

Bill 108 intended to address planning backlog: Elliott



By Brock Weir

Politicians are never going to agree on 100 per cent of the issues 100 per cent of the time, but it is important to have the lines of communication open," says Newmarket-Aurora MPP Christine Elliott.

Ms. Elliott, who was elected to represent Aurora's north riding in the 2018 Municipal Election sat down with The Auroran on Friday afternoon to discuss the one-year anniversary of the Provincial Election, one which saw the Progressive Conservative Party of Ontario sweep into power after nearly a decade-and-a-half of governance by the Liberal Party.

For the PCs, Friday's anniversary was a day of celebration, but it also came at the end of a week of significant legislative changes ahead of MPPs' extended summer recess, including Bill 108. Billed as the "More Homes, More Choice Act", the Bill has been touted by the Provincial government as a way to improve housing stock across Ontario and pave the way for more affordable housing.

The legislation has, however, received widespread condemnation from many communities, including Aurora, who see the Bill as restoring the powers of the former Ontario Municipal Board (OMB) to the Province's new Local Planning Appeals Tribunal (LPAT) and, therefore, take away the powers of a municipality to have ultimate say on how their communities develop and grow.

"The current Provincial Government just hammed in ill-conceived and ill-considered legislation with literally no input so they could all rush off on a five-month vacation," said Mayor Tom Mrakas in his social media channels on Friday morning. "I guess the Legislature is 'closed for business.'" (For more on the Mayor's response, click [HERE](#))

Responding to the matter during the interview, Ms. Elliott says it is the Government's "responsibility to listen to those concerns and react wherever we are able."

"I have the greatest respect for Mayor Mrakas," she says. "We have had a conversation about that particular Bill and we agree on some parts of it, but we agree to disagree on other parts. We're never going to agree 100 per cent on everything, the world doesn't work that way, but I think it is really important that we have the lines of communication open."

The intent of the Bill, she says is to "make sure that we can open up more housing, that we can create more supply."

"We know it is very difficult for people across the Province to be able to purchase their own property and there are many different issues we need to take a look at in that respect," she continues. "There are some concerns with respects to the Appeal Tribunal. Our

goal is to make sure that we can have those hearings happen.

?There is a big backlog happening right now. We want to make sure we can have that expedited as much as possible while still making sure people have the right to an appropriate, proper hearing, of course. There are some issues and concerns around that, but certainly from the Government perspective, we believe this is being done in the proper manner in order to reduce the backlog and make housing more affordable.?

Friday was a milestone in a tumultuous year for the Provincial Conservative government.

Elected on a ?blue wave? and sweeping back into Queen's Park with a majority, recent opinion polls have suggested that support for the Party's policies is waning.

Indeed, protests outside Ms. Elliott's Newmarket constituency office have, in recent months, become a regular Wednesday afternoon fixture.

To this end, Ms. Elliott says she is listening to what constituents are telling her, whether they are communicating their message directly to her or to her staff, including office manager Dawn Gallagher-Murphy.

?It is very important for me to be an appropriate representative, to know what people are concerned about or want to know more about, so we are addressing those local concerns,? says Ms. Elliott. ?On a Provincial level, the people of Ontario elected us last year to get Ontario back into good fiscal shape and to create more jobs, and to make some difficult decisions. We are being responsible financial stewards. We inherited a deficit of \$15 billion, which is a lot of money, that we need to eliminate that deficit and we have a responsible plan in order to do that over a five-year time frame.

?We know people depend on many services ? healthcare and education probably being the most important services that people need to continue to rely on ? so we are making sure that we bring that deficit under control in a responsible way. We have pledged and will commit another \$1.3 billion to the health care budget over the next year and an additional \$700 million to education.?

Considering the recent backlash to how Provincial money is being spent, Ms. Elliott adds that it is important as a government to ?explain to the people of Ontario why we think [new policies or new bills] are important.?

?We still have work to do to explain some of those issues and what we're finding is when we do that in a fulsome manner that people do understand why we're doing things and they understand the difficulties they are facing in our economic situation right now,? she says. ?\$15 billion is a huge deficit. It is going to take us several years to bring our economy and our budget back to balance, but we are dedicated to doing that because that is really important for the people of Ontario and not just for people of my generation, but for the next generation.

?I don't want to see young people in this province having their future held back by decisions that are being made today. We want to make sure that all of the young people in Ontario can stay here, can have their futures here, their jobs, careers, own a home, have their families here, take their vacations here. That's why we are doing it, so everyone can have that opportunity.?