something that we need to do—we need to look at how we get back into affordability for our kids, for our grandkids, and everything else.

There's lots of work to do, but I'm really hoping this committee does take the value that we're hearing from people at the table and we address the issues that we can all solve. So I look forward to that.

Ms. Mary-Margaret McMahon: My dad bought our house in Collingwood—a huge house—for \$6,000 in the 1960s and stupidly sold it.

David?

Mr. David West: I actually do thank the provincial government at the moment for quarterbacking the whole idea that this is a significant problem and taking action. We need to be doing that because it is a real problem. I have a 23-year-old at home who—I don't know where he's going to live. I think that the problem is solvable. I think the high-interest environment right now is making it very difficult, but I think there is hope, and with the right measures in place, I think it's doable.

I think we are very lucky in York region. Our communities are really great and really strong. The housing issue is a problem. We need to solve that, but I think that we have a lot to be thankful for. We can build on good foundations.

Ms. Mary-Margaret McMahon: I think your 23-year-old could live with my 25-year-old and 26-year-old. We'll get them communal housing.

Mr. Steven Del Duca: In Collingwood.

Ms. Mary-Margaret McMahon: Well, actually, one of them is in BC because they've given up.

Steven?

Mr. Steven Del Duca: I think the bottom line is, this committee has a really great opportunity. I referenced this earlier. This is a moment for all of us to not be timid. Change can be difficult. I think a lot of us, as human beings, do find comfort in the status quo. It is a lot of heavy lifting to make substantial, existential changes to the way that we govern ourselves. But this has got to be that moment when we rise to the challenge, when we do something that's uncomfortable in order to produce the outcome we need.

1200

This can't be about partisan politics. This can't be about different levels of government that are fighting with one

another. We have to recognize those things that are working—and there are lots of things that work well in York region. We have to bring an all-hands-on-deck, globalized, almost war mobilization kind of effort to this challenge, because if we don't at this moment in time, we will regret this, our kids will regret it, and they will demand of us as we grow a little bit older, "What did you do, when you had the chance to make a meaningful difference, to make my life more affordable when it comes to shelter, when it comes to housing here in York region and beyond?"

So don't be timid. Empower the minister and the government to actually make bold changes that will have the outcome that we need.

The Chair (Ms. Laurie Scott): Over to the government side: Please begin.

M^{me} Dawn Gallagher Murphy: Thank you for being here today and for your deputations.

My question will be directed to the town of Bradford West Gwillimbury.

Your Worship, thank you very much for your presentation. I heard you when you were talking about the number of voices around the table at Simcoe region and regarding the population of half a million people—and growing, of course. You talked about representation by population. You talked about some of the things that are critical about infrastructure. I wasn't aware that the local lower-level tiers are responsible for the water/waste water.

My question to you: Given your testimony today, what do you feel is the best solution for Bradford West Gwillimbury when it comes to enhancing service delivery and, obviously, supporting effective local governance in two-tier—it seems like you are all for two-tier. What do you feel will help Bradford West Gwillimbury further build more homes in your area?

Mr. James Leduc: It's a good question, and I thank you for it.

Bradford is a very unique system within the county. We are the only urbanized centre in the county, other than Barrie itself. So when we look at the county overall, the best solution I think we can come up with is where I talked about that potential where we have a two-tier system, but with different actual avenues when it comes to south and north. The county was designed for rural centres, and in the southern section of the county, we've become more of a GTA-style centre, especially in Bradford's case. People come to Bradford and they say, "Oh, I thought it was in York region." They call us and say we're in York region. I say, "No, we're in Simcoe county." We are much more like the York region system, and we think that the two-tier may be changing a little bit, where the north is the north and the south is the south—if we kind of manage that that way, that would help Bradford a lot, because we are an urban centre.

We're looking to see about the governance structure being changed. It's based on electoral right now, up at the county, and we feel that based on population is better, because as a growing community—we're a young, growing community. Our families are young, and they're not

counted as electors because they're so young. We need to change that.

I think we have to change the size of the governance, because it's 32 members—it's very hard to get something through a system when we have so many voices at the table. We're over 156 politicians throughout the whole area, when you count all the councils, so there's a lot of say at the table—never a bad thing, but at the same time, a smaller say is better, where we can get some real decisions going.

Bradford has hundreds of millions of dollars' worth of infrastructure in the ground, and we have to pay those bills pretty soon, and it's very tough when we can't get policy through at the county level.

I love my county colleagues—they work very hard—but we just have a different area where we need to make different changes. Bradford is ready to grow. We're ready to do what we need to do for the province—help out the province with their growth and bring more housing. But we think there has to be a different structure when it comes to the two-tier system in the county, and it could be different levels.

M^{me} Dawn Gallagher Murphy: To the mayor of the town of Richmond Hill: Your Worship, you have noted before that you are doing everything possible in Richmond Hill to look at how you can build more homes.

When I saw your housing starts, you are below target. So I'm wondering if you can specify—is there some type of duplication, of red tape—where do you see specifically what could be holding up Richmond Hill from further meeting their targets?

Mr. David West: Well, I think we have very fertile ground in Richmond Hill right now for growth, and it would be more fertile if—I mentioned earlier that when the subway arrives, we've got a TOC that's the size of Newmarket that can move into Richmond Hill. I'm under no illusions that that's going to happen overnight either. But we have lots and lots of growth potential in Richmond Hill: along the Yonge Street corridor, in our TOCs, in our key development areas at the Highway 7 and Yonge TOC, 16th Avenue and Yonge, the Village Core and the Yonge and Bernard area. In our new official plan—and it's not new in the sense that that concept is not new, but we have renewed permissions to allow growth in those areas, and we are expecting that growth.

Right now, it's a very difficult environment for anything to be built in, but I don't believe that the bottleneck is the pipeline; the bottleneck is, when it gets out of the pipeline, it needs to be built, and for a number of reasons, I'm sure—none of which we really control. We're not the ones that are initiating the building. It's the private market that needs to be doing that type of work.

So I think we are doing what we need to do, and I've talked to many other Ontario big-city mayors, and it's the same thing—it's got to be well understood that we need to get the private market to do the building. We are responsible for approving and setting the stage for approvals for the growth to happen, but we're not actually doing the building.

M^{me} Dawn Gallagher Murphy: A very specific question around the Bloomington GO station—I know that's basically the border of Aurora and Richmond Hill. Again, looking forward to denser housing around transit, there's a great new station there. I'm just wondering if there are thoughts or plans on how we can get more densification around that transit station.

Mr. David West: In order to meet our targets, we don't need that area to necessarily develop now or at some time in the future. The problem with a lot of that line is that it's Oak Ridges moraine land, so most of that land is off limits to development. Frankly, I don't think it's necessary for us to open up those lands in order for us to meet our targets. We have plenty of opportunities all up and down the Yonge Street corridor, including those nodes that I'm talking about and the TOCs. So I don't see that as necessarily anything that we are urgently looking at doing in the near future. It would be very expensive to service and, frankly, inefficient from an infrastructure point of view. It may happen some day, but that's not really part of the solution, I don't think.

The Chair (Ms. Laurie Scott): Thank you very much to all the presenters for coming this morning.

This committee is now recessed till 1 p.m.

The committee recessed from 1208 to 1300.

TOWN OF COLLINGWOOD

MR. JONATHAN SCOTT

CITY OF MARKHAM

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

We have the town of Collingwood, we have Jonathan Scott, and we have the city of Markham. I'll just invite you to come forward, everyone.

This lovely group of people here on the right will turn your mikes on for you. You have seven minutes to present. If it's okay, I'll just start in the order that I read them.

The town of Collingwood: Would you be willing to go first?

Ms. Yvonne Hamlin: Of course.

The Chair (Ms. Laurie Scott): Okay, when you're ready.

Ms. Yvonne Hamlin: Thank you so much. My name is Yvonne Hamlin. I am the mayor of Collingwood. My goal today is to leave you with two thoughts: (1) Collingwood is the hub of southern Georgian Bay, and (2) Collingwood—really, like any hub—requires financial assistance and other support if we're going to align and deliver efficient municipal services in southern Georgian Bay to continue, among other things, supplying housing and affordable housing throughout southern Georgian Bay.

What is southern Georgian Bay? I've had a map handed out, staff-prepared. You'll see the other golden horse-shoe—not the one down in the grey, but the one in the

north, around Georgian Bay. You'll see Collingwood is marked in red.

Southern Georgian Bay, as it has become known—and I'll talk about that in a minute—is comprised of two counties, Simcoe and Grey, and six municipalities. In addition to Collingwood, we've got some considerable farmland to the south and west of our town—but in this area, of course. We've got recreational facilities, which are the ski hills and the Bruce Trail to the west, in the town of the Blue Mountains, and on the east side of us, the other recreational facility, of course, is the longest freshwater beach in the world, which is Wasaga.

We have about 100,000 residents in southern Georgian Bay. This includes part-time residents. Our part-time residents are cottagers. They're there every week—often more time than they spend with the address on their driver's licence.

The last thing I'll point out is that we have about three million visitors a year to southern Georgian Bay. We're told that we're third in the province, after Toronto and Niagara Falls, in terms of a destination.

So how is Collingwood the hub? We have the regional hospital. We have most of the doctors in southern Georgian Bay; we have about 50. We have 38 lawyers' offices, 26 dentist offices and 24 fitness facilities. In our town, we make regional access available to our recreation facilities, which includes a pool and arenas. We have all the major banks. We have a vibrant arts community. We have about 100 restaurants. And we have the thriving downtown, probably one of the most thriving downtowns in Ontario.

We have a small business enterprise centre that functions out of one of the town buildings. It has an accelerator there, as well as a community futures operation, and it's ably assisted by the town's economic development department.

We have the major employers in our small boundaries—and I'll just give you an example of not a major employer, but an interesting fact: We have a co-working space in town with over 200 businesses there.

I'm going to give you a few ideas of how we've been co-operating as a region.

A number of years ago, we set up the South Georgian Bay Regional Mayors and CAOs Forum, and the intent was to discuss regional solutions for transit, transportation, physician recruitment, water and waste water servicing, and regional recreation facilities. I sat on the physician recruitment committee, and I can go on all day about that, but I won't.

Also, Collingwood arranges operational contracts for regional transit in southern Georgian Bay; in particular, with the town of the Blue Mountains, Clearview, and Wasaga Beach. We would like to expand that. It takes resources and staffing. We are very much an economic unit, and our employees travel among our communities, and if they could get there by transit, it would be much better, not just for the environment, but we could have more affordable housing in areas in the region that don't have land that is as expensive as I'll say Collingwood's is. Transit would be so great.

We also work with the Blue Mountain Resort to provide a dedicated bus route there from Collingwood, to get the workers back and forth.

I'll also let you know that we have been advocating at MTO, and this has been having some success, although we're just still at the beginning. We need a plan for the regional transportation in our area. Because of the major drivers for the recreation and Collingwood itself, the volumes of traffic through not just our community but Grey Highlands and the other communities is overwhelming at times.

As you may know, there are a couple of huge projects on the horizon. The Blue Mountain Resort is planning a huge increase, with hotels, condos, retail, right on our western boundary. Great Gulf has picked up 1,500 acres, and they're planning hotels, condos, three golf courses.

In Collingwood, our developers are doing a major grain terminals restoration—a \$200-million project going out to the public within the month.

We also have a major development in Collingwood called the Poplar Regional Health and Wellness Village, which is probably going to be a \$1-billion development.

The next thing I'll mention is water. Everyone wants infrastructure, but we've been working on this for some time. Since 2000, Collingwood has been supplying water—

The Chair (Ms. Laurie Scott): About a minute left.

Ms. Yvonne Hamlin: Perfect.

We've been supplying water to New Tecumseth. We have a 60-kilometre pipe connecting us. We need a major expansion. We tendered; we got the numbers in. We had planned for a \$120-million project; it's more like \$250 million. So we need provincial support because local municipalities—we don't even have the funding room to be able to raise those kinds of funds. That kind of expansion will support 60,000 new homes in two phases, in south Georgian Bay, including things like what we keep reading in the paper—maybe a planned expansion of the Honda plant.

In conclusion, we're a region—we call it a region, locally, anyway. We can't rely on just one county or one municipality; we're six, and we just need that extra support from the province to be able to deliver the services efficiently for our area.

Thank you.

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

Now I'll ask Councillor Jonathan Scott to go ahead and introduce himself.

Mr. Jonathan Scott: I'm Jonathan Scott. I'm a councillor for Ward 2 in Bradford and one of our alternate county councillors. Thank you for having me here today to speak further to what my mayor shared this morning.

Our position, as Bradford West Gwillimbury, is based on core values and resolutions our town has passed for well over a decade, as well as this term. It boils down to two matters: governance reform, and clarifying roles and responsibilities. We desperately need governance reform of Simcoe county to lead to those other goals. Indeed, as I said at county council earlier this month, sitting next to the

mayor, Simcoe county itself has been trying to reform its own governance since at least the 1980s.

As my mayor shared with you this morning, Simcoe county is comprised of two representatives per municipality, so that's two reps for Bradford, population of about 50,000, and also two reps for Tiny township—appropriately named—population 8,000. You might understand why we find that fundamentally unfair. The county does have a weighted vote system, but that's only employed on contentious matters, by request, and even there, the weighted vote is calculated based on the total number of electors; so summer cottagers up from Toronto count, but migrant workers in the Holland Marsh or younger or new immigrants in Bradford don't count. So even on a weighted vote, our larger population, as a diverse and younger suburban community, is still penalized at the county.

Incidentally, we asked county council if this weighted vote could be applied automatically earlier this term, and as I understand it, it was denied because they said there wasn't sufficient technology to do it, notwithstanding the fact that Toronto and other regional councils have electronic voting and it can be calibrated to do a weighted vote. That wouldn't have solved the entire problem because the principle in Canadian law is one of effective representation more holistically than simply bums in seats—it's about voting power, but also representation.

1310

It's worth discussing what I mean here by effective representation and the democratic principles upon which our country was founded.

I think we're all familiar with the American rallying cry of "no taxation without representation." In Canada, we evolved a little bit less violently, but a key principle of Confederation was representation by population. The law in Canada, more recently, is clear on this.

In *re Prov. Electoral Boundaries*, the Supreme Court found that section 3 of the charter's right to effective representation is clear that "dilution of one citizen's vote as compared with another's should not be countenanced," and further, "each vote must be relatively equal to every other vote; there cannot be wide variations in population size..." Unfortunately, this principle is not reflected in the reality of how Simcoe county is currently constituted.

This is about more than a general principle of law. This is also a practical matter. Bradford has long felt that, despite paying a disproportionate share of the county's budget, we do not receive the same value for money as other municipalities, in part because we do not have effective representation. Various expert studies over the years have borne out the fact behind this perception. We do, in fact, receive less money, particularly for services, but also for infrastructure, than we pay into the county's budget.

Our needs are different, as a suburban community, from rural, northern parts of the county. For example, a Bradford townhouse development needs yard waste pickup. In the northern end of the county, you just take those leaves out back and burn them. Our library service needs multi-lingual collections in a way that smaller, less diverse

communities perhaps do not. We have our own bus transit system and do not need regional transit to duplicate local transit lines—I could go on.

Most importantly, I think, for your purposes: As a final example, an infill subdivision in my ward to build much-needed housing stock gets a relatively quick local planning review, and then the developer calls and says, "What's the holdup?" And it's because Simcoe county is doing a duplicative planning review.

My mayor and deputy mayor, this term and last, have tried to reform Simcoe county over the years. They have advocated for our interests, yet despite these matters being decided against Bradford's interests, it's precisely because we have neither the representation nor the voting power to carry the day at Simcoe county. We have 6% of the representatives in the county chamber, despite being over 10% of the population and funding closer to 15% of the county's budget, and growing, every year. In fact, just three municipalities in south Simcoe, including Bradford, fund 40% of the county's budget, but only have 18% of the seats on county council. Again, you can appreciate why we would find this unfair and frustrating.

We're grateful that the province is doing this review, and we really hope you will help us find a solution. I think there are two areas the standing committee could recommend to the Legislature, and since municipalities are ultimately creatures of the province, you could mandate that changes be made this term. The first area is clarifying and cleaning up roles and responsibilities between the two levels. The second is mandating that principles of Canadian democracy—fair representation, rep by pop—are mandated to be enacted through a regional governance reform exercise this term.

We actually generally agreed with Simcoe county's submission this morning about roles and responsibilities when it comes to local planning. As long as the county is there to do regional-scale matters, particularly water and waste water, as my mayor shared, we think there's a role there. But there are duplicative departments that we could drive efficiencies by eliminating. In order to sort all of this out, we have to deal with Simcoe county's unfair governance structure. We believe the province, through this standing committee, should mandate that all regions—and each are unique—have those basic Canadian democratic principles enacted.

We would respectfully suggest that because Simcoe county has tried and failed to reform its governance over the years, the province should step in and say, "Rather than just kicking this back to you, here are some clear guidelines, some clear instructions, so you go reform your governance in keeping with these principles of representation by population." Whether that's a ward system, whether that's amalgamating various roles—incidentally, this would lead to fewer politicians and taxpayers' dollars being saved.

The Chair (Ms. Laurie Scott): You have 60 seconds.

Mr. Jonathan Scott: If this reform were to occur, we believe the other matters and the important matters that the province is asking municipalities like Bradford—which is

one of the fastest-growing municipalities—to succeed at could be better delivered.

It all comes down to, if you give us a more equitable, more effective and more efficient regional government, we think we can build the infrastructure, build the housing supply that the province needs, as one of your fastest-growing communities.

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

Mayor Scarpitti from Markham, please start your presentation when you're ready.

Mr. Frank Scarpitti: Good afternoon, Chair Scott and members of the committee. It's a pleasure to be here with you this afternoon. I applaud the government for hosting these meaningful conversations, and I am confident that these deliberations will result in positive change. The review represents a critical opportunity for the Ontario government to make changes that will improve service delivery and reduce the tax burden to property taxpayers.

The city of Markham is the largest municipality by population in York region and Canada's most culturally diverse city. A hub for innovation, the city anchors the second-largest cluster of information technology companies in Canada, over 650 corporate head offices, and more than 1,500 high-tech and life sciences companies that are headquartered in the city of Markham. We're fiscally responsible, having the lowest 19-year-average property tax increase in the GTA. We have a strong record of lean, efficient government and a commitment to service excellence.

I'm here today to share some recommendations for the future of regional governance in York region while also sharing Markham's unanimously agreed-upon recommendation: If nothing else, the status quo in York region must change. The current governance structure in York region is more than 50 years old, and it's not what's needed in 2024. Our world has changed, our communities have changed, our municipal role has changed, so it is time for change. Towns have transformed into cities, and these cities have become some of the biggest in Ontario and in Canada.

Last June, I offered my recommendation, through a public statement, to form one York, one city. In my view, the optimal outcome would be one city for York region. I've made this clear in the past, and it's my view today. It's time to consolidate all nine municipalities in York region. That may sound bold, but what it really means is consolidating services that are more efficient and would cost less. When you exclude the education portion of the property tax bill, 70% of what property taxpayers pay for municipal services already goes to the region of York, so we'd only be consolidating the last 30%—a consolidation that would realize significant savings in both operating and capital budgets. If you want to bring about the most effective change, consolidation is needed in York region: one tax bill, one planning department, one water department, one fire department—and, as you know, we already have one police and EMS organization.

All nine municipalities in York region have their own IT department, cyber security, water billing, tax billing and recreation systems, just to name a few—eight fire departments, 10 planning departments, 10 economic development departments, 10 road departments, nine recreation departments, 10 corporate communications departments, and 77 elected officials. I'll remind you that York region has a population of 1.2 million people; Toronto has three million and has only 26 elected officials and one department for each of those previous examples. Of interest, that same area in York region is served by only 10 MPPs.

Streamlined governance in York region will reduce costs, improve service levels, and lower taxes.

The province is committed to building more housing, and we share that commitment. Achieving these targets requires ambitious and bold moves from the province to reduce duplication. Now more than ever, we have to be agile. We need more homes, we need more roads and transit, we need more infrastructure, and we need to be building them faster. It's not just about planning and getting approvals; it's the integrated process of getting those homes built and getting those communities created. We need to make the whole process more efficient. Madam Chair, your government has a minister dedicated to red tape reduction. We need a governance structure and processes that achieve those very same objectives.

I was pleased to see the government's recent decision in Peel. Now there's going to be a more focused review of those services in Peel to support the commitment to build more homes, including land use planning, servicing roads and waste management. York region deserves the same attention. We know what it takes to offer excellent services. It can be done, and it can be done right. Take Alectra Utilities, for example. The merger of Enersource, PowerStream, Horizon, and Hydro One Brampton saved \$310 million in operating expenses and an additional \$110 million in capital.

1320

You'll hear from others that the cities and towns of York region are unique; of course, they are. But just as a reminder, places like Unionville, Markham Village and Thornhill are very unique places, as well, and were brought together in one governance structure 50 years ago in Markham, and yet they've managed to maintain their heritage and local identities.

Detractors to my one-city proposal say that you can't provide services in such a large geographic area. On the contrary, right now, York region provides police, transit, public health, water and waste water, EMS for the entire region. For all intents and purposes, York region is already one city—

The Chair (Ms. Laurie Scott): You have 60 seconds.

Mr. Frank Scarpitti: Markham council, last July, took the position that the governance model in York region requires modernization, and they wanted to explore single-tier governance without regional government. While that option, through the Peel decision, looks like it has been taken off the table, their unanimous vote called for change in York region.

Cities can and should take more control over local matters.

I've long been an advocate of streamlining governance in York region, and I believe that government must take bold action to help us as local leaders to do what's best for our residents and our taxpayers. We must do as much as possible to make government smaller and more efficient.

In closing, please consider the city of Markham as an ally to you as you embark on this review. We remain ready to provide input, feedback, and to collaborate on this once-in-a-generation opportunity to finally address systematic problems that have been ignored for far too long.

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

Now we'll do rotations of questions. We're going to start with MPP Burch for his first round of seven and a half minutes. Please go ahead.

Mr. Jeff Burch: Thank you all for your presentations. It's much appreciated.

I want to start with Mayor Hamlin from Collingwood. You talked a lot about the economy in Collingwood, about Collingwood as a hub. I thought you could take an opportunity to talk about housing and housing targets. I can imagine, like some northern communities with a lot of seasonal housing, there are challenges with respect to housing employees of all the businesses and tourism industry. That impacts finding affordable housing for folks who live in Collingwood. So maybe you could talk about those challenges and what you need from the provincial government to support that.

Ms. Yvonne Hamlin: We are one of the leaders in Canada, I think, in Collingwood, trying to come to grips with the need for housing, for the reasons you've outlined.

We set up an affordable housing task force before the province did. We've developed an affordable housing master plan. We need about 150,000 rental units for people who work in Collingwood—not all the different income groups, but people earning roughly between \$35,000 and \$50,000 a year. That sounds like almost nothing in the context of Toronto; it is huge in our context. It would make such a difference. Collingwood itself, as a town, has very few pieces of land that we can utilize. Our boundaries are quite small. So we're really struggling with how to produce this. As you've mentioned, because we're catering to the tourist trade as well as the residents in south Georgian Bay, we have a lot of restaurants and people who need the minimum wage workers. Also, we have the people who work at the resort and the ski hill. There are so many of them, and there is no affordable housing in that municipality, the town of the Blue Mountains. Their mayor says the average home that's built in the town of the Blue Mountains is 3,600 square feet.

Collingwood is trying to help, and I know the town of the Blue Mountains is trying to sort this out as well, but we've had a lot of growth in our community, from young families to active retirees. Our kindergartens have portables this year for the first time ever. There are so many young families moving in, and we just need some help.

The water plant, for example, is something we've been advocating at the provincial level to get some assistance—because how are we going to build without water?

Mr. Jeff Burch: Thanks very much.

Mr. Scott from Bradford West Gwillimbury, I want to ask about the regional government. There are a lot of similarities to Niagara. We also have a regional government, with 32 folks sitting around the table. It has always been an issue folks have talked about, as well as representation for the smaller municipalities that don't want to be left out, which is why the number is so large.

You mentioned some kind of a ward system as a solution. Is that something that has been discussed at the regional level, in the studies and discussions that you've had?

Mr. Jonathan Scott: Yes, it has, and it was, I think, narrowly defeated last term. The idea, I believe, was to essentially have five wards. You'd still have the mayors, but then the ward system would give that representation by population that I spoke about.

The interesting thing—because you're right; I actually compared Simcoe county to Niagara at county council a week or so ago. The difference, I would say, at Simcoe county is how stark the divide is north/south. You really do have New Tecumseth, Innisfil and especially Bradford that are part of the GTA. We drive down to Newmarket–Aurora for a lot of our restaurants or shopping, still, in Bradford—that we do want to keep people in Bradford. So the north/south divide is stark. We're the ones that are growing quite rapidly and suburbanizing, in those three southern municipalities, but we're also the ones footing the bill for the county and not getting the services back that we feel we need for a more urban style of living.

Mr. Jeff Burch: When we were in Niagara, there were some frustrations with some of the things in Bill 23, but one of the things that folks were fairly happy about was the change in moving a lot of the planning responsibilities from the region to the lower tiers and ending some of the duplication that was happening there. How is that going in your region?

Mr. Jonathan Scott: It hasn't been effectuated yet; it hasn't happened, necessarily, yet, but we want to see that duplication removed. When I have, as I mentioned, the local planning review already done—we get that maybe the conservation authority is going to take a little bit of extra time or what have you, but for the region to completely be duplicating the same review, that doesn't work for us. So if it's just regional-scale matters—infrastructure like water and waste water, and maybe even transit—we could see that role within regional planning, but we don't need it to be duplicative.

Mr. Jeff Burch: So, to sum up your position, which I think is the same as Mayor Leduc's, what he talked about—you do think that regional government, two-tier government, is working, but it needs some adjustment with respect to clarifying the roles of each level and making sure that people are democratically represented.

Mr. Jonathan Scott: Yes. The phrase I used at county council last week was, "The county needs to stick to its

knitting.” Bradford needs to do the same, and we will if they will.

Mr. Jeff Burch: How much time is left?

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

Mr. Jeff Burch: I’ll move to the mayor of Markham, and I’ll come back to you next round.

You’re advocating for one city of York region. That has been discussed in Niagara, as well, for the last 30 years. There are a lot of studies out there that say that there are no savings with mergers. There’s no area or region you could point to that has been amalgamated where any savings have been achieved. I realize there are reasons to do it other than just cash savings, but you might want to comment on that—that there’s actually nowhere where it has saved money.

The Chair (Ms. Laurie Scott): You have 24 seconds.

Mr. Frank Scarpitti: So maybe we’ll stand out in the province of Ontario. I know the province of Ontario, by the way—parties of different stripes have always aimed to consolidate electric distribution companies, so Alectra was one of those. Historically, all parties have pushed us to do that, and they did it for the right reasons: to provide better service, save money. It can be done—

The Chair (Ms. Laurie Scott): You may have to finish that up later. They’re going to cut your mike.

MPP McMahon, you have four and a half minutes. Please go ahead.

1330

Ms. Mary-Margaret McMahon: I only have four and a half minutes, so we’re going to have rapid-fire questioning.

I appreciate all of you coming today. The biggest thing I appreciate is your candour—and I actually now know why Mayor Scarpitti’s parents called him Frank.

I would caution about the comparison to Toronto city council. As a former city councillor, I can unequivocally say that the representation they have now is not fair. It is wrong, and it was done, again—these guys have heard it until they’re blue in the face—in the dark of the night, as a surprise, in the middle of an election, and was completely unfair and for questionable reasons. I’m just putting that out there.

We’re here to talk about housing and housing targets and dealing with this housing crisis which we are all in agreement of, regardless of stripe—we just want the shovels in the ground—and how we can help enable you to do that. Targets tell one story, but we know there’s always a story behind the story.

What can the province do to assist you better in dealing with the housing crisis and getting the shovels in the ground? Do you have concerns about the backlog at the land tribunal? Is it the developers not coming in and getting their site plan approvals or their building permits? Is it the water infrastructure lack of funding? What is key to you?

I’ll start with Frank.

Mr. Frank Scarpitti: Well, we could probably have a session all afternoon about that question. It’s a great question. There’s a lot that can be done.

By the way, I had similar conversations with the previous government.

I met very early on with government officials when this government first got elected. I said, “Please change the planning process in the province of Ontario, because it just takes too long to get things done.” As hard as municipalities try, they have to follow provincial legislation and processes—things like EA. There have been changes made to the EA process. Again, what I said to them was, “Change the process, make it faster, but you don’t have to give up your strength on environmental policy. You have your standards. Get through the process quicker.”

I’ll just sum up by saying I’m glad to see some of the changes that have been made in terms of the process, but you’ve put all the onus on municipalities. You want us to review and approve in a certain period of time or we have to give money back to developers. I ask you and challenge you, and all parties, to get your own provincial agencies, get your own provincial approval processes in line so that we get comments from some of your ministries in time to be able to actually meet the deadlines that you’ve put in place. I would say, put the same criteria that you put on municipalities to your own government ministries and to your own provincial agencies.

Ms. Mary-Margaret McMahon: Sage advice.

Jonathan?

Mr. Jonathan Scott: I’d first say that until interest rates were raised, Bradford had no problem building housing. When I started undergrad, we were 12,000. Today, we’re at 50,000, and we’ll be at 80,000 in the blink of an eye. So that’s astronomical growth in the context of what was once a small town and is now, perhaps, a medium suburb. We’re trying to densify, and we’re trying to grow up, not out now, particularly near our GO train station.

So what do we need from the province? I think—

The Chair (Ms. Laurie Scott): You have 45 seconds.

Mr. Jonathan Scott: —we need what we’ve spoken about in terms of regional governance review. We need all-day, two-way GO train service. We need other transportation infrastructure. Generally, we do a pretty good job of building housing when the market is there. We need the provincial government to support us on the other pieces of infrastructure and this governance review.

Ms. Mary-Margaret McMahon: Thank you.

We’ll get back to you next round, Yvonne.

The Chair (Ms. Laurie Scott): Yes, she’ll have another round.

Over to the government side: MPP Coe, please start.

Mr. Lorne Coe: Thank you, Chair, and through you to Mayor Scarpitti: Thank you very much for being here with us.

Sir, when you talk about the consolidation to one city and significant savings in both operating and capital budgets—I think I heard you approximate what those savings could potentially be. Can you restate that again, please—both in the operating area as well as capital budgets.

Mr. Frank Scarpitti: I gave an example of merging large utilities. We now have almost a million customers for Alectra. Through that process, we were able to save money in operating and in capital, and yet actually increase service to our customers. We've made changes to our call centre, to our customer billing, to CRM, to be able to streamline and consolidate some of our operations. And I think that can happen at the local level with municipalities.

Part of the answer that I was going to give to the previous question—and I'm only citing this as an example, just to show you: You could actually consolidate the town of Whitchurch-Stouffville with the city of Markham, and we wouldn't blink an eye. We'd be able to do their tax billing. We'd be able to do the registration for their recreational facilities. That's a very small example which I think can actually happen on a larger scale, in being able to consolidate services.

I'm going to underscore the statement that I made within the presentation: When you take out the education portion of your property tax bill, 70% of what taxpayers in the city of Markham pay for municipal services goes to the region of York. I mentioned all the different departments that we have. And I can tell you, you can have a whole lot of discussions and ideas, as the previous presenters have said, but when you have one organization, you align priorities, you have one governance, and you have a standard that is met right across the whole region.

As you're leaving today, just take a look at Highway 7 here in the city of Vaughan. We have a growth centre at Yonge and Highway 7 that will make this place look like a low-rise development.

The amount of growth, the pace of growth that we're being asked to do as municipalities cannot be served with a structure that was put in place over 50 years ago, when we were essentially all rural municipalities.

A lot of good things were done when the regions were set up, but I have to ask the question, why is there this disparity in the GTA in terms of governance structure already? Why were there only three municipalities in Peel region but nine in York region? It may not have made sense. It sure doesn't make sense today.

I think the bottom line is, I'm looking to this committee, collectively—again, all parties, stripes—to make changes to improve the structure that we have, to save money in operations, and to really stay focused on what we've got to get done over the next 10 years.

Mr. Lorne Coe: The approximations that you have in savings—do you have staff reports that support those projections?

Mr. Frank Scarpitti: I haven't provided projections related to municipalities, but, yes, we could certainly provide—I know Vaughan has done some work—some work. As a member of regional council, I'll say, most definitely, as a region, we could provide input in that. I think it's not only the number of departments, some of the duplication—but for everything that we've done and had success over the 50 years when the regions were set up, there's a lot more that's being expected of us today as

municipalities; we understand why. Again, I think the role of local government has changed, and what we have to contend with.

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

Through you, Chair: To MPP Pang, please.

Mr. Billy Pang: How much time do I have?

The Chair (Ms. Laurie Scott): MPP Pang, you have three and a half minutes.

Mr. Billy Pang: Good.

This is for the mayor of Markham. According to your presentation, I think you want less cooks in the kitchen, so that means, more or less, you're expecting some of your colleagues to vote that they are going to lose their job. I would be interested, in the future, how you'll persuade them to do that.

According to the 2022 Development Charges Study from Markham, you have a projected increase of population of 90,000 by 2031. The province gave you a target of 44,000 homes. This is your own city's studies—that there will be population growth, and that is the housing crisis in Markham. In your jurisdiction, you have some opinions on uploading or downloading some services or consolidation of services—but at the table, what's your plan to catch that target, 44,000 homes, on or before 2031?

Mr. Frank Scarpitti: I applaud the government for staying focused on increasing the housing supply. You talk to municipalities, you talk to economists, you talk to people involved in the industry—it's a stretch goal. In Ontario, to be able to double the pace of construction and to hit 1.5 million homes in the next 10 years—it has never been done. So, first of all, it's a stretch goal, and I think we all better recognize that, because if we don't, we're fooling ourselves. But it's good that we've set some goals.

1340

I had this discussion with the previous government, as well. They laid out a map one day and said, "Look at all that we've done in our Golden Horseshoe plan. We've approved all this housing." Well, that was a policy document. When you're on the ground, when you have to plan for water and sewer, you don't—

The Chair (Ms. Laurie Scott): I'm just giving you a warning: 60 seconds.

Mr. Frank Scarpitti: I'll just say that we have approved secondary plans. We've been the poster child. Just south of where you live, in Markham Centre, I can tell you, we increased the density there long before any provincial government recognized that we had to curb urban sprawl. We were actually a leader, ahead of any provincial government, in recognizing that in some key areas, we needed to intensify. So we've done our part. We've done our official plans. We've approved secondary plans. If you want to join us every Tuesday night, you're welcome to sit and take the heat from the public, like we do when we sit in public meetings and have to explain to them why we're making the changes that we do to meet the housing target demands. Getting there is a long road, and it takes investment and it takes money. You don't build some of these major sewers in two years. Your EA process slows the process down.

You want to get housing built faster? Change some of the processes that we have to undertake locally in order to do that. We can have all the numbers and plans that we want—

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

We're going to move on to the final round, with MPP Burch for seven and a half minutes.

Mr. Jeff Burch: I'll come back to Mayor Scarpitti. I think MPP Coe explored the amalgamation thing. We may have to agree to disagree on some of that, but I want to continue in the vein that you're talking about right now with respect to—and we've talked all day about how municipalities have done their job when it comes to requirements that they speed up the approvals process, and that there are penalties if they don't. I think municipalities have done everything that they can. The problem is that right now, builders are not getting shovels in the ground. There are reasons for that that have to do with the economy. Builders aren't in it for charity; they're there to make money.

A lot of municipalities are asking for some kind of sunset or use-it-or-lose-it policy on approvals. There are some things you can do through bylaw, but they're asking for provincial leadership on making sure that if someone takes the time and resources from a city to go through the approval process, there is some responsibility on the builder, as well, to get the shovels in the ground. Can you comment on what kind of an issue that is in your municipality and whether you agree with a use-it-or-lose-it policy?

Mr. Frank Scarpitti: I'll just say this: Please have the discussions with the municipalities about what we could get in terms of either incentives or penalties. To be honest with you, we need as many tools as possible.

I just want you to understand: Municipalities are under siege. We're being asked, and we've agreed, to try to double the pace of construction of new homes. We need every tool possible to undertake that. As much as I support use-it-or-lose-it—because we've done that in the past; we actually had to do it out of necessity because we had a certain amount of capacity within the system at the time. The reality is, I've got probably half a dozen developers that would start construction of housing tomorrow, but they can't because the sewer isn't built; the water to those communities is not built. You're going to penalize a developer and say, "Well, you've got this land. You've been sitting on this land. Why aren't you building?" Some of them actually want to start, but they can't until that infrastructure is in the ground and built.

Yes, we need penalties, but the reality is, while it sounds good to have those penalties—the reference to high interest rates and other issues; the doubling of costs for concrete-forming for these high-rise developments. How do you force a developer to go ahead and develop when the infrastructure is not there? The interest rates—there are people who have gone out to try to sell homes in the last six months; they've sold two units in a whole high-rise condominium building. So how do you force a developer to start building? It's a complicated issue.

All I will say is, everything that you can give us that strengthens us to be able to move the process through—we're going to welcome that, but it has got to be meaningful, and it has got to be targeted in the right places.

Mr. Jeff Burch: With respect to DCs, the province, with Bill 23, took away \$3 billion to \$4 billion in revenue from municipalities. Then, they set up a \$1.2-billion fund to apply to. To get that, you have to meet your housing targets. To meet your housing targets, the criteria are foundations poured, shovels in the ground, or however you want to phrase it. You have no control over that.

What is your revenue gap from Bill 23, approximately, and how big a problem is it that you have no control over the criteria to get that money, even if you meet your housing targets?

Mr. Frank Scarpitti: I'm sorry if some information is a repeat of this morning, when Chair Emerson spoke, but Bill 23—again, there are many aspects to that that have had financial impact. The discounting of DCs has hurt municipalities. At the region of York, if I remember correctly, in six months, the impact was \$35 million, and longer term, the impact is greater.

Again, if we're going to be forced to not charge development charges—because that's how infrastructure to actually build these homes gets created—we need something that replaces that. Whether that's grants from the province or—sorry; I don't want to change the word. It's not grants, but actual funding—because to apply for grants for major infrastructure like that, you would be delaying the construction of homes for many decades. If there's funding that replaces that, that's one thing, and then we have the ability to move. And I know you got some information this morning about what the region requires.

So, yes, the development charges have been in there—and by the way, there are backed-up studies every time; we don't just pull that number out of the air. The DC is based on the amount of growth that a municipality is going to have, the infrastructure, the community centres, the fire halls that will have to be built to accommodate that infrastructure, and that's collected over many years, so when it comes time to build the community centre, we have the funds to do that.

Very quickly on the build-more-homes-faster fund: There was some delight when that announcement got made. We said, "Yes, we're fine with looking to ways to get those permits out the door faster"—then we found out later in the year that it's not the permits; it's the housing starts. We don't control that part of the process, committee. Our job is to get those permits at the front counter so the builder can come in and pick them up. After that, if their resources are tied up on one site and they can't start a site in Markham, that's not our fault. So that's an aspect that really does have to change.

The Chair (Ms. Laurie Scott): You have 60 seconds.

Mr. Jeff Burch: So while the intention may have been good, the fact that municipalities have not been made whole actually inhibits their ability to get that infrastructure that a lot of builders are waiting for.

Mr. Frank Scarpitti: Absolutely. It just scratches the surface, by the way, as much as it was welcome news. In Markham—and I'm happy to sit down with any member—the impact of Bill 23 is a \$1.3-billion impact to us over the next 10 years. We cannot fund that from property taxes. Some of that is DCs and related to the changes that were made. Some of it is related to the amount of parkland.

Just to give you an example, we reduced the parkland requirement by 50% in high-rise areas like this; with Bill 23, that reduced it down to 10% of the land area, so for a project with 2,000 people, you get a park about the size of a tennis court for all the activities related to the people who live there.

The Chair (Ms. Laurie Scott): MPP McMahon, you have the final four and a half minutes.

Ms. Mary-Margaret McMahon: Wow. I've just been captivated, so this is great.

1350

We're going to go to Yvonne, with the first question—about how we can help get shovels in the ground in beautiful Collingwood.

Ms. Yvonne Hamlin: In December, we passed a new official plan. We worked on it for several years. We have accommodated the need for growth, as we were directed, and we have built into the official plan height, density, intensification. And now the plan is at Simcoe county. Much like Bradford West Gwillimbury, we are mature enough in our development and—I'll say, professional planning staff in our municipality. We don't need the county to have a look. And how long will it be at the county? This is always a challenge for us. I know the province started on getting rid of the county approval process. There are some municipalities that maybe need that—the smaller ones—but we don't, at the west end.

Secondly, I'll just say, as I mentioned before, we need help on what some might think local services—but they affect southern Georgian Bay. I'll give you one tiny example. I was at an event to raise money for our regional south Georgian Bay humane society—a new building. A developer said to me, “We have some plans to build a couple of apartment buildings in the town of the Blue Mountains”—right beside us. “If we do this, could you, Collingwood, run a bus there?” That's how crazy it is in southern Georgian Bay. That's why I say we need to do services efficiently. We need the province to help us sort this out.

Ms. Mary-Margaret McMahon: Yes, we've heard that local municipalities are happy to get the planning process back in their hot little hands, and they would like the whole of the process, so they'd like that scooped from the region.

A quick rapid-fire round: This government has done a few reversals in their plans and policies. There's the Peel regional review, for example—they're going to divorce; they're not divorcing. So do you have faith in us that we're actually going to do something bold and brave with all your testimony and ideas, and get the shovels in the ground? What frustrates you? What gives you hope? You have about 45 seconds each.

Yvonne?

Ms. Yvonne Hamlin: I'm just going to say I'm here because I have faith in the process. So I'm leaving here with fingers crossed, hoping you're listening.

Ms. Mary-Margaret McMahon: All right, my favourite municipality in Ontario.

Interjection.

Ms. Mary-Margaret McMahon: Tell my Beaches—East Yorkers.

Jonathan?

Mr. Jonathan Scott: Peel is an interesting example. The previous government actually delivered rep by pop. In the city of Mississauga, every city councillor became a regional councillor. I actually think the partial dissolution of Peel that Minister Calandra announced—Mayor Brown might have said he won the PR battle, but Mayor Crombie got most of what she wanted. That's not a bad model for what you could do to Simcoe county—bring in rep by pop, clarify the rules and responsibilities. We'd probably be generally fine with that approach.

Ms. Mary-Margaret McMahon: Are you hopeful that we are going to do something tangible?

Mr. Jonathan Scott: This is a government that ran on a slogan of “Get It Done.” So, please, when it comes to Simcoe county, get it done.

Ms. Mary-Margaret McMahon: Practise what you preach.

Frank, bring it home.

Mr. Frank Scarpitti: Well, I'm hopeful. I think that no matter what party you represent, what level of government you're at—we know there's a crisis out there, so it is a call to action, and I am hopeful.

And I'll just say that it was no surprise for me—I knew a divorce was much more expensive than bringing the family into one, if you will.

I would just say, please—obviously, if it's a bad decision that you make in Peel, you don't want to spread it to the rest of the GTA. But I have to ask, whatever changes you make, with the premise that it's going to improve services and reduce costs in Peel—why wouldn't you make those in York region and other parts of the GTA? It just doesn't make sense—why you have one structure versus another.

The Chair (Ms. Laurie Scott): Now we're moving to the final round for the government side. MPP Rae, please go ahead.

Mr. Matthew Rae: Thank you to the presenters this afternoon.

We've heard about the need for housing-enabling infrastructure, as was outlined in the letter which the committee is looking at, obviously, with regional governance, and I know we hear that often. We heard it in Halton. We heard it in Niagara. We hear it all over Ontario. Obviously, waste water—if you don't have a toilet, you can't build the unit.

Just for the record, for the mayor of Markham: You have three federal Liberal members in your city, as I'm sure you're well aware, and one is a very powerful cabinet minister, I would argue. I would encourage you to call them and ask them to fund waste water infrastructure with the province.

In the fall economic statement, we announced \$200 million. It's not enough; we agree there needs to be more, but this is currently what we're looking at. Obviously, Minister Surma is willing to work with the federal government to set up an infrastructure program that was similar under former federal governments—the ICIP funding, in particular, I'm thinking of, with the 30%, 30% and 30%; right now, we're having to go alone with our municipal partners.

Obviously, I know Collingwood—there's a big ask from there. I've heard from the MPP from that area for the budget this year, and I know many others have those similar asks. I always tell my municipal colleagues it always helps to have more voices at the table for that—around that, to ensure that.

My question is for the mayor of Collingwood. The mayor of Markham already answered the question from my colleague—sorry, Frank.

Mr. Frank Scarpitti: Well, it wasn't a question. It was a statement.

If you think we don't talk to the federal government, I can tell you that we do.

One thing I want to make very clear: We need dollars above what we got before. If you're going to have the federal government and the provincial government say, "Oh, we've come to the table with all this money for your water and sewer"—if that's going to be at the expense of more transit, more schools and more hospitals in our community, do not dupe the public.

You've asked us to build more homes in the next 10 years. That means we have to double the investment in infrastructure—and that's not just water and sewer; that's hospitals, that's schools.

We have high schools with over 1,500 kids in them. They have to take turns eating lunch, starting at 10:30 in the morning.

It's not just about saying we're going to have these dollars. If it's at the expense of these other critical pieces that provide for complete communities, I am not going to stand for duping the public and saying, "Oh, we've got this money, but guess what? Your hospital won't be built for the next 25 years"—or the other things that are needed.

Anyway, I'll be quiet and let the mayor of Collingwood—

Mr. Matthew Rae: I appreciate the remarks from the mayor of Markham.

I will also, for the record, state the province is investing \$50 billion in hospitals across the province of Ontario. We're investing \$15 billion in school capital, as well. I 100% agree we need complete communities around that, Your Worship.

My question to the mayor is, what's your opinion on a use-it-or-lose-it or a sunset clause for development?

Ms. Yvonne Hamlin: We have some ability to do that now if we don't renew draft approvals of subdivision, but it's complex, and a lot of councillors don't want to get into that. So I think it would be better to have a use-it-or-lose-it clause.

We have developments in our community that are really long in the tooth. They got their planning approvals 20 years ago, before there was any hope of servicing where they are—and there's still no hope of servicing where they are. But it takes up a lot of resources.

Let's have the developers come to the table, get their water allocation, get their sewer allocation and so on—who are ready to go.

Mr. Matthew Rae: Thank you.

I defer my remaining time to MPP Smith.

The Chair (Ms. Laurie Scott): MPP Smith, you have three minutes left.

Ms. Laura Smith: Through you, Chair: I want to thank everyone for being here. I appreciate everybody coming out today.

A lot of points were drawn up, and it's amazing how we can draw so many parallels between one community and another, regardless of whether they're 100,000 or a million, like we've seen. We talked about helping the government, helping our municipal partners do the hard work, and Wayne Emmerson talked about the heavy lifting, and we respect that.

The building better faster fund does help the municipalities hit their targets, specifically when it comes to enabling infrastructure, servicing new roads. This is all within the wheelhouse of what our hopes are—but I'm being reminiscent.

I could also talk about DC fees, which are just—or rather the removal of the DC fees. That's just for affordable and attainable housing. I know there's an illusion that it's encompassing every DC fee for every unit; it does not. It's simply so that we can help that area which the province recognizes is a definite fallback for so many communities.

Mr. Mayor, thank you so much for being here. You talked about a very drastic, bold consolidation, and we talked about numbers to bring that to fruition. You did something very cognitively, which I appreciated—you talked about just adding on one municipality and adding onto that. I'm wondering if you could further talk about that. I'm very interested in kind of taking a piece of a pie and adding more to it—because we are looking for serving as a community an economically viable proposal for the province and cost-saving measures. These are all very interesting things to me, and I'd love for you to talk about that a little more.

The Chair (Ms. Laurie Scott): You have 60 seconds.

Mr. Frank Scarpitti: I do appreciate Minister Calandra saying that we're going to further clarify the definition of "attainable," so I get that DCs are pertaining to that particular category as being reviewed. But your comment that DCs are just about that—actually, it's not. We have things that we were able to include in the DC charge in the past because it was related to future growth. Your policy says that we have to take that out and can no longer be funded by DCs, so that now has to be put on the property tax bill.

Your policy also says, "If this iPad is \$1,500, you can't charge \$1,500; you're going to have to give it a 20% discount." So the question is, where do you get that 20%?

As I said, at the region, in six months—a \$35-million impact to us.

On the question of what else we—

The Chair (Ms. Laurie Scott): I don't know what else I can say, other than the timer is going. I'm so sorry.

Mr. Frank Scarpitti: That's it?

The Chair (Ms. Laurie Scott): Yes, 60 seconds went quick, but there you go.

Interjection.

The Chair (Ms. Laurie Scott): I'm not doing it. This man here is doing it.

Thank you very much to all the presenters who were here this afternoon.

Just a reminder: The written submission deadline is 7 p.m. on Thursday, January 18, 2024.

The committee is now adjourned until 10 a.m. on Thursday, January 18, 2024. Thanks, everyone.

The committee adjourned at 1402.

STANDING COMMITTEE ON HERITAGE, INFRASTRUCTURE AND CULTURAL POLICY

Chair / Présidente

Ms. Laurie Scott (Haliburton–Kawartha Lakes–Brock PC)

Vice-Chair / Vice-Présidente

Ms. Teresa J. Armstrong (London–Fanshawe ND)

Ms. Teresa J. Armstrong (London–Fanshawe ND)

Mr. Lorne Coe (Whitby PC)

Mr. Hardeep Singh Grewal (Brampton East / Brampton-Est PC)

Mr. Joel Harden (Ottawa Centre / Ottawa-Centre ND)

Ms. Natalia Kusendova-Bashta (Mississauga Centre / Mississauga-Centre PC)

Ms. Mary-Margaret McMahon (Beaches–East York L)

Mr. Billy Pang (Markham–Unionville PC)

Mr. Matthew Rae (Perth–Wellington PC)

Mr. Sheref Sabawy (Mississauga–Erin Mills PC)

Ms. Laurie Scott (Haliburton–Kawartha Lakes–Brock PC)

Substitutions / Membres remplaçants

Mr. Jeff Burch (Niagara Centre / Niagara-Centre ND)

M^{me} Dawn Gallagher Murphy (Newmarket–Aurora PC)

Ms. Laura Smith (Thornhill PC)

Clerk / Greffier

Mr. Isaiah Thorning

Staff / Personnel

Ms. Sude Bahar Beltan, research officer,
Research Services