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**Official Report
of Debates
(Hansard)**

HE-49

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

Get It Done Act, 2024

1st Session
43rd Parliament

Wednesday 27 March 2024

**Journal
des débats
(Hansard)**

HE-49

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

Loi de 2024
pour passer à l'action

1^{re} session
43^e législature

Mercredi 27 mars 2024

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Présidente : Laurie Scott
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LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY OF ONTARIO

ASSEMBLÉE LÉGISLATIVE DE L'ONTARIO

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

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

Wednesday 27 March 2024

Mercredi 27 mars 2024

The committee met at 0900 in committee room 1.

GET IT DONE ACT, 2024

LOI DE 2024 POUR PASSER À L'ACTION

Consideration of the following bill:

Bill 162, An Act to enact the Protecting Against Carbon Taxes Act, 2024 and amend various Acts / Projet de loi 162, Loi édictant la Loi de 2024 sur la protection contre les taxes sur le carbone et modifiant diverses lois.

The Chair (Ms. Laurie Scott): Good morning, everyone. The Standing Committee on Heritage, Infrastructure and Cultural Policy will now come to order. We're here to conduct public hearings on Bill 162, An Act to enact the Protecting Against Carbon Taxes Act, 2024 and amend various Acts. We are joined by staff from legislative research, Hansard, and broadcast and recording.

Please wait until I recognize you before starting to speak. As always, all comments should go through the Chair.

Are there any questions before we begin? Okay.

**STATEMENT BY THE MINISTER
AND RESPONSES**

The Chair (Ms. Laurie Scott): Appearing today is the Minister of Transportation, the Honourable Prabmeet Singh Sarkaria. He will have 20 minutes to make an opening statement, followed by 40 minutes for questions and answers, divided into two rounds of seven and a half minutes for the government members, two rounds of seven and a half minutes for the official opposition members, and two rounds of five minutes for the independent member. Are there any questions? Okay.

Minister, welcome. You have 20 minutes for your presentation. You may begin whenever you're ready.

Hon. Prabmeet Singh Sarkaria: Good morning, everyone, and thank you so much for this opportunity to be here before all of you to talk about this very critical piece of legislation that we have put forward, the Get It Done Act.

It is no secret, Chair, that our government has the most ambitious transit infrastructure plan in our province's history. We are making historic investments, including \$100 billion over the next decade to build the roads, highways and public transit we need to support our growing

population. This includes almost \$28 billion to renew, build and expand our highway infrastructure in every corner of our province.

With Ontario expected to grow by five million people over the next 10 years, we need to act quickly to get these critical projects built without unnecessary delays. The greater Golden Horseshoe alone is expected to grow by a million people every five years, reaching almost 15 million people by the year 2051.

We all know too well that building new infrastructure is often easier said than done. We also have a responsibility to ensure that life remains affordable for families now and for years to come. As the cost of living continues to rise and people across our province feel like they're struggling to get ahead, we are taking action and ensuring families keep more of their hard-earned money in their pockets, right where it belongs.

Our government has a plan. With the Get It Done Act, we're addressing both of these priorities. If passed, we can plan, approve and build key projects faster than ever before while keeping costs down for families and businesses across the province.

As our population continues to grow, we need to ensure our public transit system keeps pace. That's why, over the next decade, we're investing over \$70 billion to transform public transit in the province, which includes building four priority subway projects. This is the largest subway expansion in Canadian history and currently the largest public transit investment anywhere in North America. We are working each and every day to make transit a better, more accessible choice for commuters and breaking down financial and accessibility barriers to take public transit.

Last month, our government, under the leadership of Premier Ford and Minister Thanigasalam, launched One Fare. With this new program, fully funded by our government, commuters only need to pay once when transferring between GO Transit, the TTC and other transit agencies across the greater Toronto area. One Fare will save commuters an average of \$1,600 per year.

The Get It Done Act makes it easier to get shovels in the ground on priority projects and infrastructure of the future. That's why our government plans to use the Building Transit Faster Act to declare the Hazel McCallion LRT extensions to downtown Mississauga and downtown Brampton as priority transit projects. This will allow us to build the much-needed extensions quicker so that we can

connect more people to jobs and other opportunities throughout the greater Toronto area.

The Hazel McCallion Line and its extensions will transform the way people travel across Peel and the greater Toronto area. It will also provide two of Canada's fastest-growing cities with faster and more frequent service than ever before. The Hazel McCallion Line will join the Ontario Line, the Yonge North subway extension, the Scarborough subway extension, the Eglinton Crosstown West extension and the Hamilton LRT as priority transit projects under the Building Transit Faster Act.

Chair, I'd like to also recognize that because of that act, we were able to reach another milestone in the Eglinton Crosstown West extension two days ago, when we announced the launch of the RFQ for the system and rails package and the design for seven of the new stations that are coming. This is in addition to the tunnelling that has already started on that project—over five kilometres of tunnelling already completed—showing the progress and success of having these types of pieces of legislation that allow us to move quickly and to build Ontario and to build these priority transit projects.

We have a responsibility to build Ontario for the next generation of young people, families and businesses. They deserve reliable and affordable transportation options that get them where they need to go when they need to get there. They shouldn't have to be stuck in gridlock. That's already costing the province \$11 billion a year in lost productivity. Traffic not only increases the cost of the things we buy but also reduces access to good jobs and forces too many Ontarians to sacrifice time doing the things they love just to get to and from work.

While public transit is part of the solution, we have never faced a more urgent time to build highways, roads and bridges. I'm sure everyone in this room can relate to the frustrations of gridlock. It prevents people from getting to work and other priorities on time, draining our happiness and productivity. It leaves commercial goods stuck in transit, which makes prices rise even higher for families. Every minute commuters are stuck in bumper-to-bumper traffic is a minute away from work, a minute away from friends and family, a minute away from doing the things that they love. Madam Chair, I experience this almost every single day, coming into Queen's Park. My ride from my house to Queen's Park is always filled with gridlock, and it motivates me every single day to ensure that we get legislation like this passed so we can build highways, like Highway 413. We know how critical those highways are to build for our economy and for the people who live across the GTA, but also to make sure that we save 30 minutes per trip.

I just want to put that into perspective a bit. Chair, 30 minutes each way is an hour a day, five hours a week, back to yourself, to your families and to your friends, and that you can spend doing the things you want, rather than being stuck in gridlock, which is an incredible chance to improve the quality of life for so many people, give people the opportunity to spend more time with their kids or their families or to get to a Blue Jays game or a Raptors game

faster. It's about giving people options. That's why we need to take immediate action to build the infrastructure that we need to support our growing population before the gridlock gets even worse.

We've seen the challenges of what the previous government has left us with—15 years of not building in this province. We now see record population growth. We have shovels in the ground on almost every one of our priority transit projects because of the pieces of legislation that we have brought forward to expedite timelines, but if we don't act, the future generations of this province are the ones who will struggle.

0910

For far too long, building new infrastructure in Ontario has been a slow and overly complicated process, and one that has resulted in unnecessary delays and increased costs for taxpayers. That is why the people of this province elected us—to get it done, to stop listening to the protest groups that want to protest every single transit project, highway project in this province. That is why we are building generational projects like the Bradford Bypass and the Highway 413, both of which will be toll-free and bring much-needed relief to some of the most congested traffic corridors in North America.

As I said before, Highway 413 will shorten travel times—30 minutes per trip. That is why our government is streamlining approval processes for building critical infrastructure, and we'll do it without compromising any of the rigorous environmental oversight or consultations we have in place today.

Looking to the future, we all know Ontario is an electric one. Over the past three years, our province has attracted more than \$28 billion in new investments in vehicle manufacturing and the EV battery supply chain. Our EV sector will create thousands of well-paying jobs that will fuel Ontario's economy well into the future, connecting the next generation of young people to good jobs, six-figure salaries and a better life. Our transition to electric will help slash our carbon emissions.

As more drivers choose to transition to electric vehicles, the critical minerals in northern Ontario have never been more valuable. However, if we want to secure Ontario's place as a globally competitive jurisdiction, we must focus on investing in our mining sector and cutting any unnecessary red tape. We want to ensure our mining sector remains competitive and attractive to investors so we can seize the opportunities in the EV space.

As part of the Get It Done Act, we'll explore options for improving the permitting process for developing and operating a mine in Ontario. We are putting an end to inefficiencies, to make Ontario a world leader in the mining sector. Just as we can't have millions of people stuck in gridlock, we cannot afford to have multi-million dollar investments in our mining sector caught up in red tape. Identifying and eliminating regulatory duplication and delays will ensure the mining sector is positioned to thrive in Ontario for years to come. This will revitalize our mining sector, building on the incredible work done by our Minister

of Mines, and create thousands of more well-paying jobs for the people of Ontario.

With the Get It Done Act, we'll cement our position as a world leader in the mining and electric vehicle sectors. By taking these steps, we are making Ontario more attractive to investors, giving our economy a much-needed boost and getting it done for the people of this province, and particularly northern Ontario.

Chair, a big reason our province is growing so exponentially is that more than 500,000 newcomers are arriving here each year. They come here for a better life and to contribute to our economy, but all too often, their first impressions are the soul-crushing gridlock that the rest of us experience every single day.

That's why our government is investing in transit infrastructure in every corner of our province. We know transit keeps people moving and is a key driver of economic growth. We're not only connecting people to jobs, but we're also connecting them to friends and family, medical appointments, school, and so much more.

Since day one, our government has made affordability one of our top priorities for the people of Ontario. Now, more than ever, we need policies that help Ontario families keep more of their hard-earned money.

If passed, the Get It Done Act will bring forward several cost-saving measures for the hard-working people of this province. People deserve to have confidence that they won't face new costs getting to work, medical appointments and other important commitments, and we have a plan to make sure they don't.

The Get It Done Act would amend the Public Transportation and Highway Improvement Act to ban any new tolls on provincial highways. This would not only apply to all of the province's 400-series highways, but also the Don Valley Parkway and Gardiner Expressway, once both highways are uploaded to the province.

If the Get It Done Act passes, any future government would be required to conduct public consultations before enacting new tolls, because the public has the right to know if the government is going to enact tolls that can cost as much as \$5,000 a year. We know that tolls add to the price of commercial goods, and that cost is then reflected in the prices we see on store shelves. In April 2022, our government eliminated tolls on Highways 412 and 418, a move that by 2027 will save drivers a total of \$68 million. By introducing legislation to ban any new tolls on provincial highways, we are getting it done and making life more affordable for Ontarians.

That's just one of the many cost-saving measures we've introduced in the Get It Done Act. We are also proposing to make the current freeze on driver's licence and Ontario Photo Card fees permanent. Our freeze has saved Ontarians \$22 million since 2019, and it will save drivers \$66 million more this decade. If the Get It Done Act passes, any future fee increases would require a legislative amendment. Ontarians work hard for their money, and they deserve to keep it. By making it more difficult to hike fees in the future, we are protecting people's wallets today and well into the future.

Carbon-pricing measures are another way in which Ontarians are seeing their hard-earned money slip away. Premier Ford and our government have been clear about the cost of the federal carbon tax. That's why we are taking action to protect Ontarians by making it more difficult for provincial governments of the future to introduce new carbon-pricing programs. If passed, the Get It Done Act will require a referendum to be held before any carbon-pricing regime could be introduced in Ontario. That would not only cover carbon taxes, but other forms of carbon pricing, such as the cap-and-trade system we got rid of.

As many Ontarians struggle to make ends meet, now is not the time for the government to raid people's wallets by putting a price on carbon. Unfortunately, we are looking at a 23% increase in the carbon tax from the federal government, coming on April 1. So I continue to urge every member of this House and committee to call on the federal government to stop their hike of the carbon tax. It's a tax that will impact families, truckers and workers, and that impacts every single aspect of our life.

Our government is always looking for ways to save Ontarians money and time.

In 2022, we announced that we are eliminating licence plate renewal fees, saving vehicle owners up to \$120 each year per car or truck.

If the Get It Done Act passes, it will enable a process for automated licence plate renewals which will save vehicle owners more than 900,000 hours a year. Automatic renewals will only be available to drivers in good standing, who are insured and do not have outstanding tickets or penalties. Those not considered in good standing will be notified 90 days before their licence plate expires to ensure they have time to comply. This means, of course, that municipalities will still be able to use a renewal process to collect outstanding fines, and more than eight million Ontarians will benefit by having the licence plate for their cars, light-duty trucks, motorcycles and mopeds renewed automatically.

0920

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

Hon. Prabmeet Singh Sarkaria: Thank you, Chair. I appreciate that.

Our government is committed to building a better future for all Ontarians, no matter where they live. Now, more than ever, we need to take action to ensure we have the transit and infrastructure we need to support our growing province. Each day, we are working towards eliminating red tape and ensuring we are building the key infrastructure that is needed. We are going to set Ontario's mining sector up for continued success as our province cements its position as a world leader in the electric vehicle industry.

This bill shows how serious we are about building a better future, and it is proof of our commitment to always getting it done for the people of Ontario. Passing the Get It Done Act will allow us to build on the work for years to come.

Once again, I want to thank the members of this committee for the opportunity to appear before you.

Chair, I will pass it back over to you.

The Chair (Ms. Laurie Scott): Thank you very much, Minister, for appearing with us this morning.

We're going to start with the official opposition for their first round of seven and a half minutes. MPP Shaw, please go ahead.

Ms. Sandy Shaw: Thank you very much, Minister, for being here this morning. I appreciate it.

You talked about the carbon tax, and it has been mentioned a few times in the House. I'd just like to get on the record here that while you spend a lot of time talking about Justin Trudeau's federal carbon tax, it needs to be acknowledged that the Progressive Conservatives have a carbon tax of their own. They collect millions and millions—it will amount to billions of dollars over the course of a few years. In fact, right now, through your emissions performance standards, you're charging \$65 per tonne of carbon, and that will be rising to \$80 a tonne on January 1.

So my comment would be—because we have a short time here—that this government would do right by looking at their own carbon tax, to be clear about it and transparent that you do collect a carbon tax, and be clear and transparent on how you are spending that money in the province to improve the environment, climate change, and the impacts of carbon taxes. Why are you collecting it and what do you plan to spend that on?

Unfortunately, that's not my question, Minister—

Hon. Prabmeet Singh Sarkaria: But I have to answer. Do I get a chance to address that comment, Chair?

Ms. Sandy Shaw: No, it's not my question, and it is my time—you could, if you want.

Let's just start from the beginning of the bill, and let's look at schedule 1. Schedule 1 in the bill is a change to the Environmental Assessment Act, and what it does, essentially, is expedite the government's ability to expropriate land before an environmental assessment.

What we have heard recently from the folks in Wilmot is that the township of Wilmot is now forcing farmers to sell over 770 acres of the best farmland in Ontario.

I have a letter here from Catherine Fife, who wrote to the Premier to say, "I have recently learned from a group of Wilmot township farmers that they are being forced to sell over 770 acres of the best farmland in Ontario. This land banking is being conducted by a third party, at the request of the region. Constituents from across the region have reached out to raise concerns. This has left residents and farmers of Wilmot with many unanswered questions, but at the heart of this issue is the mistreatment and lack of respect for Wilmot farmers."

MPP Catherine Fife ends with, "I urge you to support these farmers as they fight to maintain their family farms and businesses."

That's why I'm very concerned with schedule 1—the fact that we are losing farmland, right now, at an unsustainable and an alarming rate; that this schedule 1 will expedite the loss of land, perhaps farmland, in the province.

My question to you is, do you expect to see more massive chunks of farmland being lost through schedule 1?

Hon. Prabmeet Singh Sarkaria: Thank you for your question.

Wilmot—that part of that question, I think you could address to Wilmot, but I'll speak to your part on the environmental assessment process.

I think we have a mandate to build in this province. One of the biggest projects, and generational projects, that we will build is Highway 413. I will do anything and everything in my capabilities to get shovels in the ground on that project as soon as possible, because that is what the people of this province elected us to do. That being said, we have the strongest environmental protections found anywhere in North America, or probably the world, for that matter. In fact, Highway 413 has undergone and been in the process of the EA for almost 15 years now.

Look at the success we've had on public transit. I spoke about the Scarborough subway extension, the Ontario Line, the Eglinton West extension, and I want to speak to some of the community benefits of it. When we talk about building transit and why we need to build it so quickly—the west extension will bring 37,000 people within walking distance of public transit. That's transformational for the people living along that line, and it's because we put forward measures that allow us to expedite and allow us to build quicker. I think that's really important, and that's what you see in this piece of legislation—an opportunity to get shovels in the ground quicker, to build this province on highways, on roads, on bridges, on priority transit projects.

We also nominate, under this piece of legislation, the Hazel McCallion Line as a priority transit project with respect to the extension of the loop in downtown Brampton, as well as in Mississauga.

So I'm very confident in the environmental protections this province has, but at the same time, we're going to build.

Ms. Sandy Shaw: You said in your opening remarks that building infrastructure is easier said than done, and I would agree with that.

We had the budget last night, and with that budget we see that the provincial debt has soared to \$462.9 billion. You currently have the largest debt of any subnational jurisdiction in the world. When I was elected in 2018, I remember this government saying how much was owed of this debt by every man, woman and child. I would say that this, under your government, has ballooned.

My question is, are you actually, as you purport to be, a good steward of taxpayer dollars? You're hell-bent to build the 413, but you have not disclosed the cost of the 413. People are saying it's going to cost somewhere in the order of \$10 billion to \$15 billion to build the 413, at a time when the government has this massive, massive and growing debt, understanding that we are seeing under-spending on important issues like public health care, public education. So my question to you is, how are you going to pay for this when you already have an unsustainable debt level? I think the second-highest line in the government's spending that you owe—

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

Ms. Sandy Shaw: —is interest on the debt. So how are you going to pay for this \$10-billion-plus 413 boondoggle?

Hon. Prabmeet Singh Sarkaria: For 15 years, the previous Liberal government, supported by the members of the NDP, left this province in shambles, left this province without the infrastructure that is needed for the growing population that we have today.

We have to make these investments. The cost of not building infrastructure today is way greater than what we will see in the impacts out to the future generations.

Building Highway 413 is a priority project for us, and building the Bradford Bypass, investing in public transit—\$70 billion over the next 10 years.

The difference is, we're building assets; we're building infrastructure in this province, where previous governments neglected their duty to build for future generations. They neglected their duty to invest in transit, highways, infrastructure and hospitals. That is why, if you look at our budget—

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

We're now going to move to the independents. You have five minutes. MPP McMahon.

Ms. Mary-Margaret McMahon: First off—I hope you're not taking it out of my time—I'd like to welcome our new member from Kitchener Centre, MPP Aislinn Clancy.

Applause.

Ms. Mary-Margaret McMahon: There we are. It's great to have her. Unfortunately, I have to share time with her.

Interjection.

Ms. Mary-Margaret McMahon: Bittersweet, yes.

Thank you to the minister for coming in. I think it's your first time at our committee, and it's a pleasure to listen to you and to have the opportunity.

As we discuss Bill 162—there's a lot in here, for sure. You're talking about transit, which is so great. I love that, as a big environmentalist—that you're investing in transit and you're doing things for vehicles too, with the highways and whatnot.

0930

I'm just wondering what you're doing for cycling infrastructure and how you're connecting cycling infrastructure to transit and the last mile and first mile or every mile on two wheels.

Hon. Prabmeet Singh Sarkaria: That's a very important question.

Almost every one of our stations that we designed—one of the first announcements that I made, in the Agincourt GO station, as minister, made it more accessible for bikers to be able to get onto that.

Just last week, actually, I announced a doubling of bike coaches on the Kitchener line and Lakeshore West line, because we have been experiencing many people on our GO trains who had challenges or were frustrated by the amount of bikes that were in the actual coaches, so we are retrofitting and building and adding bike coaches to our GO train system.

Not only that; when we launched the procurement for the Frederick Street bridge on Highway 7 just about a month ago, with respect to this piece of legislation that allows us to get shovels in the ground, a part of expanding that bridge is to accommodate Highway 7 to be four lanes,

but also to accommodate cycling infrastructure on our bridges so people are still connected.

So we are doing a lot to support every mode of transportation, and it's exciting because, whether it be public transit, whether you prefer to ride your bike, whether it be putting drivers first with respect to highways, our plan is one that supports every mode of transportation in this province.

Ms. Mary-Margaret McMahon: And the Frederick Street bridge idea—can that be rolled out over other bridges and overpasses, as well?

Hon. Prabmeet Singh Sarkaria: Well, in everything that we do as a government, we take into consideration the transportation needs of that area and region, and so we will definitely do that on every project that makes sense.

Ms. Mary-Margaret McMahon: I'm going to pass it over to my colleague.

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

Ms. Aislinn Clancy: I'm just bringing us back to the greenbelt. I know no one wants to talk about it, but I think the biggest problem that it included was overriding some of the land protections that we have in our province. That led to a lot of problems, I'll say.

Our regional borders have changed. They went from our regional plan that was really thoroughly assessed by stakeholders, community; we spent so much money and so much time and included so many voices to make sure we're being responsible with the land that we use. The land was added and then taken back and then added again, and the process, I have to say, was disappointing. We've added about the same amount of land—close to 3,000 hectares of farmland—and we've, instead of doing it through the process that we had, looked at the municipal mayors who voted in support of the province's changes.

I'd like to see a better process for this regional boundary. It's in here in schedule 3—for a Waterloo regional boundary change. We've added 3,000 hectares, again, and we've done, I would say, a 10th of the process that we had in place. Can you justify how that went about?

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

Hon. Prabmeet Singh Sarkaria: Thank you very much, Chair.

We had consultations with respect to those changes that you had mentioned; there was a long process before those were implemented into this Get It Done Act.

What I can say is, generally, Minister Calandra and his team have consulted with many municipalities, with municipal mayors. It is our objective to build 1.5 million homes over the next 10 years. Those are ambitious goals that we are going to achieve but that also require us to take bold actions. So we're going to get those houses built, but we're going to work with municipal partners. We have the support of those leaders who we trust have had an opportunity to speak to their colleagues on council and others as well.

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

We'll now move to the government side. MPP Coe.

Mr. Lorne Coe: Minister, thank you so much for taking the time to be here and for your very well-informed delegation.

Minister, you're familiar with the region of Durham. At a time when Durham residents and workers and businesses are seeing their hard-earned dollars get stretched further than ever—and this is what I hear at the doors; affordability is one of the key issues—we need to keep costs down for hard-working families in the region of Durham, including businesses. Can you highlight, in a broader way—because you did touch on some of these initiatives earlier, in your delegation—in the proposed legislation, if passed, how you would achieve the goals as outlined in the legislation, please?

Hon. Prabmeet Singh Sarkaria: Thank you very much, MPP Coe. I want to take this opportunity to recognize the hard work that you did in advocating for Durham residents, especially with respect to removing the tolls on the 412 and 418. This piece of legislation that we've put forward is, in part, due to the advocacy that you had for your residents over the past three years. When the previous Liberal government put those tolls on Highway 412 and 418, unfairly punishing the people of Durham region, you spoke up. You advocated for your community. Because of that, not only have you saved \$68 million by removing the tolls on the 412 and 418—between last year and up to 2027, that's the estimate of what that would save.

We also enshrined into legislation that there will be no more tolling of highways owned by the government, whether that be the DVP, the Gardiner Expressway—two critical arteries of this province—or any of the 400-series highways.

For example, I know we've talked about it in the past—that people move all across this province, and they need the certainty when they move across the province that there's not going to be some sort of surprise toll as they try to commute into the city because they're using a certain highway. We heard, for a very long time, advocates from the city of Toronto saying they want to tear down the Gardiner Expressway; they want to toll the DVP. But it's this government that's delivering certainty to those people.

You have examples in the US. There's a mayor in New York who's trying to impose a tax on people who are using his roads to get into the city, which could cost a worker \$5,000 a year.

It's our responsibility to give people that certainty that there won't be additional taxes, that there won't be additional tolls, that the cost of living won't go up under this government.

As you know, we've never increased a tax and we've never increased a fee; we've only frozen or cut those or gotten rid of them.

We're also advocating that the federal government stop its 23% increase of the carbon tax, which is going to hurt drivers, and it's going to hurt people in this province.

I want to thank you for the advocacy that you've done for Durham residents in removing the 412 and 418 and continuing working toward ways in which we can make life more affordable.

There are other parts of this legislation that also speak to that. One of those is the freeze on licence fees, photo card fees. If you look at the previous Liberal government, they increased that every opportunity they got. Every opportunity the Liberals had to increase a fee, they did that.

Our government, every step of the way, has avoided that and never done that. In fact, we put \$120 back into everybody's pocket for a car or truck every single year.

You have this government focused on keeping costs low, putting drivers first, putting commuters first, in comparison to previous governments that did nothing and actually increased the cost of owning a vehicle, of operating a vehicle and, frankly, have supported carbon taxes, brought carbon taxes into this province that impact the cost of your food, that impact how much it costs you to fill up a tank of gas when you need to take your kids to school, when you need to take your kids to hockey or basketball practice. That's unacceptable.

Under this government, we're always going to put the consumer first, the drivers first, the people first, because that is what we were elected to do.

Mr. Lorne Coe: Thank you, Minister, for that answer.

Through you, Chair, to my colleague at the far end of the table here.

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

Mr. Sheref Sabawy: I really appreciate the presentation, and I would like—

The Chair (Ms. Laurie Scott): You have two and a half minutes.

Mr. Sheref Sabawy: Yes.

I would like to thank you very much for spearheading the most ambitious transportation plan in the history of this province. As a resident of Mississauga, I would like to thank you for the Hazel McCallion Line. I think this line is going to change how Mississauga looks and the future of Mississauga. I was standing at a traffic light at Rathburn and Confederation on the weekend. I could count 11 cranes for 11 high-rises coming up in the Square One, which means 30, 40 floors of buildings with thousands of people going to be residents of Mississauga, newcomers, people moving to Mississauga—especially newcomers who don't have a car, who can't drive, who don't have a licence. They can't afford insurance. There are lots of other aspects of that that open the door for thousands of new residents to come to Mississauga and help the city to grow.

0940

As a resident of Mississauga for 29 years, I have been using the Milton line for many, many years, commuting every day to downtown. I am very happy to hear that our government is going to work on making this line—as we know, currently it's six trains in the morning going from Milton to Toronto, and in the evening it's six trains coming back from Toronto to Milton. It's six trains a day—one direction in the morning and the other in the evening. The announcement making this line 24 hours, the whole day, both directions—

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

Mr. Sheref Sabawy: —is very important. Can you shed light on this, please? It's important to Mississauga residents.

Hon. Prabmeet Singh Sarkaria: Thank you, MPP Sabawy. You've done an incredible job advocating for transit in your area.

Mississauga is one of the fastest-growing places in the entire country, and so we need transit to keep pace with that.

That's why, in this legislation, not only are we nominating the extension of the loop downtown into the city of Brampton, but also the loop in Mississauga, an even bigger loop that was originally proposed as a priority transit project. That means we'll be able to build it faster. That means we'll be able to get shovels in the ground faster on those extensions.

We've made a commitment to the people of Milton and Mississauga that we're going to improve GO rail transit. We're investing \$6 billion, and we've asked the federal government to come in and support 50% of the cost, because it's about connecting more people to transit, giving them more—

The Chair (Ms. Laurie Scott): Thank you very much. I'll go to the official opposition again. MPP Shaw.

Ms. Sandy Shaw: Minister, I'm going to refer you to schedule 3 again, particularly as it impacts Halton and Waterloo. It appears to me that there was no analysis done by this government to assess the proposed modifications to adopted municipal plans. I did participate in a ministerial briefing, and we asked about this at the time. They provided no evidence-based assessment of these modifications. It looks like all the government is doing is taking the original modifications made by Steve Clark when he was the minister, which were then reversed with Bill 150, and now they are asking local municipalities just simply, "Do you want to keep these?"

I would remind this government that Minister Calandra was really clear that these original ministerial modifications failed to meet a standard that maintains and reinforces public trust. We now know that the most significant modifications were being pushed by lobbyists and developers of well-connected landowners, and they were not based on evidence assessment by non-political ministry planning staff.

We all know that the public's trust is not exactly strengthened by what you have done and by what you are proposing right now, because it looks like you're just allowing mayors of lower-tier municipalities to say whether they want to make these changes or not. These proposals are in the current adopted regional plan, and this schedule is just overturning this.

My question is, were there ever any planning staff reports provided to the ministry from lower-tier municipalities—or was it just a letter from a local mayor? Isn't it priority number one to regain the public trust and show that you make your decisions based on evidence, not insider influence and preferential treatment? How can you justify these changes made to Waterloo and Halton in schedule 3 that are not based on evidence?

Hon. Prabmeet Singh Sarkaria: MPP Shaw, I would suggest that working with the local mayor and their representatives and their communities is exactly what you would expect. The mayor is elected with the majority of voters in that local municipality, and so they do speak for their communities. To suggest that mayors don't represent their municipal governments—I think I would disagree with that.

I think Minister Calandra has done an incredible job of consulting with those municipal partners. As we've seen,

we have ambitious plans on housing and building houses across this province. And we should be able to do that.

Ms. Sandy Shaw: Minister, I appreciate that. So am I taking from what you're saying that there were assessments provided? And if that is a yes, can we have a list of those? Why are they not provided publicly—the assessments that were provided to your government to make these changes in schedule 3?

Hon. Prabmeet Singh Sarkaria: We have the support of the impacted municipalities on the changes that have been put forward here. As I said, we asked local governments what changes they wanted to keep their official plans, and that is exactly what this government will continue—

Ms. Sandy Shaw: I don't mean to interrupt, Minister, but you have said this already.

If the answer is yes, we hope that we will see a copy of these assessments that were done either by the region, lower-tier municipalities or non-political staff at the ministry.

The other question that I have is, in your assessment, were the changes in schedule 3—did they go against the growth plan or the provincial policy statement, as is adopted in the province? Are these consistent with that?

Hon. Prabmeet Singh Sarkaria: Well, MPP Shaw, I think we have to look at what municipal leaders in their specific municipalities are saying, and to suggest that municipal mayors don't—

Ms. Sandy Shaw: Okay, do you know what? We only have a small—

Hon. Prabmeet Singh Sarkaria: No, I think I have to answer that question because I think you're suggesting—

Ms. Sandy Shaw: Well, he's saying the same thing over and over again.

Hon. Prabmeet Singh Sarkaria: No, because that is—we talked to the local municipalities, mayors. They are the ones we consulted with. They are the ones that have put forward—

Ms. Sandy Shaw: Chair, I would like to reclaim my time because I have heard this and we have short time.

I'm going to pass the mike to MPP Armstrong, please.

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

Ms. Teresa J. Armstrong: Thank you. I just want to know how much time I have, please.

The Chair (Ms. Laurie Scott): You have three minutes.

Ms. Teresa J. Armstrong: Okay.

I want to go back to some of the gridlock questions, highway issues.

We all travel on the highway most of the time to get to Queen's Park, unless we live in Toronto. Well, if you live in Toronto, you're going to travel on some of the highways as well.

The minister mentioned that the gridlock costs the province \$11 billion in productivity.

The government always looks for proposals from the NDP on the opposite side of the House, and we have presented a proposal that actually makes sense. It would be good for the gridlock—and you talked about how people want to save time to go to work, to see families, to go to sports events—but I also argue that it's about safety. When

you're travelling on the 401, it's about safety as well. And part of that safety piece is truckers—transport trucks on the 400-series. It's very daunting to have a line of truckers, specifically, when you're driving to Toronto, and I've had that many times. The opposition proposed a very informative, productive, cost-saving measure for truckers, which I'm sure they would appreciate, which was to take the tolls off commercial vehicles to use the 407, to alleviate the grid, to help productivity of \$11 billion—to alleviate that cost that you're claiming that happens on the 407.

I just want to know why the government wouldn't take that advice to help get our food supply quicker to businesses—because, again, transport trucks are also in gridlock when they're on the 400-series. So can the minister speak to why that wasn't something they would consider to help the economy, to alleviate the cost of gridlock and to make highways safer, let alone getting people to where they need to go in less time?

Hon. Prabmeet Singh Sarkaria: Our government believes in building infrastructure. We believe in investing in highways. I said this when I was asked in the House about this, which is—

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

Hon. Prabmeet Singh Sarkaria: This is another way for the NDP to try to kill the Highway 413 project, which is not going to happen. This government is going to get shovels in the ground on Highway 413 because that is critical to the future generations of this province. With the amount of—

Ms. Teresa J. Armstrong: If I could just interrupt you, Minister: We have resources to use. The 407 can be utilized along—

The Chair (Ms. Laurie Scott): Thank you. That's the end of the time.

I'll now go to the independents. MPP Clancy.

Ms. Aislinn Clancy: I really appreciate the investment in transit. Honestly, it's fabulous, it's unprecedented, and I want to recognize that. Of course, I will always ask for at least more buses from Bramalea to Kitchener, now that you've extended frequency on that line. So thank you so much for that. It's a big win.

0950

My question is about the 413. We've seen how MZO, the greenbelt—all this land expropriation has had a negative impact on our farming industry. Nobody can get into farming. Farmers from my area are fleeing faster than they can run to go to PEI, where farmland is a tenth of the price. We know we're losing 319 acres a day. With the OFA, the agricultural federation—land protection is one of the main things that they are concerned about. We know that with the regional boundaries—we've said we don't need that for housing; it has been overridden.

Anyway, we're moving to the 413. The worries are that by weakening environmental assessments and expediting expropriation, more land than necessary will be expropriated, and we have concerns about the process. Process is key here. You can justify anything and nobody will lose trust if there's good process. So by weakening the environmental assessments, my concern is that more land will be expro-

priated than necessary. Can you explain why I should believe it won't happen?

Hon. Prabmeet Singh Sarkaria: Our government is steadfast in its commitment to build Highway 413. We believe we need to get shovels in the ground immediately. We need to build this highway. We reached a conclusion with the federal government, as well, on this, which we'll have more to say about once it's ratified through the courts and out of the court system.

What I can tell you is, Ontario does have the highest standards of environmental assessment and environmental policy anywhere in North America. You can put it up against any other state in the US or province in Canada and see how much we put towards ensuring the environment is protected—

Ms. Aislinn Clancy: Can I interrupt? Can you explain—now that we're expropriating the land before the assessment, how can you be sure that we won't expropriate too much land?

Hon. Prabmeet Singh Sarkaria: Well, we'll expropriate as much land as needed to build Highway 413. I think that's a part of any process, whether we build transit, whether we build highways. Expropriation is part of that process. And that's why we will continue to do so in building the 413.

Ms. Aislinn Clancy: I'm also concerned that the 413—we've reduced highways to being a low-impact infrastructure investment. That, to me, is concerning. I'll ask later why it has been demoted to a low-impact infrastructure project; I'm not sure why.

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

Ms. Mary-Margaret McMahon: Thank you to the member across from me, MPP Sabawy, who's raving about all the housing builds in Mississauga. It's good to know.

My question is on the carbon tax, which feels like it's almost a punctuation mark in your verbiage these days—all your government members. I'm not sure if you saw the submission from the Canadian Environmental Law Association, CELA. They're saying the proposal for the carbon tax is fundamentally at odds with the recommendation in the Ontario Provincial Climate Change Impact Assessment: Technical Report, January 2023—the one that was released in the dark of the night and is sitting on a shelf, collecting dust. It's on page 2. They feel that there's value that is in direct odds with what you're proposing on carbon pricing. I'm just wondering about that and what you're doing as an alternative for climate action.

Hon. Prabmeet Singh Sarkaria: As a government, we adamantly oppose any form of carbon pricing.

If you want to talk about reports, I'll talk about the people I talk to every single day, who I meet.

The carbon tax is about to go up by 23% on April 1: That's going to hurt families who drive to work every single day; essential workers, whether they be nurses, whether they be those who are stocking our store shelves, or those truckers who are taking food to and from farms and onto our shelves—

Ms. Mary-Margaret McMahon: So what's the alternative the government is doing for climate action?

Hon. Prabmeet Singh Sarkaria: The alternative is not to charge citizens and make life more unaffordable for them.

Ms. Mary-Margaret McMahon: Right. But what other action would you be taking for the climate?

Hon. Prabmeet Singh Sarkaria: I say any policy that is brought forward by this government will never punish drivers, will never punish families. That's a core tenet of this government's—

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

MPP Kanapathi—

Ms. Sandy Shaw: I have a point of privilege, Chair.

The Chair (Ms. Laurie Scott): Point of privilege? MPP Shaw, just—

Ms. Sandy Shaw: I just want to clarify that I did ask the minister to provide assessments that the ministry may have received on the changes in schedule 3 to the Halton and Waterloo boundary. I just want to make sure I'm clear that that was something that was on the record.

The Chair (Ms. Laurie Scott): Thank you, MPP Shaw. *Interjections.*

Ms. Sandy Shaw: It's a point of order? Or on a point of privilege? A point of order, then.

The Chair (Ms. Laurie Scott): Okay. I was going to say it's not a point of privilege; it's a point of order.

Ms. Sandy Shaw: Okay—seeking clarification.

The Chair (Ms. Laurie Scott): So that's on the record.

Ms. Sandy Shaw: Thank you. And I understood that the minister agreed—

Interjection.

The Chair (Ms. Laurie Scott): No, you just put it on the record.

Ms. Sandy Shaw: Okay.

The Chair (Ms. Laurie Scott): MPP Kanapathi, you can begin the government side of questioning, please.

Mr. Logan Kanapathi: Thank you, Minister, for not only attending but for your presentation and for your hard work. I know this is important for our file—an important ministry.

The Yonge North subway extension: You were the first person, after the big announcement—you were at the side, along with MPP Pang and Minister Calandra. This is critical infrastructure, not only for the city of Markham or Markham–Stouffville, but also the entire York region. York region is the fastest-growing region in Ontario. I know the timing is important. Can you explain why these measures were chosen?

And when the Get It Done bill is passed, how much dollar savings would you estimate could be achieved through this legislation?

You talked about gridlock you experience coming from Brampton all the way to Queen's Park. It's not only alleviating—you mentioned, in your presentation, 10 minutes' walking distance. You're going to alleviate 30,000 people a day—that is the Yonge North subway extension. You mentioned that. Please elaborate on that.

Hon. Prabmeet Singh Sarkaria: MPP Kanapathi, I want to thank you for—I think my second announcement, as Minister of Transportation, was on the RFQ launch for

the Yonge North subway extension. I remember when we got elected in 2018, you were one of the first people to advocate for that extension, and you were the one who, as a municipal councillor, also spoke in support of that, in favour of that, and pushed from a municipal level to get that funding, along with MPP Pang and all of your colleagues in Markham and Richmond Hill—and all of your municipal, I would say, lobbying on that to previous governments who, unfortunately, never did invest in that project. It's great to see that when both of you, MPP Kanapathi and MPP Pang, got to Queen's Park, you spoke to the Premier, you presented a bold plan for your cities—and here we are today. RFQs are out for the Yonge North subway extension.

Let's talk about some of those benefits that both of you have advocated for.

When we talk about just the project, it's 4,300 jobs that will be created for the construction of that.

MPP Kanapathi, you asked about walking distance to transit. I spoke about the Eglinton Crosstown West extension earlier, which is going to bring 37,000 people within walking distance to a subway station. For the Yonge North subway extension, it's 48,000 people who will be within walking distance to a transit station. That's incredible. That's changing the quality of life for so many people. That's better and more accessible public transit for your residents, who can use that line to get to pretty much anywhere in the city once we've completed building all of our LRTs and our public transit projects.

That is the success that we can have when we put forward legislation like the one that we have today—you nominate a project as a priority project, you cut through the red tape, you cut through the challenges of building.

Every other government came here and spoke about building but never actually got shovels in the ground.

We should be proud of the fact that, as a government, we've been able to get shovels in the ground on the Ontario Line, on the Scarborough subway extension. The RFQ is out for the Yonge North subway extension. This is incredible progress that will impact generations and generations of Canadians and Ontarians and those who live in your communities. So I want to thank you for the advocacy that you have done with respect to that and really seeing this project come full circle.

That's why it's important to continue supporting pieces of legislation like the one that we have here today. It's about building transit, and it's about improving the quality of life for those across this province.

Mr. Logan Kanapathi: Thank you.

Madam Chair, MPP Rae has a question.

The Chair (Ms. Laurie Scott): MPP Rae, please go ahead. There are three minutes left.

Mr. Matthew Rae: I want to thank the minister for being here this morning.

It's very telling that NDP members of this committee do not trust our local municipalities. They know their communities best, as Minister Calandra says very often.

I know MPP Shaw was asking some questions around official plans. The city of Kitchener phone number is 519-

741-2345. I encourage her to reach out to the mayor and the city council there, and to hear from them on why they are proposing these changes that Minister Calandra asked them to make.

We work with our municipalities, as the minister knows—in Brampton, in his area. The fastest-growing communities—the region of Waterloo, Brant, Peel—

Interjection.

Mr. Matthew Rae: I know MPP Shaw is talking over me right now, but she can also talk to a former colleague, Councillor Chapman, who still sits on city council, I believe, and would have been aware of these proposed changes.

Obviously, I don't live in the GTA, but I know we're making some major investments in GO Transit—two-way, all-day GO to Kitchener. I know my colleague mentioned Milton. As you know, Minister, I'm a big Raptors and Blue Jays fan. I just wondered if you could tell me about some of those investments so we can attract more tourism to the GTA, whether it's to see the Jays or come for a concert.

Hon. Prabmeet Singh Sarkaria: That's what we have been working so hard to do—to provide those options for people when they're taking transit into the city. So whether it's a Jays game or a Raptors game, it's about making sure that there are options for those people to travel into the city, whether you're in Niagara or whether you're in Kitchener. It's about an integrated GO rail transit line and services that are integrated. And a big part of that, when you talk about communities just outside Toronto, is One Fare. You talk about the stories of people who get on transit in Mississauga or Brampton or Durham—they take the bus there, to the GO train, and then they take the GO train in, and then they've got to use the TTC. It's transformational—the amount of money that they're able to save. More people will take transit because of the support that we have given through the One Fare program.

It's unfortunate that members of the NDP and Liberal caucuses won't support these changes and will vote against \$1,600 of savings. When it comes to transit users, we bring in policies like One Fare; they vote against it. When you try to talk about reducing the cost of driving by fighting the carbon tax, they unfortunately fight that as well.

The Chair (Ms. Laurie Scott): You have 10 seconds.

Hon. Prabmeet Singh Sarkaria: It baffles me that there's a 23% increase in carbon tax coming by the federal government on April 1, and there's only one party in this House advocating against it.

The Chair (Ms. Laurie Scott): That concludes the committee hearings for this morning. Thank you, Minister, for joining us—and all the participants.

We are now adjourned until 1 p.m. this afternoon.

The committee recessed from 1004 to 1301.

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

We are here to resume public hearings on Bill 162, An Act to enact the Protecting Against Carbon Taxes Act, 2024 and amend various Acts.

Today's remaining 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? We're all good.

MR. MARK CHAMBERLAIN
ENVIRONMENTAL DEFENCE
MOTOR VEHICLE RETAILERS
OF ONTARIO

The Chair (Ms. Laurie Scott): I'll ask the first three presenters to make their way up to the table. We have Mark Chamberlain, Environmental Defence, and the Motor Vehicle Retailers of Ontario.

Please state your name before you begin speaking, and then you have up to seven minutes to speak.

Mr. Chamberlain, if you're ready to start, that would be great.

Mr. Mark Chamberlain: My name is Mark Chamberlain.

I like the motto "Getting It Done." It reminds me of the Nike motto, "Just Do It." It implies action.

My background: I spent my youth growing up and working on a farm, I was educated as a mechanical engineer in 1987. I was a young entrepreneur, and I did a management buyout of a 17-person tech company in Hamilton, took it public in 1995, grew it to just under \$200 million of annual revenue by 2002, with 550 employees across North America. I sold to L3 in 2002, and I left in 2003. Today, the company L3Harris Wescam has 1,500 people—the largest tech company in the Hamilton area and a leader on the world stage of airborne imaging systems for the aerospace defence industry.

In the 20 years since, I have been on many boards; particularly, I spent seven years on the directors of the Ontario Centres of Excellence, now the Ontario Centre of Innovation. And I led the implementation and creation of the Innovation Factory in Hamilton, which is part of the innovation network here in Ontario.

Also, 14 years ago, my wife and I started a not-for-profit in Hamilton called Bike for Mike, which works to make it safe enough for 100% of our elementary school children within 1.6 kilometres from school to be able to walk and/or cycle to school, which is really important to me now because I'm a grandfather of four lovely young grandchildren trying to walk and cycle to school safely every single day in downtown Hamilton.

For businesses today, our most important resource is still our people, with the ideas they come up with and, subsequently, that we try to commercialize. Where they live, work, play, how they work, when they work, all impact their performance and, therefore, our performance as companies. Work-life balance is paramount—including that we've now gone to a 32-hour workweek.

The infrastructure that enables where we live, work and play, and move between them, is critical to everything about us—our health, our time, our wealth. Enabled by new work habits, new communication technologies, new business models such as rideshare, and a broader understanding and desire for mobility choices that are more convenient, environmentally sensitive, safer, healthier and more affordable, we are in a unique time in history when road infrastructure can actually be optimized rather than maximized. This is called 21st-century infrastructure. It emphasizes sustainability and need to adapt, and to mitigate climate change with investments in clean energy and climate resilience. It incorporates smart technologies and anticipates future developments such as autonomous vehicles and smart city planning to improve efficiency and connectivity. It includes a broader, more inclusive definition of infrastructure that considers the needs of all communities, including low-income and rural areas, and it integrates spaces for recreation and community well-being. And it includes, to maximize and optimize this very limited resource, traffic-demand management tools, including congestion pricing, including tolls.

Congestion exists everywhere in the province. Building one or two new highways won't fix the congestion-everywhere problem, nor will it fix our large infrastructure maintenance deficit which impacts our business performance. Continuing down a 20th-century approach to transportation infrastructure is the most expensive approach, the most congested approach, resulting in the greatest negative impact on productivity and cost for all businesses, including mine, as a former farmer.

Today, we have about 11.5 million acres of farmland in Ontario. You've heard all this here. In business, to be the best in the world, we benchmark ourselves against the best in the world. So I point to the Netherlands, who have approximately 4.75 million acres of farmland. With 40% of the farmland that we have here in Ontario, they are the second-largest annual exporter of agricultural goods, next only to the United States. In 2023, the Netherlands exported about €124 billion, or about C\$180 billion, of agricultural products. It took the Netherlands about 800 years to reclaim 1.7 million acres from the sea. In the past 35 years, we have consumed approximately 2.8 million acres of farmland in Ontario, and our current rate of destroying an average of 319 acres per day, with no sign of abating, in 13 years, will have consumed the amount of farmland equal to the entire amount of farmland of the Netherlands, valued at about \$189 billion of potential revenue loss. So the Dutch reclaim their land; we consume it.

Why does the government have such disdain for our farmers and the farming community? Why don't we have a higher aspiration for the current and potential future economic value of our agricultural sector, their role in food security, their resilience to climate uncertainties, and their inherent capability and capacity to provide all of our domestic food needs? And throw in there maybe an aspiration of higher nutritional value food at a lower cost. We treat our farmers like inventory managers of land waiting to be developed.

Finally, as a grandfather, our aspiration is that 100% of kids get to walk and cycle to school—not a difficult aspiration, in my view. Why? Mental health, physical health, academic performance—we talk about the academic performance of children. We talk about their obesity. We talk about their mental health. Infrastructure is health—

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

Mr. Mark Chamberlain: Thank you.

I'll quickly summarize: "Just Do It" campaign, self-improvement—it aspires to excellence. It looks at making us better than we are today.

Projects like 413 aren't inspiring; they're ill-conceived. It's not 21st-century infrastructure; it's 20th-century infrastructure.

This act of getting it done does nothing to enhance Ontario—it is getting it done not for us, but it's getting it done to us.

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

We'll now move over to Environmental Defence. Phil, please go ahead. You know the routine.

Mr. Phil Pothen: My name is Phil Pothen. I'm in-house counsel, Ontario environment program manager and land use and land development program manager with Environmental Defence. Our non-partisan team of experts is focused on identifying and advocating the most effective policies to safeguard Ontario's natural heritage and species at risk, prevent runaway climate change, but also to fix problems like environmental racism and exclusion that are being caused by Ontario's housing shortage.

1310

Our submissions today are mostly focused on schedule 3 of Bill 162, which consists of amendments to the Official Plan Adjustments Act, 2023. In its current form, that schedule would make it much harder to fix the housing shortage.

We urge this standing committee, as a priority, to:

—amend schedule 3 for the Halton region by deleting item 7 of section 2, which imposes settlement boundary expansions that were rejected by regional council, rightly;

—for Waterloo region, delete item 8 of section 2, which would impose a settlement boundary expansion that was rejected by Waterloo region council;

—for Peel region, delete modifications 36, 37, 38, 39, 40, 41, 42 and 43 in section 1, which would wipe out huge numbers of walkable, transit-supported homes by eliminating the Heritage Heights MTSA and impose additional settlement area boundary expansions in Peel; and

—for Barrie, remove provisions that would eliminate phasing, convert land to residential uses, convert employment land to residential, and—here's the key thing—reduce the amount of homes that are planned for the existing built-up area and the existing designated greenfield area within Barrie to 52 people in jobs per hectare, down from 79. That's fewer homes.

We are also asking the committee to delete section 1 in its entirety, but that's not the focus of our presentation.

EDC has been consistent about telling all three levels of government that there is no way to solve Ontario's en-

environmental and environmental justice problems without adding enough homes to existing neighbourhoods to house everybody who would like to live there, without permanently slamming the brakes on further expansions of settlement area boundaries in southern Ontario, and without ensuring that none of the unbuilt farmland that we have already designated—more than 350 square kilometres in the GTHA alone—gets wasted on inefficient forms of development that add fewer than 100 people per hectare. We have also been clear that this is the only approach that can succeed in fixing the housing shortage itself, because Ontario's capacity is being throttled by shortages of construction labour, equipment and certain materials that can't easily be fixed by the federal and provincial governments.

The only way to build enough new homes fast enough to fix the housing crisis is to increase efficiency. Increasing efficiency and delivering more homes faster requires that we shift most of the family home construction currently going into farmland and natural areas to existing neighbourhoods and built-up areas that have been kept off limits. We cannot afford to waste a whole chunk of our construction capacity on building new roads, sewers and other infrastructure from scratch when there is ample capacity within many of our existing low-rise single-detached neighbourhoods.

Delivering more homes requires that we shift most family residential construction, in particular, towards not just townhomes, but also things like family-sized apartments, six-storey wood-frame mid-rise buildings and four-storey, four-unit low-rise multiplex buildings, because that kind of construction is the only way to deliver a lot more units with the same construction methods, the same workers and the same equipment that we are currently using and wasting on inefficient single- and semi-detached greenfield construction. This isn't some kind of idealistic dream; it's a technical necessity.

That's why the Blueprint for More and Better Housing created by former Conservative Party of Canada deputy leader Lisa Raitt identified this priority of shifting construction to existing neighbourhoods and denser, more labour-efficient forms of family housing as the non-negotiable core of any good-faith plan to solve the housing crisis. If you're not doing that, you're not actually interested in solving housing; you're interested in using it for a fig leaf for things you're doing for other reasons.

The bill seems calculated to do the opposite of what we know we need to do. In its current form, it would directly kill Peel region's plans for dense, labour-efficient homes and workplaces at Heritage Heights by eliminating the Heritage Heights MTSA. It would directly reduce the number of homes to be created on each hectare of greenfield development in places like Barrie by lowering the OP greenfield densities. It would impose extreme and dangerous boundary expansions on Halton and Waterloo region's official plans that shift construction to lower-density forms of development that will produce fewer homes more slowly.

In Halton, for example, meeting projected housing needs efficiently, even by building at the bare minimum density

needed for kids to be able to walk or cycle to school and generally support amenities within walking distance would not come close to using the 11,000 hectares of designated development land that were sitting unbuilt within settlement boundaries in Halton before this bill and before any boundary expansions. Despite building at low density between 2000 and 2019, Halton only consumed 3,000 hectares. There's just no prospect that adding more land in Halton would do anything but push development into less-efficient forms.

I just want to conclude by addressing the disingenuous PR exercise that Minister Calandra has used to place a veneer of legitimacy on these forced boundary expansions. The settlement boundary expansions this bill would impose on Halton and Waterloo regions were rejected by regional governments because of the negative impact they would have had on housing output, traffic and the environment at a regional scale. Even though the low-density sprawl development that's proposed may be physically located on the outskirts of Milton or Halton Hills, the flood risk and other damage that it causes, the traffic it causes and the loss of housing that it causes are in Oakville and Burlington—

The Chair (Ms. Laurie Scott): I'm sorry; you're out of time. I did not give you a warning, so I must admit that part. But I'm sure there will be other opportunities as you go through. Thank you very much.

Mr. Notte, you're next.

Mr. Frank Notte: Thank you, Chair, and committee members. I'm Frank Notte, the director of government relations for the Motor Vehicle Retailers of Ontario, formerly known as the Trillium Automobile Dealers Association.

Since 1908, we've been the voice of Ontario's 1,100 franchised new car and truck retailers, representing every brand and franchise. We are Canada's largest provincial auto retail association. Last year, 40% of all new cars and trucks sold nationwide were purchased from our members; that equates to just under 720,000 new cars and trucks.

Our members don't just sell and service vehicles. According to an economic impact study produced by PwC, our members also generate and support 85,300 jobs in Ontario, are responsible for one in 20 of all retail jobs in the province, and contribute \$13.9 billion every year in GDP.

We are also proud to produce the Canadian International AutoShow, Canada's largest consumer show, every year in Toronto. I'm proud and humbled to report that the 2024 auto show broke the all-time attendance record, with 371,559 guests. That's an incredible vote of confidence for Ontario's auto industry.

The good news continues. As Minister Fedeli points out, Ontario went from zero dollars to \$28 billion in electric vehicle investment in just three short years. As well, Canada claimed top spot for the first time in BloombergNEF's latest global lithium-ion battery supply chain ranking. These developments put Ontario on the road to further reducing our carbon footprint while supporting the automotive industry.

I'm here today to offer our association's support for Bill 162, the Getting It Done Act. This is one of the most pro-

auto bills I've ever seen in my 14 years at the association. Specifically, we applaud Minister Sarkaria on schedule 6 of the bill. We prefer the implementation of road tolls be done through legislation rather than regulation. This move makes road tolls—a significant cost to drivers—much more accountable to the public. We believe if a government wants to implement an item as significant as road tolls, a bill should be introduced in the Legislature, debated and have public consultation through a standing committee, just like the public scrutiny all bills must go through.

Over the last 10 years, we've seen the issue of road tolls, particularly with the city of Toronto, make headlines. In 2017, the then mayor, John Tory, wanted to implement road tolls on the Gardiner Expressway and Don Valley Parkway. In order to make that happen, all the province needed to do was make a regulation. It came as a surprise to stakeholders like us that road tolls were even on the table. We only found out when Premier Wynne publicly denied Mayor Tory's road toll request. This lack of transparency would have never happened if a bill proposing road tolls was presented in the Legislature, as would happen under Bill 162.

On that note, I want to commend Toronto mayor Olivia Chow and Premier Ford for putting the never-ending drama of road tolls on the Gardiner and DVP in the rear-view mirror. Mayor Chow and Premier Ford deserve much credit for agreeing to upload the Gardiner and DVP to the province. This frees up some \$7 billion of city revenue without tax increases or road tolls. This helps keep vehicle ownership costs low for families and businesses.

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Congratulations to Mayor Chow for getting this deal in just six short months since taking office, something her predecessor was unable to achieve in his nine years in office. And congratulations to Premier Ford and Minister Sarkaria for taking over these critical pieces of infrastructure and not tolling them. Premier Ford and Mayor Chow showed that standing up for drivers is not a partisan issue.

I also want to note that freezing the cost of drivers' licences as stipulated in schedule 2 of the bill is another important move to keep expenses low.

Our association applauded the elimination of licence plate stickers, which saves vehicle owners \$1 billion per year. Now they will save some 900,000 hours per year thanks to automatic permit renewals. No longer will vehicle owners have to waste time telling the government which vehicles they own every year, even though the vehicles never changed ownership.

Coming on the heels of the reduced provincial gasoline tax, the elimination of licence plate stickers and the scrapping of the Drive Clean program, the MVRO sees Bill 162 as another important step to keeping vehicle ownership affordable.

Thank you for your time.

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

We'll now start with our questions. We're going to start with MPP Shaw and the official opposition.

Ms. Sandy Shaw: I'll begin my questions with Mr. Chamberlain.

Thank you very much for being here, Mr. Chamberlain. It really is an honour that you're here today.

I think maybe you were being a little bit modest, but Wescam, your company, was a powerhouse of technological innovation. If I'm not mistaken, some of the technology developed resulted in winning an Oscar—winning an Academy Award for subsequent companies, based on your technology. So when you come here to talk about what is 20th century, what is 21st century, you know of what you speak.

You didn't get to talk too much about this, but I do want to give you more opportunity to talk about your interest in making sure that we see all kids and families being able to walk or bike safely to school. Not to pit deputants against one another—but I do note that Mr. Notte talked about this being pro-auto legislation. I see—and I imagine you might see—a complete absence of consideration for increasing autos on the road in our inner cities and, in fact, the size of some of the vehicles that we're seeing produced that are in our inner cities that we're seeing. These massive vehicles are resulting in an unfortunate increase in pedestrian deaths.

I'm going to give you an opportunity to talk a little bit about why the concept of kids being able to walk or bike to school safely is about good infrastructure—that it builds good communities—and about good economics.

Mr. Mark Chamberlain: I'll be clear: I'm not against cars.

Ms. Sandy Shaw: No, I realize that.

Mr. Mark Chamberlain: But I am very pro e-vehicles, especially e-bikes. They make a huge difference in the downtown core of a city.

We do not track the cost of free parking—parking—on housing, on living in a city. We don't even talk about cars in terms of their volume, in the city, in size. The Ford F-150 cannot see a child walking across a crosswalk. We have dominated our design of cities around automobiles. Again, I'm not against automobiles. I'm for mobility—moving people. The idea of single-occupancy cars dominating a 400-series highway when 80 people can actually be on a bus is ridiculous. It's just the inappropriate use of technology.

If we want to have our cities safe for our children to walk, to cycle, to move, without—I didn't talk about the fact that the pollution—and e-cars eventually may help this. Respiratory disease and death and the smog by cars has a greater impact on the physiological being of a child than on adults, and yet we accept this as being okay.

We worked with kids in grade 5. We asked them the question: "What would your walk to school look like from a standpoint of safety, so that you will actually walk or cycle to school?" And, "What would it look in terms of fun, so you actually want to walk and cycle to school?" We asked the question because—again, I can pull out the data—the health impact and the habit of health impact for all respiratory diseases, almost all chronic diseases that we face today, is about moving the most amazing device ever invented for transportation and for health: It's our feet. We need to design infrastructure that maximizes the use of our and our kids' feet—and to do that.

When we add 400-series highways—there’s an origin, and there’s a destination. We’ve done the studies. We know that more cars coming into a destination that’s not built for additional cars is even more congestion, which takes up the space, the volume, where we can’t put safe infrastructure for walking and cycling. The impact on our children, if there’s any care—I put my priority on children way ahead of a car, because we actually have alternatives to cars. It’s not against cars—because we know that cars and congestion are an exponential curve. You don’t have to eliminate all the cars; just reduce it significantly, so that we actually get rid of the congestion. We add technology. We add pricing. We add alternatives.

Our children—scholastically, their mental health, their physical health, their environment—depend on creating downtowns that they get to walk or cycle.

And we’re not inventing anything here; go anyplace that you like to visit on holiday, and you’ll find that exact environment.

Ms. Sandy Shaw: I think what you’ve presented here is an important concept. It should be an obvious concept, but it’s important, and I think it should be part of the measures of success that this government puts forward. Really, their policies that they’re putting forward need to be seen through the health and well-being of our children. What are we doing here if that’s not what our priority is? So thank you for that.

Let’s talk about the already-existing highways. We know that this government is hell-bent to build the 413, despite the fact that it will pave over all kinds of farmland and expedite that loss of farmland. We already have the 407. The 407 exists, and for all intents and purposes it runs parallel to the proposed route of the 413, but if you drive on the 407—it’s underutilized; the words that you use are that it’s “not optimized” at all. In fact, at one point a plane was able to land on the 407, because it was so sparse—to show the need, to show how it’s underutilized.

We, the official opposition NDP, put forward a reasonable ask of this government. If they were really, truly concerned with reducing commute times for people, they would remove the tolls for truckers on the 407. I have to give trademark credit to Phil Pothen for raising this at pre-budget consultations; thank you very much for that. If we were to remove the tolls for truckers from the 407—including the portion of the 407 that this government currently owns; including this government going to the table, to the owners of the 407, whom they’ve already given a billion-dollar gift of not enforcing penalties.

Can you understand—because I can’t—why the government, rather than making better use of the 407, which they could do today, would rather have this fictional 413 that’s going to cost us \$10 billion somewhere in the future?

The Chair (Ms. Laurie Scott): You have 14 seconds left.

Mr. Mark Chamberlain: There’s no evidence, I think, anywhere in the world today that adding new highways actually reduces congestion, period.

Ms. Sandy Shaw: Thanks. I’m sorry.

The Chair (Ms. Laurie Scott): There’s another round. Don’t worry. My fault.

Moving on to the independent: MPP McMahon.

Ms. Mary-Margaret McMahon: I’m welcoming our new colleague MPP Aislinn Clancy to the committee. You’re going to love her, as we do. I’m sharing time with her, so we’re going to be extra quick—even though I just took up 10 seconds.

First, all of you, thank you for coming.

Phil Pothen, did you want a couple of seconds to finish?

Mr. Phil Pothen: Yes, thank you. The boundary expansions that this bill would impose on Halton and Waterloo were rejected by regional governments, because of regional impacts that primarily affected people who are outside of Milton and outside of Halton Hills, for example; that affected people in Oakville and Burlington. To try to use a sign-off from a mayor who was always supportive and got outvoted at regional council as somehow legitimizing rejecting the outcome of the regional council decision makes no sense at all. It’s like picking—“Oh, I found a voter who agrees that we should ban shoes.” That was only a small portion of the group of people who were affected by this development.

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Ms. Mary-Margaret McMahon: You were talking about Lisa Raitt writing about shifting construction to existing neighbourhoods. We’ve heard that over and over again. Could you elaborate quickly on that and your thoughts on fourplexes in neighbourhoods?

Mr. Phil Pothen: Lisa Raitt is no bleeding heart liberal, let alone a leftist or an environmentalist of any sort that I’ve ever heard of.

It’s simply the case that if you want to deliver enough homes to solve the housing crisis, you cannot do it with single and semi-detached and townhomes. You’ve got to put the bulk of your construction, including the bulk of your family home construction, in denser, more compact, labour-efficient forms of development, and you have to do it in the neighbourhoods that are currently low-rise. That has got to mean allowing four-storey fourplex development—not just nominal legalization of fourplex that keeps the same setback requirements and floor-space index, because you would get tiny apartments that way. You need enough leeway to build four family-sized units on a lot that’s currently occupied by a single detached home, 4,000 square feet—four 1,000 square-foot units, which is similar to a current bungalow. And you’ve got to allow six-storey wood-frame buildings on some of those interior lots as well, particularly locations around parks, where the families can make use of existing park face, because they don’t necessarily have enough yard space of their own, and also along transit streets.

If you’re deciding not to do those things and not to do them at the provincial level—legalize them, as-of-right—you are deciding, as a government, simply not to solve the housing crisis at all—

Ms. Mary-Margaret McMahon: With that, I’ve got to hand it over to my colleague. Thank you.

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

Ms. Aislinn Clancy: I want to thank our guests.

I did want to say my kids were part of the Walking School Bus. The cancer society is investing in people walking to school safely. It prevents cancer, as well.

My question is for Environmental Defence. From the research I've done, sprawl costs two and a half times more to a municipality than it does by infill. We're talking about affordability here. Can you explain a little bit about how building this kind of housing into rural farmland is not only costly to our farming economy but also costly to rural municipalities and property taxpayers who are getting downloaded lately?

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

Mr. Phil Pothén: What it comes down to is, most of our post-World War II neighbourhoods are white elephants that are being subsidized by the pre-World War II parts of our community, and if we want those communities to become sustainable, we need to have enough people living on each metre of street to pay the cost of maintaining that metre of street, to pay the cost of replacing the pipes when it's time, and that means getting around 100 people per hectare. We're not doing that if you build in greenfield. Not only are you creating more of that development, but you're also failing to give the existing neighbourhoods the density that they need in order to support their own current operating costs and ultimate replacements costs of infrastructure etc. You've got to get the existing neighbourhoods to 100 people per hectare before you even think about extending outwards.

The Chair (Ms. Laurie Scott): Moving on to the government side: MPP Coe, please go ahead.

Mr. Lorne Coe: Thank you, Chair. Through you: Mr. Notte, welcome, and thank you for your level of engagement with a number of ministries over the years.

In the case of the legislation that's before us today—and in some ways, it's comparable to other legislation that comes before committee—do you have any proposals on how we could improve this bill? This afternoon is a time to share that information with us, if you would, please, sir.

Mr. Frank Notte: From my perspective, it's good to go. Like I said in my remarks, it's the most pro-auto bill I've seen in my 14 years—or at least one of them. I would urge the government to just get it out of committee, and let's pass it.

Mr. Lorne Coe: Thank you for that response and, again, thank you for your level of engagement with the government and several ministries on different pieces of legislation over the years. We appreciate it very much.

Through you, Chair, to MPP Pang, please.

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

Mr. Billy Pang: Thank you, Madam Chair. Through you to Frank: Thank you for your presentation earlier.

We all know that we are facing a housing crisis in Ontario. The status quo is not working, so we need to move faster. The Ontario government is moving forward with several other initiatives aimed at streamlining building approvals to get shovels in the ground sooner on roads, highways and public transit, as well as other key infrastructure projects; also including moving more projects to a streamlined environmental assessment process—some showed their concern here about the environment—that would help get critical infrastructure such as highways, railways and transmission lines built faster to support

Ontario's growing population while continuing to protect the environment.

From your perspective, how do you think—overall, your thoughts on this proposed legislation, Bill 162, the Get It Done Act. You shared some of your insights already. Can you expand a little bit on that?

Mr. Frank Notte: I remember being in front of the standing committee in 2012, when the government of the day was deciding on ways to reduce traffic. Back then, we supported what was called the GTA west corridor, which is the Highway 413 that's proposed here, so it's no stranger to us at the association. We needed that highway back then. And here we are, some 15-odd years later, with more people coming into the province, more homes needing to be built, more jobs being created. I would just say that we needed that highway back then, and we were on record back then, saying to the government of the day, "Let's just get on with it." So in terms of Highway 413, it can't come soon enough.

Mr. Billy Pang: How about our lately implemented One Fare transit support? As you are a motor vehicle retailer, is that anything that you may show interest in—One Fare—from your perspective?

Mr. Frank Notte: Nothing specifically. We're not the experts on that.

What I can say is, if the government is making it easier for people to get around, whether it's by car or train, then why not do it? If you have to cross three municipalities on your commute via public transit, then if the government is making that easier, that's just common sense.

Mr. Billy Pang: You're the Motor Vehicle Retailers of Ontario, so you're representing motor vehicle retailers.

We are building more roads, more highways to deal with the traffic problem. I heard that, well, everywhere, there is congestion—it's not necessarily in all of Ontario, but it's someplace, right? When I travel around in Ontario sometimes—I can remember there were times, when I was driving, that I could not see a car in front of me or behind me for an hour. I was in the middle of nowhere—even no signal. So we are building the infrastructure for high-speed Internet, and also highways.

What do you think, from your perspective, selling cars—how do you deal with those congestion issues? Every morning, I have to travel from Markham to here. I have to go through the Don Valley parking lot every day. How do you think this bill can help in solving the traffic issues?

Mr. Frank Notte: I think it's a supply and demand issue. We're going to have more demand, for road users, whether that's people in the car bringing their kid to hockey or whether that's a GO bus coming from Uxbridge to downtown. If we're going to build more highway capacity and increase the supply, I think we'd better do that ASAP, because the demand is already there, and the supply already can't meet up with the demand. So I think more capacity is the way to go.

The Chair (Ms. Laurie Scott): MPP Rae, you have two minutes.

Mr. Matthew Rae: Thank you to the presenters today for your deputations. I appreciate you all coming in.

Frank, you mentioned the licence plate stickers that our government got rid of. When I first started driving, if I remember correctly, from my memory, it was \$90, and then the next year the former Liberal government increased it to \$120, where it was before our government removed it. I thought to myself at the time, what is this going to? Why is it going up so much? Inflation was non-existent back then. It was very low. It was way above inflation. For me, it felt like a tax. They were taxing the millions and millions of car drivers.

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As you know, Frank, I live in a rural riding. We are investing in public transit in rural Ontario, but obviously people still need to drive in my riding to get to the GO station, to come to downtown Toronto or to shop for groceries.

I was wondering if you could elaborate a bit on what your members saw when we got rid of that sticker, what their thoughts were around those renewal fees, and how it was viewed in their perspective.

Mr. Frank Notte: We know a typical dealership would have dealer plates that they would need to put on a demo car, for example, if one of their staff is using it. They also use service plates that allow the car to go on the road if the car is in the shop and needs to go for a road test or go to another shop to get fixed. That was an incredible boost to them, like it was for your average, everyday Ontarian—to see a little bit of that money coming back. From what I can tell, that money went into the consolidated revenue fund, so it wasn't dedicated to roads or anything like that. It was a very welcome measure to reduce the cost of doing business for our members, for sure—but I think it was everyone in the room, as well; it put a few bucks back in your pocket.

The Chair (Ms. Laurie Scott): That concludes this round.

We'll go to the last round, with the NDP. MPP Shaw.

Ms. Sandy Shaw: My question is for Mr. Notte.

You talked about removing tolls on the roads. It's not lost on the people of the province of Ontario that this bill is removing tolls from highways that don't have tolls but keeping the toll on the 407.

You're here and you said this is the biggest pro-auto legislation that you've seen.

We proposed an opposition day motion that asked for the tolls for truckers to be removed from the 407, including the part that is owned by this government. What do you think of that proposal?

Mr. Frank Notte: I think it sounds good. I don't know, with the contract that the province of Ontario has with the 407, if it's even possible.

Ms. Sandy Shaw: That's right, but it would be good if they tried. For example, this government forgave a billion dollars to that corporation when they didn't meet their target. We were just asking this government to get to the table and try to argue on behalf of the people of the province, but they voted no without any actual, clear evidence as to why.

Thank you for that answer.

I want to turn to Mr. Pothen. I'm going to talk about urban boundary expansions and the greenbelt grab, and I

want to talk about how we ended up with more of these being packed in. It makes your head spin, because there was what Minister Clark did in the greenbelt grab, and then Bill 150 put it all back, because, as Minister Calandra said, how this happened failed to maintain and reinforce public trust. We know that. That's where we are.

Now we have a bill where they're putting back what they took out the time they put it back in, with no evidence. I participated in a ministerial briefing to ask what evidence was provided to justify these changes that we're seeing here to urban boundaries. They confirmed that there was basically no evidence.

Can you talk about how the very fact that we think that these changes came because a mayor may have written to the government and overridden officially adopted plans—and changes that may or may not meet, basically, the provincial policy statement? We don't even have an answer. The minister couldn't answer if he thought that these changes met the government's own provincial policy statement. Can you talk about how we ended up with these changes in here without any transparency, without any accountability as to how they ended up here, and how this continues down the road of the government doing things without evidence, behind closed doors, that are possibly not in the interest of the people of Ontario—particularly in light of Wilmot, where we see 770 acres being expropriated without any clear process?

Mr. Phil Pothen: I think there's a reason why these changes are being done through statute and not through regulation, and that is that these boundary expansions could not be justified. They are not compatible with the provincial policy statement, which says you can't expand the settlement boundary unless there's some need to do so. Well, there clearly isn't a need to do so, and so the only way around it is to do it through a separate statutory amendment.

Let's be clear why there is no paper trail in support of these settlement boundary expansions. It's actually because of what my friend just mentioned, which is that the settlement boundary expansion is the most pro-auto thing that this government could do.

We talked about being able to get to hockey. I've got three kids, and hockey, gymnastics, soccer—I don't need to drive to get my kids to those things, because my municipal government didn't fail in the past. They built my community in the right way, so I don't need to drive in order to get my kids to school. I understand that many of you represent places where that's not the case. Every time signing your kids up to hockey or basketball or any sport involves having to get a car, that's a policy failure on the part of provincial and municipal governments. So we're asking you to fix that policy failure.

The reason my friend here is so happy with this legislation is because his clients get \$66,000, on average, every time the government fails. Three quarters of GTHA residents, as an example, and Golden Horseshoe residents say they would much prefer if they didn't need a car to get to school, to work, to hockey etc., and it's only because we've built our communities in ways that they need a car in order to get around practically that they actually own them.

That's why my friend is so happy. Every one of those failures is \$66,000 in his clients' pockets. That's why he's happy. That's why I'm not happy.

Ms. Sandy Shaw: I sort of gave you a double-barrelled question.

We have seen Wilmot—the government there is expropriating 770 acres of farmland. Each councillor there has signed an NDA agreement, so we can't understand why this is happening and what this is for.

I would point you to schedule I in this bill, which amends the Environmental Assessment Act to make it even easier to expropriate land, whether it's farmland or otherwise, without environmental assessment.

I know in the past I've heard you talk about how farmland expropriation for the 413 should be a red flag.

Can you explain what is at stake in terms of public trust and public transparency when we are losing farmland and it's happening behind closed doors, and when we have a government that has absolutely no qualms about building a highway on some of the most fertile, productive farmland not just in the province, but probably in North America?

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

Mr. Phil Pothen: There's always vulnerability when you place big, big money decisions in the hands of—you put all that burden on lower-tier municipalities; often, small municipalities without staff of their own, without high-priced legal counsel of their own to defend their interests. It's very easy for those small councils to get taken advantage of. It's very easy for business interests to run circles around them and to, frankly, lure them into doing things that are even bad for their own residents, let alone the side of balancing the interests of those small municipalities and the larger municipalities that are affected by them.

I don't know about the specifics of this Wilmot site, and I don't want to talk about something specific about it—but we ought to know, and that's the key point here. So this is a strong point in favour of having these decisions dealt with at a regional level, keeping decisions about settlement boundaries more broadly, about allocation of land. What goes where should be decided, generally, at a regional level—and without any specificity to Wilmot; that should be true across regions. That's the opposite of what this government did with Bill 23, and it's the opposite of what this government is doing by using letters—

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

MPP Clancy, for the start of the next round for the independents.

Ms. Aislinn Clancy: I'd like to talk a little bit about affordability again, because this is the priority, I think, for every party that's here today.

I have a big concern about speculation and how these sprawl agendas impact the value of land that currently sustains our farming economy. From my understanding, farmland per acre has just skyrocketed because of some—“Will it or won't it be protected?”

Can you explain a little bit about why farmland protection is so important and how that translates into what we pay at the grocery store?

Mr. Phil Pothen: My friend here talked about Ontario turning landowners, farmland owners, into sort of inventory managers for future development land. Well, there are two ways that we do that.

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Firstly, land outside of settlement boundaries is not future development land; it never has been. The so-called whitebelt land is land that we will never need to use for development unless we screw up the use of the land that we already have.

The number one way: It's vital that we maintain settlement boundaries as firm and not easily changed and we maintain MCRs as the only way to extend settlement boundaries, because otherwise, everything outside the greenbelt becomes treated and priced as future development land inventory, and it becomes unviable to buy and sell land on the basis of its agricultural use.

Secondly, obviously, the greenbelt is the final redoubt. That is supposed to be permanent, forever. There's no way to ever touch it. The settlement boundary itself is the first line of defence. If we don't have firm settlement boundaries, if it's possible for developers to apply to extend the settlement boundary between MCR processes, or if there's no restriction, no requirement that you build out the existing built-up area before you extend the settlement area boundary, if there aren't minimum density requirements for the existing built-up area, then all of that land ceases to be viable commercially as farmland because the prices become based on the speculative development value.

Ms. Aislinn Clancy: I think if we'd like to use supply and demand arguments—there is more demand for less land, and that means we have less farmers and less food producers.

I do have a little moment for you—sorry. I know there's a stat about how if we can move people out of cars and into bikes, it helps congestion.

Mr. Mark Chamberlain: Cars take up about 15 feet of a road and then a width of a road. A person on a bike takes about three feet and about two feet. It's simple math. If you have people walking and cycling, you have more room.

We should value space. Space in a city is very, very valuable. You have to decide how you're going to use it for housing, for transportation.

If you value health, environment, we can come up with a solution. That's walking and cycling.

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

Ms. Mary-Margaret McMahon: I'm right there with you on walkable, sustainable communities.

I have a quick question for Frank.

Thanks for coming in and representing your organization. We like to hear from everyone.

I drive a car. I also take transit. I also bike. I also use my two feet and I walk.

I just wondered what you think of the investment in transit that the government is doing right now. Are you a believer in transit? How do you feel about transit?

Mr. Frank Notte: Yes, I'm a believer in transit. I think if you give people the choice whether they want to—my brother-in-law, for example, lives in Milton. If he's got a kid's hockey game in Vaughan, he's not going to take the

bus or walk or ride his bike. If he's going down to the local community centre and lives around the corner, he's going to walk. I think if you're going to build transit, you give people the option on whether that certain day of the week, it makes sense if they're going to take their car, or if they're going to take the GO train or TTC or whatever the case may be.

Ms. Mary-Margaret McMahon: Do you take transit yourself? Does your family take transit?

Mr. Frank Notte: Yes. I live in Vaughan, and the subway goes up to Vaughan.

The Chair (Ms. Laurie Scott): For the final round: the government side. MPP Singh Grewal.

Mr. Hardeep Singh Grewal: My question is going to be to Mr. Notte.

A comment was made earlier by Mr. Pothen, I believe. Would you like to respond to that, in terms of the amount of money or dollar figure he mentioned that your organization makes from being on the road—if there's anything you'd like to say to that?

Mr. Frank Notte: It's not going to show up on our auto retailers' balance sheets any time soon. So I don't know where that figure came up.

People need cars. Ontario is very proud to be an auto manufacturing powerhouse. We've been that way for 100 years. People love cars. We did a poll in 2018 by Nanos that said 83% of Ontarians believe the family car is a necessity to run their household. So any notion that the car is going away or we're simply just going to ride our bike to bring our kid to hockey practice just doesn't make any sense to me.

Mr. Hardeep Singh Grewal: In our budget plan that we introduced yesterday, in our plan to build Ontario, we're making some of the largest infrastructure investments across the province. That includes building new roads, highways and enhancing our public transit system. As we power ahead with building Highway 413, the Bradford Bypass and other critical roads, we're also building transit. We're spending billions of dollars, spending record investments on transit, building communities where people can walk, use the subway systems, and be able to have that sense of community, when they need to be—but also have the ability to travel outside their community.

In this plan that we've developed, do you think we've taken a balanced approach in building both?

Mr. Frank Notte: Yes, absolutely.

Mr. Hardeep Singh Grewal: And then, the automobile association, overall—I know you said this: You're very pleased with the bill that we've presented, and it's a very, very pro-driver and transit-oriented bill. When we take a look at freezing fees for drivers, eliminating licence plate stickers, doing the automatic renewals, making general life easier for everybody—are you supportive of all of those measures that we've taken?

Mr. Frank Notte: Yes. Our association believes anything the government can do to promote the value of vehicle ownership is something that should be done. It was said earlier—I apologize if you said it—but I'm sure all you

guys hear about affordability in your ridings. This is it. It's in Bill 162.

Mr. Hardeep Singh Grewal: Thank you very much for your response, Mr. Notte.

I'd like to yield the rest of my time to my colleague MPP Logan Kanapathi.

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

Mr. Logan Kanapathi: My question is to Mark.

Mark, you have a lot of passion. I like your passion for children and youth. You believe in an active transportation system. You want to encourage children to walk to school.

I was a former councillor for the city of Markham. I advocated for an active transportation system. In the practical world, it didn't work. If there are parents living a block away, they don't want to let the kids walk to school, because of safety. In some areas like Markham, people can't even be safe to walk on the street.

We'd like to integrate an active transportation system that will bring a lot of health benefits, what you are talking about—mental health and physical health—and also improve their quality of life.

So my question to you is, what do you propose to do in suburban communities such as Markham, which are cities entirely based around automobiles? What's your proposal?

Mr. Mark Chamberlain: Well, you've heard some of the answers here already. It is a ground-up position. When I hear words like, "We're investing in everything. We're investing in public transportation"—in business, you're either fully funded or you're not fully funded.

If you want to make change, you can. We can solve problems as we define problems, but how we define problems really comes down to what we value. If we value walking, cycling, environment, farms, health, wellness, child development and all those sorts of things, then there are plenty of experts out there—and they're worldwide, because mature economies are actually doing this. If you look at Paris—every place that is mature is actually getting rid of roads downtown; it's not getting rid of cars, but getting rid of roads, because they value all the things I've just mentioned. So that's all possible. It's not about finding the experts. The experts are there. It's about leadership.

If you define the problem that you want to solve, all of these things—I grew up in Stouffville, before we moved to a farm. I know the area. I was travelling, in 1976, from up in farm country into downtown Toronto. It was a congested 401 and Don Valley Parkway then. And 50 years later, nothing has changed. We need a different approach.

I'm not the expert, but I do know where to find the experts. I'd be happy to sit down with you and pull the team together that can actually make Markham walkable and cyclable, healthier and more affordable.

The most affordable thing you can do for families right now: Make it so they don't have to own a car.

Mr. Logan Kanapathi: Chair, I'll hand over the rest of the time to MPP Rae.

The Chair (Ms. Laurie Scott): You have a minute and a half, MPP Rae.

Mr. Matthew Rae: My question is for Environmental Defence.

You're against the 413. You made that very clear.

Do you support any truck bypasses in Ontario?

1400

Mr. Phil Pothen: I think there might be a different situation in far northern or far outlying areas outside of the greater Golden Horseshoe.

I think the issue is, in the greater Golden Horseshoe, we're in a particular situation. All of our farmland overlaps with the same area. That's the only place where a Carolinian species can live—

Mr. Matthew Rae: So, yes, there.

Mr. Phil Pothen: You'd have to show me the proposal—and I'd have to turn it down. But we don't have a blanket policy against all bypasses.

Mr. Matthew Rae: So just the 413?

Mr. Phil Pothen: No, not just the 413. We have a particular concern about limited-access highways in the greater Golden Horseshoe, in particular, because we're so much within reach of getting to a place, in existing neighbourhoods, where we can really reduce our car dependence. By adding homes to existing neighbourhoods, getting them up to 100 people per hectare, putting shops and restaurants within walking distance, we can get rid of most of the car trips that we currently have; we can get rid of a lot of the car purchases that my friend is counting on—because we can stop forcing people to buy a car every time their kid wants to join hockey.

Mr. Matthew Rae: The only way to meet—to your point around developing in urban boundaries—is to put pipes in the ground and waste water infrastructure. I have municipalities in my riding that can't add 10 toilets. We need to invest in our infrastructure.

The Chair (Ms. Laurie Scott): That's the end of this group presentation.

Thank you very much, gentlemen, for coming today. I'll let you move away from the table, and then I'll call up the next group—

Interruption.

The Chair (Ms. Laurie Scott): And there's apparently applause.

COMMUNITY ENTERPRISE
NETWORK INC.

GRAND RIVER ENVIRONMENTAL
NETWORK

GREATER OTTAWA HOME BUILDERS'
ASSOCIATION

The Chair (Ms. Laurie Scott): I'll ask Community Enterprise Network, Grand River Environmental Network, and Greater Ottawa Home Builders' Association to come forward.

Each presenter has up to seven minutes, and then we'll move to the question-and-possible-answer period.

Jeff Mole, you may begin. Please state your name for Hansard purposes.

Mr. Jeff Mole: Thank you. My name is Jeff Mole. I'm with Community Enterprise Network, and I'm here today to speak about schedule 6.

Schedule 6 amends the Public Transportation and Highway Improvement Act. To wit, it says, "No toll may be charged for travel on a highway where the road authority is the crown, unless the toll is authorized by an act." That would lead one to believe that perhaps the government has an issue with tolls. That could be because they see it as a tax, or for whatever reason.

Community Enterprise Network advocates for development of a strong community enterprise sector in Ontario. We promote development of government policies and programs that invest in the start-up and development of new community enterprises. Our primary mission is undertaking activities that support the incubation—the start-up, if you will—of small-, medium- and large-scale not-for-profit community enterprises. We undertake these activities on a not-for-profit basis.

Community ownership of crucial industries fosters job creation and prosperity, attracts investment, produces community benefits, and helps tackle critical challenges like housing, food production and climate change.

Community enterprise development is a vital element of sustainable economic development and is a logical means of delivering public services, developing resources and building a more resilient economy.

Now is the time for the Ontario government to support the growth of the community enterprise sector. Investing in community enterprise offers value for taxpayers by ensuring profits are reinvested locally, and can help reduce the size of government.

Community Enterprise Network Inc. believes that Ontarians should receive maximum benefit from their investment in the 407 toll highway. We propose that toll charges could be eliminated on this highway or, in the alternate, that the business could be operated as a community enterprise.

By revising Bill 162, the Ontario government has an opportunity to rectify the adverse effects of privatizing Highway 407's operations and revenues. The bill should be amended to prohibit toll charges on Highway 407 and annul the agreements with 407 International and 407 ETR Concession Co.

Madam Chair, 25 years ago, the Mike Harris government flouted the public interest when enacting the Highway 407 Act and entering into a ground lease and other agreements with the 407 ETR Concession Co. to facilitate the operation of Highway 407 as a private toll highway.

On February 22, 2024, 407 International announced substantial growth in revenues and net income. For 2023, revenues were \$1.5 billion and net income was \$567 million; those are up 13% and 30%, respectively, compared with the previous year, so let's call that \$567 million profit. This announcement came on the heels of an announcement by 407 International that they will be increasing tolls effective February 1, 2024. They're making huge money, and they still have to raise the tolls.

Highway 407 toll revenue could surpass \$100 billion over the next 74 years, yielding around \$70 billion for private and foreign investors over the life of the deal.

We ask that members of this committee support calling upon the minister to ask the Auditor General of Ontario to undertake a special assignment to conduct a comprehensive assessment of the value derived from Ontario's 1999 agreement with 407 International. Highway 407 was intended and approved by Ontarians as a toll highway only until the development costs were recovered. That time has passed. The Highway 407 agreements made by the Mike Harris government were reckless and warrant reconsideration. It's past the time to take a closer look at this deal. The people of Ontario ought not be bound by such a reckless deal.

We assert that the Legislature has the power to rescind an agreement that it determines is not in the public interest by passing a law and invoking parliamentary sovereignty. The Highway 407 purchase, sale and lease agreements should be revoked, along with the purchasers' and their successors' right to compensation. Judicial review should not impede such legislative action. We assert that the Legislative Assembly is supreme, and courts ought not to be reviewing legislative choices. We assert that if such legislation is deemed unconstitutional, then the Legislature could invoke the "notwithstanding" clause of the Constitution.

Community Enterprise Network believes that the highway could remain as a toll highway and run as a community enterprise, with billions being reinvested for the benefit of Ontarians and communities.

Accordingly, Community Enterprise Network calls on the Ontario government to amend Bill 162 to either prohibit tolls on Highway 407 or nullify the 407 agreements through legislative means under parliamentary sovereignty.

Community ownership of crucial industry is feasible when governments create strategic policies and programs that help build the capacity of the community enterprise sector to produce goods and services.

For that reason, Bill 162 should be amended to enact policies and programs that support community ownership—

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

Mr. Jeff Mole: —of Highway 407 and other industries in Ontario.

Thank you, Madam Chair.

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

We'll now move to the Grand River Environmental Network. Mr. Thomason.

Mr. Kevin Thomason: My name is Kevin Thomason. I am a Wilmot resident, and I am vice-chair of the Grand River Environmental Network. For decades, our members and groups have been stewards and a proactive voice in Waterloo region for the environment, which is facing more growth pressures, more loss of biodiversity, and more challenges than ever.

Our message today on the Get It Done Act is consistent with what you have heard from us in the past: Please just stop making changes and increasing the planning chaos in

Ontario. Developers, planners, municipalities, investors and citizens need consistency and certainty to actually get things done.

1410

Schedule 1—the environmental assessment amendments that enable expropriation and assume development can proceed before environmental assessments are even complete—is absurd and confounding. If there's such little regard for our environment and water, why even bother with the charade of an assessment before simply expropriating and proceeding with any project? Schedule 1 is not in the best public interest and needs to be removed from Bill 162.

Schedule 3, the official plan adjustments, have seen so many changes, flip-flops and reversals of reversals that not even highly qualified professionals can figure things out anymore. It's not getting shovels in the ground sooner, not rebuilding Ontario's economy, nor ensuring new housing, as this bill claims. It is inhibiting development, slowing down planning, and driving away needed investment, as desperately needed housing starts continue to fall each month. This bill is once again encouraging municipalities to open up already scarce natural areas and farmland to development, diverting limited construction labour and materials to building expensive homes that few can afford, far away from where people work and want to live. It's forcing precious tax dollars towards building slow, inefficient and expensive public infrastructure where it's not needed and while little is being done to provision far more affordable housing, where infrastructure, public transit and services already exist, that could far more rapidly and effectively solve our housing crisis for millions of citizens.

The confounding schedule 3 of Bill 162 is so poorly written that everyone is struggling to understand it. For example, the overview table for modifications by this act clearly states "None" for the region of Waterloo, yet it turns out, later in the document, where there is a vague reference to map 3 on file at 777 Bay Street, that when one goes to Bay Street to get the map, there are actually thousands of acres of forced urban boundary expansions being imposed on Waterloo region, significantly compromising all of our success to date with our visionary regional official plans and their focus on sustainable, efficient, compact, walkable communities, housing choice, housing affordability and environmental protection that would have delivered the fast, affordable housing solutions we so desperately need by furthering our already successful intensification and investments in rapid transit and existing urban infrastructure. Instead, this act is forcing our farmers off their essential farmlands, threatening our precarious groundwater situation by paving over some of our best remaining groundwater recharge areas, and diverting scarce tax dollars and resources to unsustainable, inefficient urban sprawl that will reduce the number of homes that can be built, and not provide the affordable, diverse housing we so desperately need.

Waterloo region is renowned for our global success and proven visionary planning, yet there is no data, no rationale, no justification, nor any supporting materials explain-

ing why our regional official plan is being overridden; why the minister disagreed with years of work done by professional staff and accredited consultants in accordance with provincial methodology and approved with such a strong endorsement by all of our municipalities in 2022. While this bill claims municipalities were consulted by this government, our regional government that has the legal planning authority and responsibilities for official plans and this long-term growth planning was not even consulted.

I want to draw particular attention to a recent Waterloo region hydrology staff report expressing concerns about the future of our water supply if these forced boundary expansions are allowed to proceed onto important groundwater recharge areas that the region has fought for decades to protect. Astoundingly, this regional report—written for this standing committee, expressing water concerns, and so clearly in the best public interest, since our region has no pipelines to Great Lakes nor other water sources and is totally dependent on our own water supply and living within the carrying capacity of our ecosystems—was fought over for hours by developers and certain municipal mayors at regional council this past week, who did everything possible to prevent you from seeing it.

Bill 162 is set once again to flip-flop and destroy our visionary, sustainable countryside line policy and ROP that had almost no farmland loss, strong protection for our vulnerable water supply, and a proven plan to ensure that provincial housing targets would be rapidly and affordably met.

The region of Waterloo is a facilitator, not an inhibitor. It is absurd to be so severely compromising our official plan and removing regional planning authority from the region, given our complex water and servicing issues across our communities that are totally dependent on groundwater wells, collaboration, shared services and living within the carrying capacity of our already fast-growing region. We saw, in Walkerton, how quickly water issues can devastate an economy. And with Waterloo region and its agriculture, universities, high-tech and manufacturing being such a driver of the provincial economy, it's absurd to be threatening our water supply, farms and entire community's success with these unnecessary boundary expansions that actually mandate a population growth to over 1.2 million people with no data, no research, nor studies. No one even knows if our region can support this astounding 50% population increase, because it is hundreds of thousands of people more than any previous studies have ever contemplated or researched.

In schedule 3, the amendments and map number 3 ordering urban boundary expansions need to be removed, and Bill 23 should ensure that planning authority is retained by the region of Waterloo.

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

Mr. Kevin Thomason: Thank you.

Schedule 5 of Bill 162 restricting carbon pricing programs in contrast to the need to actually be addressing adverse impacts of climate change on the environment, health infrastructure and our economy is absurd. The

proposal is fundamentally at odds with the recommendations of provincial advisers, experts, and numerous reports commissioned by this government. Schedule 5 needs to be removed.

In conclusion, please just stop. Too much time has already been lost by too many changes and planning chaos already—be it amalgamation, dissolution, the PPS, the growth plan, Bill 23, Bill 39, Bill 140, development charge changes, and so many confounding processes that have yet to be completed or have already been repealed. We need stability, better public consultations, regional planning authority restored, and a focus on the simple, proven solutions that are already—

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

We'll now go to our final presenter in this round: Mr. Burggraaf from the Greater Ottawa Home Builders' Association. You may begin. Please state your name.

Mr. Jason Burggraaf: Members of the committee, thank you for the opportunity to speak today. I refer you to GOHBA's submission to the ERO for Bill 162, which I have circulated.

First, GOHBA and its members are very glad to see permissible heights for minor corridors be increased in the approval of Ottawa's official plan. Previously, Ottawa city council had decided to limit minor corridors to four storeys across the city. That decision had been made without consultation and without any consideration of the number of homes that the OP counted on to be built on minor corridors as part of its intensification strategy. These homes, which would have been directly served by transit, were summarily removed from the growth management equation with no discussion of how or where they would otherwise be accounted for. These restored heights and more flexible building height regulations, overall, will facilitate better urban development and will help address Ottawa's housing goals, especially when it comes to intensification.

I bring this up, in particular, because it's indicative of the types of decisions that happen at the municipal level that work against provincial housing policies and, frankly, go against the fundamental principles of good planning. Although this particular issue has been addressed, GOHBA is extremely concerned that Ottawa residents will continue to face a significant housing shortage over the next 20 years due to other deliberate decisions in the development of its official plan.

So the focus of my remarks today is to emphasize how important it is for the provincial government to retain its role in ensuring that government projections, growth strategies and official plans fulfill provincial housing objectives in the identification of land, the provision of housing, and the type of housing that will be available for residents.

In 2020, Ottawa approved an urban boundary expansion of 1,200 hectares. GOHBA, of course, had pushed for increased expansion lands because we didn't, and we still don't now, believe in the city's intensification numbers, both as a zoning exercise and in the housing typologies that they're willing to enable. We're still awaiting Ottawa's zoning bylaws now to see if there's reasonable potential to

achieve the intensification targets that they have set. However, that won't be in effect until the end of 2025, while Ottawa's OP is built on a portion of that intensification increasing from mid-2018 to 2025. We're obviously not going to get that portion of intensification, because that zoning isn't in place yet. So, on a whole, we've missed a good seven years of housing intensification so far.

The current official plan solidifies a structural housing deficit in Ottawa, as well, by underestimating its population growth, overestimating its potential for intensification, and thereby artificially limiting its urban expansion. As noted on page 2 of our ERO submission, Ottawa's official plan was built on 400,000 new residents to 2046. The Ministry of Finance's latest population projection forecasts 650,000 people to 2046. Ottawa's OP targets 195,000 new homes for that 400,000 that it's built on, but based on these updated projections, the city needs 242,000 new homes to accommodate the population over the next 22 years. That's a deficit of 47,000 homes, compared to what the city is currently planning for with the OP that was just approved in Bill 162.

1420

I want to provide a further example of how this deliberate decision-making manifests into lower housing supply and reduced housing affordability. This past November, the city had to update its zoning for protected major transportation areas. Unfortunately, the city had chosen to decline the opportunity to increase zoning heights around its transit stations. Indeed, the city decided to ensure that only minimum densities in its OP were confirmed—as opposed to proactive zoning to help it fulfill its municipal housing pledge of 151,000 new homes over the next decade. This was a wasted opportunity to be ambitious in its city planning, to properly plan municipal infrastructure adjacent to rapid transit, and to ensure built-in ridership for its LRT system.

As outlined in our submission, on pages 3 and 4, GOHBA has a number of recommendations to ensure that official plans for municipalities across the province align with provincial policies and support housing affordability and supply for the residents, both now and into the future. This will provide mechanisms for the government to ensure that projections of the provincial growth plan are met locally, not only from a population forecast perspective, but also from a market needs assessment of the type of housing that will be required for our future housing needs.

Provincial planning policy and municipal official plans must work in conjunction to provide a framework for comprehensive, integrated, long-term planning that supports the principles of strong communities, a clean and healthy environment, and economic growth for the long term. The importance of ensuring that municipal official plans are well thought out, comprehensive and done right cannot be overstated. The province directs municipalities to undertake this work, and in return, the province is expected to provide direction to municipalities according to provincial policy.

GOHBA and its members are concerned that municipal long-range planning, as I've detailed, is no longer centred on the basis of provincial policy that results in good planning.

The province has a responsibility to uphold the integrity and directives of its own provincial policies, and responsible decision-making must matter. Allowing the will of municipal councillors to contradict and delay proper long-term planning and growth management works against the province's goals for housing affordability and supply for residents across the province.

Ottawa, as with municipalities across Ontario, cannot be in a position where their official plans are shooting for housing targets that are well below the housing needs of its residents. The government has an obligation to review, assess, and make changes to municipal official plans to ensure compliance with the provincial planning statement.

These Ottawa examples, which I'm sure can be found across the province, emphasize how important it is for the provincial government to ensure that growth projections, growth strategies and official plans fulfill provincial housing objectives in the identification of land, the provision of housing, and the types of housing available to residents.

Thank you very much for your time. I'm pleased to answer any questions.

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

We'll now start with the questions segment. To the official opposition: MPP Fife.

Ms. Catherine Fife: Thanks to all the presenters.

Mr. Thomason, I'm going to start with you. What we are seeing right now in Waterloo region is unprecedented. We have never seen 770 acres of prime agricultural land be land-banked for an industrial purpose. The regional councillors and local politicians have all signed non-disclosure agreements—and it is silence on our democracy. I want to give you an opportunity to fully articulate how dangerous this is, what the risks are to the region as a whole, and indeed how schedule 1, in particular, to the “getting it done wrong act” is compromising our democracy, our environment and our economy.

Mr. Kevin Thomason: I have been lucky to be one of the two outsiders the farmers have allowed into their barns over the last two weeks since they learned of this—myself and the Ontario Federation of Agriculture representative for our area. These farmers are devastated. They've been given 10 days notice to have their farms ripped out from them, their livelihoods taken away, their homes taken away, and to sign the deal or face expropriation. This is an area that has never anticipated development. There are farmers who expect development on the edges of cities, and they sometimes even hope for retirement by cashing out. These are not those farmers. Some of these families have been on the land since the 1800s and have been there for generations. Development has never been contemplated in this area. It's not part of any official plan. It's well beyond our countryside line and all these other visionary things that we have put into our plans to protect our vulnerable water that we're so dependent on in Waterloo region.

And it is not fair, the way these farmers are being treated. They are reacting amazingly. They are organizing. Literally, on Monday night, I was at the Wilmot township hall, where they packed the council chambers. Hundreds of concerned farmers packed the overflow auditorium.

They packed the hallways and the stairways until the fire marshal wouldn't allow any more people in the building, and then they packed the lawn with their tractors and concerns and banners.

This is not the way we're going to be world-class, by doing planning—giving people 10 days to have their homes and livelihoods taken away from them. That's why we have these long-term plans. When I talk about chaos in the province, this is what we need to correct.

Ms. Catherine Fife: The region of Waterloo had no money to expropriate land.

Mr. Kevin Thomason: That's correct.

Ms. Catherine Fife: They are on the record as saying they did not have any money to expropriate.

Where do you think the money is coming from for this deal?

Mr. Kevin Thomason: I don't know. I sat in the December regional meeting where they deferred until 2025 any sort of large-scale investment because they couldn't come up with the money for a \$5-million reserve fund, mainly because of the impact of development charges and so many other budgetary pressures on our lower-tier government, not to mention the challenges already being faced by the region of Waterloo by having planning authority taken away from them and the chaos that that has resulted in.

Ms. Catherine Fife: Do you think that this piece of legislation is paving the way to undermine democracy in Ontario?

Mr. Kevin Thomason: If you look at schedule 1, the way that you can just start to expropriate land without even knowing if that land's suitable for the development or not is certainly a confounding thing that I think flies in the face of the values of most Canadians and the way they feel that we should be doing business and our government should be treating us.

Ms. Catherine Fife: And once this land is paved over, it's not renewable. We lose it forever.

Mr. Kevin Thomason: Yes. We are already losing over 300 acres of farmland a day. That is not sustainable in any way. In fact, the Ontario Federation of Agriculture has calculated that, at the current rates of farmland loss, in 42 years, we will have zero acres of farmland left in Ontario—no farmland left at all as recently into the future as 1980 was in the past.

Ms. Catherine Fife: Thank you so much.

I'll pass it onto my other colleague.

Ms. Laurie Scott: MPP Bell, please go ahead. There's three and a half minutes left.

Ms. Jessica Bell: My question is to Mr. Burggraaf. Thanks for coming in.

The Conservative government seems to be very reluctant to move forward with very sensible policies to permit missing-middle housing like fourplexes in municipalities across Ontario.

What is your home builders' association advocating for when it comes to allowing more missing-middle housing in municipalities?

Mr. Jason Burggraaf: We are very in favour of four units per lot. Luckily for us, in Ottawa, the municipality

has just signed a Housing Accelerator Fund agreement with the federal government to get that, and part of one of those agreement items is four units per lot that have to be introduced into the zoning plan moving forward. So that very much is a critical piece of intensification and provision of housing in Ottawa.

Ottawa's OP alone, again, just on the 400,000, a quarter of it is built on intensification of existing neighbourhoods—not along corridors, not around transit stations, not expansion; just in neighbourhoods. The only way we're going to get there with that number is to have the ability to build three, four units on a lot currently.

Ms. Jessica Bell: Are there other additional policies that you're advocating for to increase missing-middle housing province-wide?

Mr. Jason Burggraaf: We just released a white paper, actually, yesterday. I'll send it to you. It talks about the Housing Accelerator Fund and various zoning changes that would be along with that. That's obviously in the municipalities' bailiwick, but if the government chose to scope some of those things out and force municipalities to take them, we'd be glad to see it.

Ms. Jessica Bell: I'll make sure to send them to the government members opposite so that they're fully aware of what home builders are wanting us to do to increase intensification targets. Thank you.

How many more seconds are left?

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

Ms. Jessica Bell: Okay.

My second question is to Mr. Kevin Thomason. Thank you so much for coming in.

I was really surprised to hear you describe to me that there was a difference between what was on the website when it came to this bill and how it was affecting your region and what you learned when you went down to 777 Bay and looked at the maps.

Can you give us more information about how this bill is going to affect farmland in your area?

Mr. Kevin Thomason: By forcing urban boundary expansions to open on thousands of acres of farmland, it is the opposite of what we've been trying to do with our regional official plan, focused on creating complete, sustainable, walkable communities, with a focus on utilizing existing infrastructure; enabling housing choice, housing affordability; a focus on transit—in our case, phase 2 of ION running down to Cambridge and then phase 3 running east and west across Kitchener-Waterloo. Our visionary regional official plan basically was the next phase of everything that Waterloo region has done that has made us what we are today—so renowned and such a desirable place for everyone, from Google to Toyota on down.

1430

To see that suddenly now, instead of the core intensification and that urban focus—and people are voting with their wallets. We see those uptown lofts and condos in Waterloo region with wait-lists and developers begging for additional floors, while our greenfield urban sprawl subdivisions sit with unsold lots.

Vista Hills, right out near my house, was to be completed in 2016—2,500 homes completely built. Vista Hills sits less than half built out and sold today.

The Chair (Ms. Laurie Scott): We'll now move to the independent. MPP Clancy.

Ms. Aislinn Clancy: I really appreciate all the hard work you did. It shouldn't take a room of researchers or you coming to Bay Street to figure out what's happening in our own backyard, and that's troubling. That's what I want to ask you about.

When it comes to the 770 acres of land that's being assembled right now, as well as the thousands of hectares that have been added to our urban boundaries, can you describe a little bit your concern about our water table, given the paving-over that's going to happen, and the salt?

Mr. Kevin Thomason: Yes, exactly.

As you heard from Environmental Defence earlier today, things are often best looked at on a larger scale—a watershed scale, a landscape scale, a regional scale. Sometimes municipalities are just too small.

So when you look at our water, that's our region—our region employs more hydrologists than the province of Ontario. We have stewarded our water because we're so dependent on it, and we have no pipeline to the Great Lakes like London, Toronto or others. Our region has always made sure that growth makes sense within our municipality. We're one of the fastest-growing places in North America. We've managed it well. That's why we are where we are today. On the other hand, part of that is that sometimes not every municipality is ideal, or not every place is ideal, for a massive amount of development. So the region of Waterloo has taken that pie and tried to divide it as equally as they can between our municipalities—"What makes sense where?" That's where the 770 acres makes no sense, because it's this absurd development way out in the middle of nowhere. But it's also where we've guided growth.

In our area, for example, where Elmira lost its water supply due to contamination from Agent Orange—for 30 years now, their water has come 40 kilometres away from up around Kitchener. If you're going to build new homes in Breslau, where this government has got housing commitments for tens of thousands of new homes, you have to put pipes through the city of Waterloo and all the way down to Mannheim, where those wells are. We need those municipalities working together to accomplish this. And that's what the region has been—the region has been the parent in the room getting everyone working together toward these common goals.

Unfortunately, now, with this government saying to them, "You can have whatever you want and all those things you've ever wanted," we've seen our municipalities turn on each other and all put up their hands for the maximum amount of forced boundary expansion they can get. It's basic greed. Everyone always wants everything, regardless of the cost. That, unfortunately, has now turned us into several warring municipalities—as I mentioned with this water report, trying to even block this committee from seeing it. Instead of working together to achieve what we need to do, everyone is trying to get everything for themselves.

Ms. Aislinn Clancy: I know, too, that our water is getting saltier, and we have no solution for that.

I'm concerned about the process. In 20 seconds, can you talk about how you've seen process change in a short period of time and how that has divided and caused toxic relationships in our region and problematic working relationships, because process has just got a bomb on it now?

Mr. Kevin Thomason: We need regional planning authority to return to the region. In fact, it's the developers and builders who asked for that to be removed who are now the ones advocating most for it to be retained, and it has been temporarily put back to the region. We need that coordination. We need that collaboration. We need everyone working together to solve these challenges.

When I talk about the chaos and no one being able to figure things out, that is at all levels—government, industry, developers, financing, you name it. We need it all working together better, and that requires planning certainty.

Ms. Mary-Margaret McMahon: Thanks. Sorry, we're splitting time.

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

Ms. Mary-Margaret McMahon: Thank you all for coming in. This is great.

Jason, you mentioned something about municipalities not being strong enough to make bold decisions on housing, and then the province having to come in.

So what do you think of the city of Toronto approving fourplexes and the province being too petrified, terrified of fourplexes?

Mr. Jason Burggraaf: I think fourplexes are a critical piece to providing intensification housing, whatever the municipality.

Ms. Mary-Margaret McMahon: Thank you for being so succinct. That's all we have the time for.

Mr. Kevin Thomason: And Kitchener just approved it on Monday.

Ms. Mary-Margaret McMahon: Oh, wow. Awesome.

The Chair (Ms. Laurie Scott): MPP Sabawy, do you want to start off for the government side, please?

Mr. Sheref Sabawy: I am back to my question to Mr. Burggraaf from the Greater Ottawa Home Builders' Association.

I will start with asking, as builders look into those official plans and start looking into how you plan their developments in the coming, let's say, few years and then, at the same time, also talking to the city about what infrastructure needs to be put in place to get that ready for that development—do you know how much it takes from the day a developer starts the process until the day he gets something ready to be occupied or sold?

Mr. Jason Burggraaf: It depends on the type of project you have, of course.

Even if you're eyeballing a piece of land, even if it's inside the city already, you're looking at, easily, six years—usually closer to 10—especially if you're on the edge of a subdivision, for sure. The process to get even a high-rise building, what have you, could easily stretch into five to 10 years without much issue.

Mr. Sheref Sabawy: Just for the record, I'm quoting the president of the mayors' association—it's 11 years.

Mr. Jason Burggraaf: Maybe I'm just optimistic.

Mr. Sheref Sabawy: That's my first part.

My second part, talking about what we see—those official plans, for example—when was it visited in one of your areas?

Mr. Jason Burggraaf: The last time Ottawa did a real official plan was technically actually at amalgamation, back in 2000, before I even moved to the city. Even then, that was a bit of a Frankenstein of the cities that were there beforehand. So, Ottawa—it's very much considered the first official plan of this Ottawa, as it exists currently.

Mr. Sheref Sabawy: So we'll say, before things can be in the ground, change it to 25 years—we are in 2024, and it was since 2000.

My question: Did you or any of the developers' associations anticipate the amount of immigration—for example, 500,000 immigrants per year for the coming three years, to start with? Maybe it will continue.

Mr. Jason Burggraaf: Yes—well, not even us; the city, in and of itself, anticipated it. At the very start, you build up a growth projection for your area. The city set up three ranges: low, medium and high. It chose the medium ground. It does that, of course, because the medium seems most reasonable. Within two years after that mid-range growth had been approved—the 400,000 people I mentioned earlier—the ministry was already saying, “We're going to have 560,000 people.” That was, lo and behold, the high range that the city had contemplated but subsequently dismissed. Again, the city saw those potential numbers and declined to build the plan around that number.

Mr. Sheref Sabawy: Of course, you are a developer, so you understand that availability in the market now is much less than the demand, from a housing point of view—the amount of houses available for people who want to buy houses. Do you agree that there's an unbalanced demand versus availability?

Mr. Jason Burggraaf: To clarify, I'm not a developer myself; I'm just a policy guy.

There's a significant gap in housing demand, household formation versus what is available currently.

Ottawa alone—two years ago—was in a deficit of 25,000 housing units based on what it had planned to build, what it had actually built versus what the household formation numbers were. Right from the get-go, we were in a deficit. And now, on top of that, trying to make up that deficit and trying to make up the growth that we're anticipating on top of that, which—again, we're underestimating what that growth is now supposed to be.

1440

Mr. Sheref Sabawy: Can you define that as a crisis, or not yet?

Mr. Jason Burggraaf: It's a significant crisis of housing demand, for sure.

Mr. Sheref Sabawy: Will that impede the lands for cities to grow business and grow jobs and grow factories and grow growth generally?

Mr. Jason Burggraaf: One of the big things that I push on the city, for sure, is that its housing affordability is a

critical piece—no offence against Toronto—in its economic competitiveness against a Toronto or a Montreal. Ottawa's housing affordability is one of its biggest selling features for major employers.

Mr. Sheref Sabawy: We have a problem here with farmland and planning in the rural areas, and we have a problem in the urban areas where there are NIMBYs and BANANAs—“I don't want anything in my backyard, and I don't want to build anything close or near anything.”

And then we talk about the height. When you spend billions of dollars to develop infrastructure, transportation, you need density. You need the people who don't need to own cars to live close to those centres. So I put my support to your question about the four-floors height; I think in Mississauga now, we opened it—some areas are really open; they can go 40 and above, maybe.

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

Mr. Matthew Rae: Thank you to the presenters. I have a minute and a half in this round, so apologies for my quick question.

My question is to the home builders. You're talking about policy. You mentioned that you're a policy guy. Do you think it was a good decision by this government to remove development charges from affordable and non-profit housing?

Mr. Jason Burggraaf: Yes. We talked about the demand for housing. There's demand for housing at every portion of the housing continuum, right from social housing and subsidized with wraparound supports, right through attainable and affordable housing, right up to market and private rental and home sales, for sure.

Mr. Matthew Rae: How much time?

The Chair (Ms. Laurie Scott): You've got 45 seconds.

Mr. Matthew Rae: I appreciate everyone coming in today.

I will highlight that it was mentioned previously that we're overriding municipalities, but we're actually working with municipalities. The changes in the bill came from our lower-tier municipalities.

I will now defer my time to the Chair because my NDP colleagues want to ask some questions.

The Chair (Ms. Laurie Scott): Now to the second round: MPP Armstrong.

Ms. Teresa J. Armstrong: I want to ask a question to the Greater Ottawa Home Builders' Association.

I noticed in your presentation that you commissioned a third-party report conducted by Altus Group with regard to the city's growth projections, management strategy assumptions that informed its forthcoming budget recommendations. What I found interesting is that the ultimate summary of that presentation was that, ultimately, the greater Ottawa home builders believed—still believe—that the city overstated the number of households that could be accommodated through intensification in the land budget and, in turn, understated the number of households to be accommodated in greenfields, including the urban expansion areas. Can I ask you how you feel that about that? I think you made a statement about how intensifica-

tion inside was a good idea, and it seems contradictory to what the report analysis is. Do you think this report could be slightly biased to the developers' perspective?

Mr. Jason Burggraaf: I appreciate that perspective. However, I do represent every builder, no matter what the type is—greenfield, high-rise and small intensification within the city. My membership builds 90-odd-per cent of all the housing in Ottawa, so I feel pretty secure in representing all of their interests. I don't see the conflict there.

Our concern is that the city is not doing the things it needs to put in place in order to achieve the targets it has even set for itself. So when the city doesn't do that and then in its planning accounts to achieve a certain intensification target, it misses that target, it only sets a certain urban boundary expansion because it expects to achieve a certain amount of intensification—it falls short on all counts of that housing.

Like I said, the OP is built on 400,000 people. We're now expecting 650,000 people. The sheer demand for housing is going to require intensification in existing neighbourhoods, high-rise around transit stations, and new communities at the edge of the suburbs. Ottawa cannot afford to cut off any avenue of housing supply because it's going to be a task just to get the housing for its accommodation.

Ms. Teresa J. Armstrong: I appreciate your answer.

I want to ask you one quick follow-up question. I think you were in support of development charges not being charged to certain developments, overall, in Ontario. How do you think the municipalities will recover—how will those charges be recovered from municipalities, and who is ultimately going to pay for those waived development fees?

Mr. Jason Burggraaf: I'm hoping that Ottawa is going to get a good chunk, actually, of the recent municipal infrastructure funding that was part of the budget, as well as the housing-enabling water infrastructure funding—I might have mangled the name there—but it's ultimately going to be other levels of government if the municipality can't recoup on that.

The provision of housing is such a critical piece right now, especially affordable housing, rental housing, which is a community benefit overall. If we all agree affordable housing, especially—which is what the DC relief is on—is a communal good, then surely the community can pay for the infrastructure that it takes to put it in place.

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

Ms. Sandy Shaw: I'd just like to put on the record that this government, in six years, has built 1,100 units of affordable housing. I agree it's an important community benefit, and I wish the government would actually just get it done, because there's nothing stopping them from doing that. They are the government.

I want to direct my question to Grand River Environmental Network and Kevin Thomason.

I had the minister here this morning, and I asked very directly, "Who asked for these changes in schedule 3?" I had a ministerial briefing and we asked, "Who asked for these changes? Was there any evidence for these schedule changes to be made to official plans? For example, do

these changes conform to the provincial policy statement? Do they conform to the government's own growth strategy?" And no one could give me an answer to this.

So we're left to believe that a mayor possibly wrote a letter to the ministry or the minister and said, "I like what Steve Clark did earlier. He took it out. Can you please put it back in?" And my sense is that this government that continues to meddle and big-foot local planning is creating the kind of chaos that you talked about.

When it comes to Waterloo region, we think that the entire schedule 3 needs to be amended—we need to remove all the additional modifications in that area until someone has provided us evidence as to why they're back in.

Can you talk about how you think this has happened—because we can only guess it's because they're hiding the evidence—and how this is impacting municipal governments trying to make plans for communities like yours that have sensitive water issues and farmland and so forth?

Mr. Kevin Thomason: We saw how Minister Clark had to repeal the greenbelt changes because no one could explain how those lands were chosen. We saw Minister Calandra have to repeal those changes because no one could explain how they were—as soon as he came in. And then he repealed these forced boundary expansions in Waterloo and restored our original regional official plan because no one could explain where these thousands of acres had come from or why or how, just like in the greenbelt scandal.

We've had mayors now step forward—and I mentioned the greed, like kids in a candy store. These mayors are suddenly now being offered everything they had never been able to get before, and they want it all and they want everything, regardless of the cost. And yet, they're now asking for these expansions when they can't explain how these lands were selected or where they came from. It's very troubling to have no data, no justification, no research, no rationale or anything to where and how these lands—and when we see how destructive they are to our cohesive, successful regional official plan that is backed up by thousands of pages of data, that actually—

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

Mr. Kevin Thomason: —is the sustainable plan that we need to deliver the future; in fact, not only deliver the thousands of housing units that this government is looking for by 2031, but actually sustainably accommodate growth to 2051 with minimal farmland loss.

1450

Ms. Sandy Shaw: I agree with you.

I would just like to leave this comment: We know how they achieved the changes to the urban boundary expansion. There's an RCMP investigation getting to the bottom of this. The Auditor General identified this as preferential treatment given to insiders, speculators and developers. The Integrity Commissioner identified that. So there is no reason to believe that this is not what happened here again in schedule 3—that they're still at it, just coming at it a different way: a land grab by—

The Chair (Ms. Laurie Scott): Thank you very much. We'll now move to the independents. MPP McMahon.

Ms. Mary-Margaret McMahon: I would just like to recognize my amazing member from Kanata–Carleton, a newish MPP: Karen McCrimmon. Thank you for coming to represent Ottawa and beyond.

I have a quick question. I liked Jason's first supremely succinct answer, so I'm looking for another one.

When we're talking about DCs and them being removed—unfairly, I would add—what I'm hearing from regions is that they want to build the housing, but they need the pipes in the ground, waste water and water systems, and they don't have the money for it because of the lack of DCs. Do you think that affects it and impedes housing?

Mr. Jason Burggraaf: The impact on the cost of infrastructure goes directly into the cost of the sticker price, if you will, of a new house right away. For people who can't afford that, then it gets stuck—especially in these economic conditions with high interest rates and more precarious jobs. It keeps them on the sidelines of buying a home.

So it's a perverse cycle: We want housing demand to pay for the DCs, to pay for the infrastructure for the housing that's supposed to come—but people are on the sidelines, therefore they can't; but the sales are low, therefore the money isn't going into the DCs for the city to build the infrastructure in the first hand.

Ms. Mary-Margaret McMahon: So where will you get the money from to build the treatment plant?

Mr. Jason Burggraaf: Well, this is the thing. Again, the funding from the province, when it goes out to municipalities, is a much more efficient way of putting DCs into the ground first—

Ms. Mary-Margaret McMahon: Do you think \$800 million is enough?

Mr. Jason Burggraaf: Oh, no. We're going to need more than that, for sure.

Ms. Mary-Margaret McMahon: That's two plants.

Mr. Jason Burggraaf: Better than zero.

Ms. Mary-Margaret McMahon: Thank you.

Just very quickly to Kevin: I don't know if you saw the Canadian Environmental Law Association's submission. They're very concerned about expropriation taken before any environmental assessment. Your thoughts on that, in about 40 seconds?

Mr. Kevin Thomason: It's absurd. To just assume that development is going to proceed and start to buy up the land before you even know if it's suitable for the area is putting the cart before the horse—and it's the problems you get. Decades ago, developers bought lands out on our groundwater primary recharge moraine areas. They're now stuck with those holdings, and instead of doing the right thing and ensuring that our water sources are protected, they're instead trying to block reports like this from being sent to this committee that is allowing development out on the moraines, where it should never be happening in the first place.

Ms. Mary-Margaret McMahon: Thank you very much. Over to my colleague.

Ms. Aislinn Clancy: Mike Schreiner put forward a bill to legalize housing and support fourplexes, four storeys as-

of-right, and six to 11 storeys in major transit corridors. What do you think of that, from a home builder's perspective?

Mr. Jason Burggraaf: It very much matches the types of recommendations we have made to the city for its zoning.

Ms. Aislinn Clancy: Thank you very much.

I also want to talk to Kevin Thomason.

Thank you so much, Kevin. I know you were instrumental in getting a land trust that preserved land. So if a family wanted to donate land—here we have lands that people actually want to give for protection. If you weren't expropriating prime farmland, what other lands might you want to consult with and find in our area that would be more appropriate for an industrial complex and so on?

Mr. Kevin Thomason: Yes, I think that's really critical, and I think that's something that even these farmers in Wilmet who are being impacted realize. No one wants to say no to development. No one wants to be the manager who turned away the Beatles for a recording contract. We need to find the right places for these things. We can't have losers in our community. It's absolutely asinine.

Agriculture is the number one industry in Waterloo region—larger than our universities, larger than high-tech, larger than Toyota and manufacturing and everything like that. It employs more people, generating more revenues, creating more jobs. To think that we're going to threaten our agriculture industry, number one, and punch a hole in the heart of that agricultural fabric and impact not only those farmers being expropriated—and this site is so big. It's an eight-and-a-half-kilometre drive just around the site that is facing expropriation. If you have three and a half thousand people coming to shift-change while three and a half thousand people are leaving a shift, you're not going to get a farm combine down a road for 20 kilometres in any direction.

So the impacts are so broad—not to mention the water, the environment or whatever. We need—

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

Mr. Kevin Thomason: —to be coming up with these plans where everyone is a winner, putting development where development has always been anticipated and expected, close to our urban centres, close to transit, close to the infrastructure needed.

Ms. Aislinn Clancy: And we have tons of aggregate spaces that are vacated. We have lots of brownfield within Kitchener that sits undeveloped because we haven't done the proper assessments.

Mr. Kevin Thomason: Exactly. Right next to the existing Toyota plant is 400 acres of exhausted gravel pit. There are so many opportunities for brownfield and greyfield reclamations and doing this far more sustainably and in a way that everyone comes out a winner. We've got to do this as a province if we're—

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

We're going to go to the government side. MPP Grewal.

Mr. Hardeep Singh Grewal: Welcome to all of our guests. Thank you for coming today, and thank you for presenting.

Since I'm the parliamentary assistant to the Ministry of Transportation—and that has a big chunk of this bill—I'm going to ask you guys some general opinion questions, on your thoughts on the government's latest bill and basically building Ontario's infrastructure, building highways, public transportation and all of that.

I'd like to start with Jeff Mole, director of Community Enterprise Network. I'd like to ask you a few questions. It's very simple—if you're in support or if you would like to add commentary on what we're doing.

Do you support our freeze on renewal fees for photo ID cards and our drivers' licences?

Do you support our legislation to automatically now enrol people into renewing their licence plate? We first removed the sticker fee, and now we're automatically renewing people so they don't get caught off guard. If they're in good standing, they'll get that automatic renewal.

We also just introduced our One Fare system. That finally took place.

Our investments in public transit are massive, and we're going to be building new roads and highways.

In that context, are you supportive of the measures that the government has taken so far?

Mr. Jeff Mole: I wouldn't be speaking from our organization's standpoint on that. Personally, I think there's a lot to be said about that.

I think we really need to learn from the mistakes we made in the past. I have an interesting book by Borins and Chandran, *If You Build It*. It talks a lot about privatization and in particular about the 407. Folks around this table need to read this book to understand the mistakes we made 25 years ago and how to fix those—

Mr. Hardeep Singh Grewal: Just for the sake of time—because I'll be sharing some of my time with one of my colleagues, and I want to get to all of you—would your position be that you're against tolling?

Mr. Jeff Mole: Our organization would be prepared to set up a corporation to be that tolling agent, if that is so—

Mr. Hardeep Singh Grewal: So you're supportive of tolling highways?

Mr. Jeff Mole: I would say that there's plenty of room to get rid of tolls on the 407, because that's what was promised to the people of Ontario 25 years ago.

Mr. Hardeep Singh Grewal: Just simply put, are you in favour or are you against tolls on highways?

Mr. Jeff Mole: If the tolls are going to reduce taxes and improve services, then maybe it's not such a bad thing. However, having those tolls—what did we say the number was? Some \$567 million going to enrich the rich from tolls that are being paid for by the hard-working people of Ontario makes absolutely no sense. That \$567 million should go back to supporting—

Mr. Hardeep Singh Grewal: Thank you, Jeff. I'd like to keep the conversation going to our other presenters here today.

Our government is working hard to take tolls off. We took tolls off the 412—

Mr. Jeff Mole: So take them off the 407. You have the power.

Mr. Hardeep Singh Grewal:—we saved \$67 million back into the pockets of Ontario drivers, and we're continuing to do that.

My next question would be the similar line of questioning that I just asked, so I won't repeat myself. It's the same question to you, sir. Kevin Thomason, would you like to respond to that?

Mr. Kevin Thomason: I think it's clear that Highway 413 is absurd. The impacts it will do are devastating to the greenbelt and the entire headwater of the Oak Ridges moraine—but the way to answer for that is the 407 and removing the tolls on that. It's such an easy answer. It better utilizes existing infrastructure and solves a problem immediately, not years into the future.

Mr. Hardeep Singh Grewal: Before we even jump into the 413—are you supportive of our new One Fare transit system, giving people the opportunity to switch through, or are you supportive of us stopping the—

Mr. Kevin Thomason: It's not in the bill, but I am in favour of anything that eliminates chaos and simplifies things, and the One Fare system is improving that for transit. We need to get more people on transit, and that's clear.

1500

Then again, even your previous question regarding the removal of the licence fees and that—that's chaos. We had over a million Ontarians with expired licence plates and expired licences because they couldn't figure it out. We need simplicity. We need planning certainty. When a million of your own citizens can't figure something out, it's not a measure of success.

Mr. Hardeep Singh Grewal: It's pretty simple: We're going to be automatically renewing all licence plates going forward. If you're in good standing, that system will be simplified, where it doesn't cost people money, and we're putting money back into the people's pockets and creating systems which are actually much, much easier than they were previously.

Now I'd like to take that question over to Jason from the Greater Ottawa Home Builders' Association. What are your thoughts on what we're doing, as a government, to improve transit, roads and highways across the province?

Mr. Jason Burggraaf: Admittedly, a lot of what was in the budget yesterday or two days ago is really out of my bailiwick, and I don't have any background on it to comment intelligently.

However, the municipal infrastructure fund, the housing-enabling water and waste water systems, the extra money for skilled trades and youth apprenticeships were very welcome on our end. Anything that's going to enable housing affordability and encourage supply is going to be welcome by the industry in Ottawa.

Mr. Hardeep Singh Grewal: Thank you very much for your input.

I'd like to give the rest of my time to my colleague MPP Matt Rae.

The Chair (Ms. Laurie Scott): You have two minutes left, MPP Rae.

Mr. Matthew Rae: Thank you. I appreciate that.

My question is for Jason. Do you believe, if the provincial government reinstated DCs on affordable, non-profit housing, this would make affordable housing more expensive?

Mr. Jason Burggraaf: Yes, of course. Admittedly, it's hard not to argue that.

Mr. Matthew Rae: And if you make it more expensive for home builders, would that make it more expensive for builders that you represent?

Mr. Jason Burggraaf: Yes, it would. We represent both private developers as well as the too few affordable, non-profit developers that are in town. If anything, we need more capacity in that part of the industry.

Mr. Matthew Rae: Making affordable and non-profit housing more expensive—will that help solve the housing crisis?

Mr. Jason Burggraaf: No. There's a big gap in housing affordability, both private market affordable housing, social housing, transitional housing—right throughout the housing continuum, there's a significant gap in supply.

Mr. Matthew Rae: Is that it, Chair?

The Chair (Ms. Laurie Scott): No, you're good. You have 40 seconds.

Mr. Matthew Rae: Great.

I know we mentioned infrastructure—in the budget, \$1.8 billion for infrastructure, in addition to the \$1.2 billion through the Building Faster Fund to get pipes in the ground and roads built, as well.

I really hope my colleague from Beaches–East York votes for our budget, Chair. The fact that we have heard today—and she is supportive of building homes, and the importance of building that infrastructure in the ground.

The Chair (Ms. Laurie Scott): That's the end of this round of presentations.

I thank the presenters for coming. Thank you so much for your time today.

ONTARIO HOME BUILDERS'
ASSOCIATION

MS. NINA DEEB

The Chair (Ms. Laurie Scott): I'll ask the Ontario Home Builders' Association—Neil Rodgers—and Nina Deeb to come forward and take a spot at the front of the room.

The Ontario Sewer and Watermain Construction Association is no longer able to join us, so we just have two presenters this round.

Mr. Rodgers, please state your name and association at the beginning, and you can start any time.

Mr. Neil Rodgers: Thank you, Madam Chair and members of the committee. My name is Neil Rodgers. I am the interim CEO of the Ontario Home Builders' Association. Joining me is a colleague, Michelle Diplock, who is the manager of planning and government relations at the West End Home Builders' Association.

We meet again, Mary-Margaret. I'm a proud resident of Beaches–East York for over 40 years.

OHBA is the voice of the residential construction industry in Ontario, representing some 4,000 members across 27 locals spanning the province. Our members include land developers, builders, professional renovators and trade contractors. Collectively, we have the vital responsibility to build the housing supply and choices the people of Ontario need and want.

Following the introduction of Bill 150 last November, Bill 162 is a step in the right direction in bringing some stability to addressing the long-term growth management needs in this province. Through Bill 162, the province is proposing changes to the legislatively approved official plans of some of the province's fastest-growing municipalities to address local needs, while continuing to support the government's goal of building at least 1.5 million homes by 2031.

The proposed amendments reflected in Bill 162, pursuant to proposed amendments to the Official Plan Adjustments Act, 2023, will, if passed, retroactively reinstate municipally requested modifications to official plans for cities such as Barrie, Guelph and Peterborough and the regions of Niagara, Peel, Halton, York and Waterloo, to name a few.

The importance of ensuring that a municipal OP is comprehensive and executed in conformity with the provincial policy statement cannot be overstated, and long-term intra-regional planning and coordination is essential to ensure growth is accommodated in a planned and orderly manner. The provincial policy statement states that municipal OPs are “the most important vehicle for the implementation of the PPS for achieving comprehensive, integrated and long-term planning.”

A Place to Grow: Growth Plan for the Greater Golden Horseshoe instructs that every five years, municipalities within the plan area are required to accommodate population and employment forecasts set forth by the province to better coordinate planning for future growth. These growth forecasts are a foundational component of the plan and are reviewed by the minister, in conjunction with municipalities, through municipal comprehensive reviews.

The OHBA remains concerned that some decisions made through Bill 162, which upheld only those OP modifications that were requested by municipal councils, suggest that long-range planning is no longer focused on upholding provincial policy; rather, through Bill 162, some growth management decisions were politically driven, without due regard to the PPS.

OHBA submits that the province has the primary obligation to protect and uphold the principles and directives of both the PPS and the growth plan. The PPS speaks to the need for municipalities to promote healthy, livable and safe communities that are sustained through efficient development land use patterns which accommodate an appropriate mix and range of affordable and market-based residential types.

We are particularly troubled by the minister's decision in Bill 162 to not address either Hamilton or Ottawa. Two of our largest single-tier municipalities in the province were disregarded. OHBA grants that deference should be

given to municipal council decisions from time to time, but we are troubled when there is a misalignment between the voices of elected officials, including here at Queen's Park, and professional planning staff when addressing long-term provincial growth management policy.

Allow me to illustrate this problem via the city of Hamilton's OP process, which has been going on for almost nearly a decade. A consequential city staff report during the OP process recommended Hamilton's need for a significant urban boundary expansion, and there were three important conclusions I wish to raise. Under a no-expansion scenario, nearly 80% of all new households would need to be accommodated within apartment units, including those for families. The no-expansion scenario was not originally modelled in the city's land use needs assessment because it did not meet the PPS and was not considered good planning. This point was confirmed by municipal affairs and housing staff in September 2021, and based on that ministry review, it appeared that the no-boundary-expansion scenario would pose a risk to not conforming with the PPS insofar that it would not provide sufficient land to accommodate all market segments so as to avoid land shortages. Not satisfied with their own professional planning staff's advice, the city retained an outside third-party reviewer. Guess what? That advice validated the earlier staff recommendations.

1510

So what does the Hamilton decision and the effect of Bill 162 mean? Without a justified urban boundary expansion to accommodate a range of housing types, per the PPS, the city will need to densify and accommodate all new residents through apartments, eliminating the choice for residents.

We congratulate the municipalities such as Burlington, Ottawa and Milton that made a commendable decision to properly plan for the longer term and were willing to make the tough decisions to uphold the integrity of provincial land use policy.

It is our respectful opinion that the province has the principal responsibility to uphold the integrity of their own planning policies. Long-term and responsible decision-making must matter for the greater good, or risk not offering housing choices to Ontarians and prolong the housing supply and affordability crisis in this province.

Thank you, Madam Chair.

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

We'll now move to the next presenter. Nina Deeb, you can start when you're ready—up to seven minutes.

Ms. Nina Deeb: Good afternoon, Chair and committee members. My name is Nina Deeb.

On schedule 1: I would like to discuss the Environmental Assessment Act. This is an expansion of the strong expropriation powers that the government already has. Expropriation to acquire land for the public good must not occur before an environmental assessment. Government must not expropriate land without evidence. Farmers are our food suppliers and are not obstacles to be pushed out of the way. Highway 413 could pave over thousands of acres of the

lands we rely on. This is a serious threat to our food and water supplies. We do not need this highway.

Schedule 2, the Highway Traffic Act: An Ontario driver's licence currently is \$90 for five years—\$7.50 every six months. This is a very tiny reduction of \$15 every five years.

While government fees are reduced or frozen, most agencies of government are increasing their fees. Government fees and taxation are how we fund our social programs and supports. Tarion recently increased their ceiling fees by 343%, on January 1. OMVIC is increasing their consumer payment fee by 25% on April 1.

Schedule 3, the Official Plan Adjustments Act: I'm from Waterloo region, and the province continues to interfere in the official regional plans—from government-forced urban boundary expansions, to ministerial zoning orders, to the greenbelt. The government is emerging from admission of making changes to official plans based on a flawed process and must excuse itself from further legal entanglements.

Schedule 4, the Photo Card Act: There's no change. It's the exact same fee as what it was before: \$35 for five years.

Schedule 5, the Protecting Against Carbon Taxes Act: It is this government that launched a new carbon-pricing tax on January 1, 2022. This money for a carbon tax is already being collected by the province. We don't know what this money is funding.

When a political party is elected to form the government, it's elected to be the government of the day for a limited term. The party must be re-elected to continue governing into the future.

The government of the day is working with a 10-year transportation/transit plan that's scheduled to absorb \$100 billion of our budgeting.

It has awarded a 95-year lease to a foreign corporation to build on public waterfront lands. The people of Ontario will be charged to use the lands that used to be theirs and will likely be charged to park in the parking garage that we are paying to build.

Schedule 6, the Public Transportation and Highway Improvement Act: The only tolled highway in Ontario is the 407. It was built in 1997 as a P3 pilot project. It was sold two years later, in 1999, for \$3.1 billion. Just 10% of this highway was sold in 2019, for \$3.25 billion. So 20 years after the original sale, the 10% was sold for more than what we actually even sold the entire thing for. Based on this sale, a value can be put on the highway of \$32.5 billion as of 2019. The 407 would have been toll-free in four years. We would have paid for it. We would have been driving on it without paying for this anymore.

When the market feedback is that the service is overpriced, the correct response is to bow to the downward pressure and to reduce your pricing. The true business model: The business would adjust their price to meet market demand for the consumers, to entice ridership. The market downward pressures are ignored by big corporations and finance.

We are making payments on a provincially owned portion of the Highway 407. This newer part of the 407 is encumbered. The toll rates on this newer extension are

40.5% less than the original older portion that is being administered by the private sector. We do not need to build another highway for the people to use. The 407 contract must be revisited. The people of Ontario have already paid to build this highway.

Referendums: We do need legislation regarding when a referendum should be done when a decision will affect valuable public lands or assets or reduce the quality of life of citizens—for example, Ontario Place, Ontario Science Centre, the current carbon tax we have, Highway 407, the Ontario land registry system sale, the Ontario property tax assessments diversion to MPAC. We should have a referendum if a government decision will reduce the quality of life of citizens—for example, reduction of disability payments or social assistance payments, as was done in one sweep by the common sense revolutionaries.

The government suggests protections against what future governments could do. These protections would have been useful now against the very actions of this government.

This is an omnibus bill—in comparison with the omnibus Savings and Restructuring Act that amended 43 pieces of legislation, not really; it's actually a very small bill. The thrust is privatization and deregulation. It serves the interest of transnational entities. It creates revenue streams for new corporations not yet formed in Ontario. This bill is on the same path—to reduce and get government out of the way so that big corporations can take over without any restraints or oversight. This familiar anti-government, anti-politician theme aligns with getting obstacles out of the way for transnational interest. “Robbing the hood” is reverse Robin Hood—it takes from the poor to further enrich corporations. The government had protections in place to prevent these types of foreign corporate takeovers. These protections were removed, recalibration of our foreign investment policies remained to encourage takeovers—

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

Ms. Nina Deeb: —paving the way for corporate transnational capital to take over important government functions.

Our pension funds must be repatriated with their contributors. These funds must not be used to oppose the interest of the people of Ontario.

We can get this done. The first step must be to build housing. The people to build up our infrastructure need homes. We must build housing so that not only will they come but they will stay. That is the first step that we need to do.

Thank you very much for having me here today, and I do look forward to answering your questions.

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

We'll move to questions. MPP Shaw, please start.

Ms. Sandy Shaw: I'm going to begin my questioning with Mr. Rodgers and Ms. Diplock. It's nice to see you here.

We may not actually come at it the same way, but—I don't know if you were in the room when I had been asking over and over again how the changes in schedule 3 arrived there. There is no evidence that these came from good planning policy. There's no evidence that the government wasn't just asked—someone picked up the phone

and called the ministry and said to take the things that they took in and put them back in.

So I support what you're saying—if we're going to grow this province in a way that makes sense, in a way that makes sense for your members, with predictability and rules that we stick to.

How do you feel about the fact that this government, for over a year now, maybe a year and a half, has been bigfooting planning, has made chaos in local planning departments across the province and seems to not even care to follow the Places to Grow or the provincial policy statement, which is the only way that we can get on the same page and have builders build the homes we need?

Mr. Neil Rodgers: Thank you for the question.

I'm not quite sure. The suggestion of how the numbers were established—

Ms. Sandy Shaw: Sorry; I just want to clarify my question.

What I'm talking about is that they made amendments in schedule 3—they put back amendments to official policy plans across the province that they took out, and then they put it back. So municipal planning departments across the province are saying, “Where is this coming from? How can we make decisions?”

How can we support builders when this government is just mucking over and over again with the provincial policy statement, making it such an unpredictable playing field for your builders that need to put capital at risk to build homes?

1520

Mr. Neil Rodgers: Bill 150, which was introduced and passed last fall—our members certainly were very worried as to its direction and what its endgame was going to be. We did raise multiple concerns to the government, to the ministers, as to what this uncertainty would mean with respect to long-term land supply, but also, more importantly, what it meant to those entities and businesses, both builders and individuals or companies, who needed manufacturing- and warehousing-type space. What would that business uncertainty do? Would people see Ontario as a place where we do not have long-term certainty?

There was a lot of time taken. The minister, Minister Calandra, undertook a deliberate effort to go back and ask municipalities what their intentions were, and he consulted with them. The result of that was Bill 162.

I think I went on the record saying we are generally pleased with Bill 162. Where we have some ongoing concerns—and you heard my colleague Jason from Ottawa and my colleague Michelle from the West End Home Builders' Association. Ottawa and Hamilton were not reflected in this bill—two of our largest municipalities in this province. That is bothersome, and that is particularly where our comments are directed to.

Ms. Sandy Shaw: Yes, and I will agree with you that we don't know why these municipalities are in and we don't know why Hamilton is out. There is no evidence. The ministries are not communicating how this got there.

I could talk about Hamilton and urban boundary expansions for quite some time, and I might have a different take on it than you and Michelle.

What I want, in the short time, is to move onto something different, if that's okay.

We need home builders, 100%. We need home builders to build homes, and we know that and we respect that.

What I want to talk to you a little bit about today is your take on this idea of the missing middle.

What interests me are small home builders. I imagine that most builders are small home builders. All the neighbourhoods across Hamilton, for example, were built by small home builders.

The government has made it really clear that they are opposed to fourplexes as part of achieving that missing middle, whether it's inside an expanded boundary or not. Do you know what I mean? We still need these kinds of housing options. So I just want to know, from your perspective, what we could do to unlock the capacity of small builders and renovators across the province, who may not have the financing and the ability to build entire neighbourhoods or towers, but they are what we need to provide the kind of continuum of housing that everyone wants.

Mr. Neil Rodgers: On the missing middle: Ms. McMahon will know all too well the project where I suffered a painful retirement, at Queen and Coxwell, where we were truly innovators in putting up an all-wood, six-storey rental apartment building. Do you know the irony of that? It took two and a half years to approve—not without McMahon's support at council, but the planning department. It took six months to build.

Accelerating missing middle and finding opportunities for missing middle is perhaps the easiest thing to say and the hardest thing to accomplish.

Ms. Sandy Shaw: That's unfortunate. What I would like to see is a government that is removing the obstacles so that you can build what sounds like a very cool, all-lumber building. And so—

Mr. Neil Rodgers: I just want to say one thing. There are a lot of municipalities that are doing missing middle, gentle-density intensification across Ontario. I congratulate those municipalities that have the political courage to talk to their ratepayers and say, "This is what's right for our community." I'm not convinced the province should intervene in that.

I would hope the province would aspire to be bigger and bolder and do as-of-right along transit lines, BRTs and things to that effect. Leave the small stuff to local councils. The big, heavy lifting must come from the province.

Ms. Sandy Shaw: I agree with you, but this government has shown no hesitancy to interfere with local planning decisions and bigfoot them. So I agree with you, but they—

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

The independent: MPP McMahon.

Ms. Mary-Margaret McMahon: This is when I'm sad that I only have four and a half minutes and I am now sharing with my colleague, because I could speak all day.

I wish this government had my track record on housing—MPP YIMBY, yes in my backyard—and was never afraid to stand up.

As we know, I nearly took early retirement with the old Lick's Homeburgers site, for six storeys in the Beach. You would have thought the sky was falling. But it's a beautiful building, and people are there now.

The other thing with that building Neil was talking about, which I believe is now kind of as-of-right across the city, finally, is that we need changes in the building code—I'm looking at you guys—for mass timber, which is a fantastic way to build homes, to not cover them up in drywall, like what's there for the biophilic design purposes. So let's change that.

Anyway, thank you all for coming in. I really appreciate it.

I'm really disappointed that my other constituent who was listed to speak is not here, because then we would have had a beautiful Beaches–East York reunion.

Just following up on the missing-middle talk: What do you think, Neil, about building in existing neighbourhoods? Should the government focus on building up in existing neighbourhoods, looking at provincial land, as you said, along subway corridors? I live just off of the Danny, and it's only two storeys or four storeys at some parts, and there's a subway underneath. So what do you think about those? Also, your thoughts on fourplexes—just to throw in a little wrinkle.

Mr. Neil Rodgers: Meeting the aspirational goal of 1.5 million homes is a Herculean task. That is effectively doubling what we have been doing already. We were at a 33-year high in 2022—the housing stats are that we were at a 33-year high of housing completions. To get to 1.5 million, we have to double—not double down, double.

Meeting housing supply is a spectrum—each has an important role to play in getting to the number. So whether it's fourplexes, whether it's six storeys, whether it's 60 storeys, whether it's ground-related housing, every part helps. That's what the provincial policy statement speaks to. It's a range of affordable and market-based housing. You cannot look at it in isolation. You cannot necessarily pick and choose. If you choose to pick and choose, there will be some consequences. We won't see them today. We will probably see them in the future.

You talked about intensification. The term "yellowbelt" came into my mind when you mentioned that. Again, there are municipalities—I was told St. Catharines; I couldn't believe it. They adopted a four-unit, four-storey bylaw in the last number of weeks. If they can do it, any municipality in the province of Ontario can do it. I don't mean to get into a political conversation, but I think municipalities should take that at their own steam and at their own effort.

The provincial role in land use management planning, in my opinion, has to be far more aspirational—housing-supportive policies that align with infrastructure to optimize both. Provincial land—there's a lot of it. It could certainly be accelerated. I think there needs to be a lot of policies coming out of this building, and government ministries need to be considered under what I'm going to call a housing optimization lens, where you can leverage those provincial assets—

The Chair (Ms. Laurie Scott): I'm sorry; I didn't give you a warning, but that's all for this round.

1530

There's another round on that side, so we'll go to the government. MPP Coe.

Mr. Lorne Coe: Mr. Rodgers, thank you very much for being here. You're becoming a bit of a regular at standing committee, aren't you? We always appreciate your feedback and dialogue that you provide.

You will know that there are a number of former councillors here, so when you're talking about the provincial policy statement and you're talking about the growth plan and then you talk about the missing middle, it resonates with us.

I want to go back to the discussion on the missing middle that you referred to and have you talk a little bit more broadly about what adjustments or steps that could be taken within the context of what we're discussing today to get to that missing middle and make adjustments where there are challenges. You spoke correctly about challenges that exist within particular areas across Ontario. As a former regional councillor, I saw it regularly at Durham regional council, and it wasn't unusual to see the lengths of times you described, as well. I think for the benefit of those watching and listening, it merits some further discussion.

Mr. Neil Rodgers: I'm not sure how much more I can say on the notion of missing middle or its role in assisting in meeting housing targets. There remains some important work in terms of planning reforms that can assist in that respect. Our municipal planning approvals process and streams are far from desirable. The government has pledged and has already committed to—I think we're up to housing supply action bill number four; we patiently await number five.

We have been at the table with ministry staff and other like-minded associations, including the Association of Municipalities of Ontario. There is a high degree of alignment on many of the measures that can be done by government.

I go back to the revelation that it took two and a half years to get what is a pretty benign form of housing built, and we were able to execute that on a construction line in six months. Just imagine if we could have shrunk those approval timelines dramatically. Quite frankly, one of the lessons learned—it was a painful one from a financial perspective, personally speaking. It soured myself and a few others to—"Do you know what? Working on the golf course is probably much more fun than working at city hall."

Mr. Lorne Coe: Thanks for that response. It's not unlike what some of my colleagues heard at the standing committee on regional government review going forward.

To MPP Pang, please.

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

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

The Chair (Ms. Laurie Scott): You have three and a half minutes.

Mr. Billy Pang: As we are dealing with the housing crisis—"crisis" is the word that we are working on. It's not just a problem, but a crisis. "Crisis" means leadership.

When we're looking at the housing crisis, we put forth a lot of different bills to help municipalities have more tools to build more homes and build faster, including exempting some development charges for municipalities. Some of the homes that can be exempt from the development charges are the affordable and not-for-profit housing.

The NDP proposes to reinstate development charges for affordable and non-profit housing. Can this help build more affordable homes and solve the housing supply?

Mr. Neil Rodgers: I'll allow my colleague Michelle to speak to that.

The Chair (Ms. Laurie Scott): If you would just state your name at the beginning, that would be great.

Ms. Michelle Diplock: I'm Michelle Diplock, manager of planning and government relations with the West End Home Builders' Association.

Thank you for the question.

The short answer is no, it will not help enable more non-profit development.

We are currently going through development charge review processes in Hamilton and Burlington.

And this is kind of the ongoing conversation that we're having with our municipal partners in terms of, how do you incentivize and enable more affordable housing to be built, and how do you encourage partnerships between developers and the non-profit sector?

Waiving the development charges is one of those key tools that I believe everybody generally supports in terms of how we can actually get more homes built at a more affordable price point. I'm just noting that development charges are a significant cost factor on the cost of a home and the cost to construct.

Mr. Billy Pang: As you may be aware, many municipalities have a strong pushback on the development charges that they love collecting. Some are claiming that they lost one quarter of their budget and their income, and they made a long list—when I look at that list, I cannot articulate how these items are related to this exemption.

From your perspective, what do you think the impact is on the municipalities? Do they need to exempt those development charges from those particular types of homes?

Ms. Michelle Diplock: I'll use the example from Hamilton, as Hamilton was already exempting non-profit and affordable housing providers; it was a one-off decision of council, for the most part. So every non-profit developer needed to go to council for an approval, and there was a lot of uncertainty in terms of whether or not they would actually be able to get that, because they can't count on it.

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

Mr. Billy Pang: Do you think that's the reason that they can meet their target?

Ms. Michelle Diplock: No. I think it will help to accelerate the supply of housing of all ranges and types—and that we are able to better afford that type of development.

The Chair (Ms. Laurie Scott): I will now move on to the next round and the official opposition. MPP Shaw.

Ms. Sandy Shaw: I just want to make a comment, also, that in terms of this government's performance when it comes to affordable housing, the federal housing minister said that they are at risk of losing funding because they're not making the targets. He wrote a really strongly worded letter—that if this government doesn't get going on building affordable housing units, they're going to lose \$357 million, which is a lot of money. So the development charges being waived for affordable housing is not the problem. They just need to get it done when it comes to affordable housing.

I want to go back to the comment that Mr. Rodgers made about how the government needs to get together across departments to make this decision.

The government had a housing task force that made quite a few recommendations, and really, it's over two years now, and the government just goes out of their way to ignore these recommendations.

The province of BC also has a housing crisis; they're not immune. There's an NDP government there, and they came up with some bold decisions and choices, and it's the kind of things that we were talking about earlier. They have seen their housing starts go up by 11%—as you have said, as we have seen, in Ontario, it has gone down by 7% last year, so we're going in the wrong direction. The NDP government in British Columbia, I would argue, did what this Ford government continues to refuse to do. They enacted policies—the kind of policies I was talking about before—and zoning reforms. The minister there said they were inspired with these changes by Ontario's housing task force recommendations.

My question to you is, can this government not play a role with some bold policy moves, particularly for small home builders? They could lower the barriers. They could have small business supports for small builders. They could have lower-cost financing. There are all kinds of things they could do. They could have preplanning and approval assistance. They could pre-approve building designs. There are many things that this government could do to let small builders go at it and not experience the kind of negative stories that you're sharing here with us.

So my question—there is a question here, and my question is: Why is this government ignoring their own housing task force policy recommendations that are being picked up in BC, where they're seeing huge successes in building housing?

1540

Mr. Neil Rodgers: I may not characterize it as ignoring them.

I can tell you, we are at the table and have been at the table for a number of months. I know Minister Calandra knows that our patience is not—

Ms. Sandy Shaw: Limitless?

Mr. Neil Rodgers: Let me restate that. We are impatiently waiting the release of the HSAP 5.0. As I mentioned, we have been urging them to be bolder. We have a generational crisis on our hands in terms of both housing supply and affordability. This government should pull out all the stops, in our opinion. More needs to be done.

I remain confident that Minister Calandra will continue to invite us to the table and bring forward legislation this session.

Ms. Sandy Shaw: Well, lucky you. You're at the table. I'm happy to hear that, and I'm happy to hear that you're pushing and advocating for the government to be bolder. I think that's exactly what we need to do.

I have young adult children, like we all do, who cannot afford a house in the community that they live in, and they may not be able to afford a large, single-family home. They would like to be able to live in the community. My daughter, for example, wants to be able to raise her family in the same community that she was raised in.

What you're talking about, this generational crisis, needs a sense of urgency from the government. I will argue that this greenbelt grab, the urban boundary expansion, the flip-flops on the provincial planning statement and so forth have set us so far back. I'm impatient. You're impatient.

Is there anything you can say here, not to the government, but to the young people in this province who want to see a glimmer of hope that one day they will have their own place to live? Can you, from the perspective of your members, offer a glimmer of hope to young families in this province?

Mr. Neil Rodgers: I think the foundations are beginning to get in place. We have long been employing the term "housing-supportive infrastructure"; the government is using the term "housing-enabling." We are not arguing on that point.

The fact of the matter is that building housing takes an incredibly long time. I heard one of you, earlier, ask my colleague—and I won't disagree; it takes at least a dozen years to bring a greenfield site to fruition. And it takes about seven or eight years to bring a high-rise site from approvals to occupancy. So housing and infrastructure share one thing: a painfully long time to execute.

What's important here is that government, municipalities, and the building and development sector are all on board with the infrastructure investments that were made. Last week's announcement of \$1.8 billion was particularly consequential. You don't ever take your foot off the gas in terms of that investment—and it is an investment, and I think it has to be seen that way.

Do we need more? Absolutely. Do we need to rethink how we fund critical infrastructure? Are development charges an outdated tool? Do we need to look at something more progressive, more 21st-century? Yes. Hopefully, these discussions begin to happen. But growth takes time.

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

Ms. Sandy Shaw: Thank you very much, Chair.

The Chair (Ms. Laurie Scott): Moving to the independent: MPP Clancy.

Ms. Aislinn Clancy: I want to thank Nina—I agree a lot. I appreciate your advocacy for land protections, to help us ensure we have a livable planet. The climate crisis is the biggest thing that will affect all of us if we don't have a place to live that's livable.

I have a question for Neil. Mike Schreiner proposed a "Legalize It" act which would be legalizing fourplexes,

legalizing four storeys as-of-right, and legalizing six to 11 storeys on major transit corridors. If this were the case, in your experience as a home builder, what would the impact be on spurring home development?

Mr. Neil Rodgers: It would be impactful. I think where the rubber will hit the road is—simply enshrining it in provincial legislation is one thing; getting it done at the local level is critically important. Those pieces of legislation would not and should not get into writing zoning by-laws for municipalities, but let's face it, that's where municipalities need to see the light. Municipalities need to educate and inform their constituents and their ratepayer groups that this is critically important. We all know that that is generally the elephant in the room—trying to convey the public good of intensification to ratepayers.

We have seen laneway housing in my community. I support it. It is the beginning of the housing spectrum. It's a small but important start.

Ms. Aislinn Clancy: I just want to mention that we didn't get the chance to debate that because it was discharged to committee.

One of the main barriers to housing development I hear of is shortage of labour, high cost of cement etc.

Do you not agree that densification is more efficient? My understanding is that 70% of the land across Ontario is zoned as single-family dwelling—70%. I know it's about choice. So I just wonder, is it not more efficient to build up in gentle density to maximize and optimize the number of units we can make within these limitations we have?

Mr. Neil Rodgers: Again, it's easier to say in words than it is in practice. Don't discount the incredible difficulty we have in managing intensification on our roads. We've all been victims of congestion on our roads, navigating neighbourhoods and streets—

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

Mr. Neil Rodgers: I think one of the common misnomers is that an intensification site has an abundance of public infrastructure, whether that's sewer, water, roads. The city of Toronto is operating on a 150-year-old wooden sewer system—

Ms. Aislinn Clancy: I'm going to interrupt you. I do believe that every place has different amounts of capacity and we should optimize that capacity.

Can you talk a little bit, Nina, about the worries you have about expropriating land before the environmental assessments are done?

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

Ms. Nina Deeb: Thank you for the question.

I think that we should know that we need the land before we expropriate, so we shouldn't be putting the cart before the horse. You think about it from the perspective of the person who is being expropriated—who may have been there for hundreds of years or who knows. That could also be their livelihood, could be the family farm. It's very concerning, because we need the food supplies.

The Chair (Ms. Laurie Scott): The last round is to the government side. MPP Kanapathi.

Mr. Logan Kanapathi: Thank you for being here and thank you for your presentation. I could see the passion for building 1.5 million homes—more than that, as Mr. Rodgers, the way you present it. I came from the municipal world too. We understand your language.

The land use plan is a provincial plan. We have been working, in the last six years, on how we can increase our housing supply. It has been long overdue.

I was watching, through my eyes and 13 years at Markham council, moving one file to another table from planning to building, building to zoning—it's months and years.

On top of that, I come from a two-tier system, a regional system, and the process, more than infrastructure, I would say, is causing the home building crisis, and everything added back into that to homebuyers—when I say “process,” it's from OP to rezoning to amendments, all the way to getting a building permit. It takes six to seven years to build one house—forget about 1,000 houses, building subdivisions.

1550

The Ontario Home Builders' Association is the voice of the residential construction industry, representing 4,000 members in Ontario. So I start with, how will this bill help those that you advocate for? Tell me about Bill 162.

Ms. Michelle Diplock: Definitely, a sense of urgency around remedying the housing crisis is very important. We appreciate that the government is moving quickly on a number of these initiatives and that it is an evolving process as more and more legislation comes through.

We're very interested in how we can also work together to streamline the approval process so we are not taking two to three years for just the planning discussion, because construction can take also take a long time, depending on the size of the development.

Mr. Logan Kanapathi: Thank you.

I'm also sharing my time with my good colleague MPP Dowie.

The Chair (Ms. Laurie Scott): MPP Dowie, please go ahead. You have five minutes left.

Mr. Andrew Dowie: Terrific.

I want to thank everyone for being here.

I'll put my former municipal hat on, as well, as not only councillor, but also as one of the permit issuers. I was involved in the municipal process, so I'd like to dive into this a little bit with the home builders' association.

When you file a permit, if you need to go to zoning, you are going to have to have public consultation and hear from the people in the community and decide whether you are going to amend and receive their feedback or not. The as-of-right discussion really is the removal of that public feedback—about whether the neighbourhood can influence how the neighbourhood will grow and continue on. So I want to explore this.

Understanding where you're coming from on just taking away some of the barriers—do you have an opinion as to how much involvement a neighbourhood should have in terms of influencing the style and look of the neighbourhood as it develops?

Mr. Neil Rodgers: We are not suggesting, nor would we ever advocate for, the removal of public comment and public oversight in how planning policies are created in municipalities. That's very entrenched in statute; it's very entrenched as a process.

I just want to respond to your question about as-of-right zoning. As-of-right zoning would not take away ratepayer rights. How an as-of-right zoning bylaw would be established—it would be all front-ended. So that process would clearly articulate, clearly consult with the community on what the vision is.

Alberta has—and in fact, we have in Ontario, but it has been rarely exercised—a development permit system. Like I said, it's all front-end loaded. So it hasn't taken away public commentary. Where there is public interaction is, perhaps there may be a variance that is required for that specific purpose, but the actual zoning—the municipality, the community have broken the back at the front end. That is tremendously important.

Mr. Andrew Dowie: Is the front end the official plan amendment that would govern the regulations that would follow, or are you still envisioning something specific to the development being proposed in terms of that consultation?

Ms. Michelle Diplock: One of the challenges that we find with municipal zoning is, the province does require that municipalities update their official plans regularly, and the zoning is meant to follow the updates to the official plan—often, this piece is one of the challenges that doesn't get implemented. So we have cases across Ontario where the high-level policy, the provincial policies and the municipal official plans, are all designed to facilitate growth and development, but the zoning policies are very,

very behind. Part of what that sets us up for is, it's allowing people to have commenting opportunities on really old zoning bylaws. In Hamilton, we still have zoning from the 1950s. Most municipalities are somewhere between—I think there are some with 1913 as their start dates.

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

Ms. Michelle Diplock: So part of the challenge and part of what we're looking for is, when we have a modernization of the zoning bylaw, it can very much help set an appropriate conversation for development—because the high-level policies say, "We want growth here," but the zoning says no. That's where you get into those contested conversations with neighbourhoods.

Mr. Andrew Dowie: I'd love to know if you have on offer an opportunity to have parallel processes or concurrent processes during the permit stage, where we may be able to inform ourselves as to how to better remove those timelines that are leading to delay.

Mr. Neil Rodgers: At the permitting stage—I'm not quite sure I understand the question. It's commonplace for landowners to file both an official plan amendment and a zoning bylaw and a site plan application—

The Chair (Ms. Laurie Scott): We're out of time, so you might have to just have that conversation off-record.

Interjection.

The Chair (Ms. Laurie Scott): I know. We'll leave you all hanging.

That concludes our business for today.

I'll give a reminder that the deadline for filing written submissions to Bill 162 is 7 p.m. on March 28, 2024.

The committee is now adjourned until 9 a.m. on Thursday, April 11. Thank you, everyone.

The committee adjourned at 1557.

STANDING COMMITTEE ON HERITAGE, INFRASTRUCTURE AND CULTURAL POLICY

Chair / Présidente

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Mr. Andrew Dowie (Windsor–Tecumseh PC)

Ms. Sandy Shaw (Hamilton West–Ancaster–Dundas / Hamilton-Ouest–Ancaster–Dundas ND)

Also taking part / Autres participants et participantes

Ms. Jessica Bell (University–Rosedale ND)

Ms. Catherine Fife (Waterloo ND)

Clerk / Greffier

Mr. Isaiah Thorning

Staff / Personnel

Ms. Sude Bahar Beltan, research officer,
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Mr. Michael Vidoni, research officer,
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