

GETTING THINGS DONE

By Mayor Tom Mrakas

Now that that the current Provincial government has rushed to pass Bill 108 on its way to a five-month break from the Legislature, many have asked me what exactly are the implications for our Town?

What will Bill 108 mean for Aurora?

This Bill is being touted as the solution to the very real need for more affordable housing; that somehow the answer to affordable housing is to increase the supply. And how does this Bill aim to increase the supply of housing? Well, by removing the 'obstacles' to faster development and that means making significant changes to 15 different Acts and in turn negatively affect a municipality's ability to ensure good planning within our own community.

I've heard several MPPs parroting the same line, that solving the affordability crisis is a matter of 'simple economics.' Well, if housing were widgets, then yes. It is simple economics to say greater supply means lower price, and greater affordability.

But houses aren't widgets. Increasing supply won't magically increase availability of affordable housing. What it might do? Further devalue the homes that are already on the market.

Right now, York Region is already experiencing a near 30% drop in housing prices. If you follow the current government's logic, then sellers can expect an even greater drop in home prices as all this new supply further floods the market. Isn't that the goal of the Bill? More houses equal lower prices. That's the 'simple economics' they're touting isn't it?

Not that that will happen in any event. The Bill does not even define what constitutes 'Affordable housing' let alone how the type of housing that needs to get built 'apartment buildings, bungalows' will get built. Just the simplistic argument that more means more affordable.

The Bill has also reduced and capped what developers will have to pay for Development Charges (DCs are the charges that developers pay to help build infrastructure, playgrounds, and all the great amenities we have in our community).

The current government argues that the cost savings realized by the developers will be passed along to those purchasing homes. With greatest respect, based on what evidence? Even if individual home purchasers were to realize some savings, those savings would likely be quickly eaten up by increased property taxes. DCs pay for the hard and soft services that are needed by our community. If they aren't coming from the DCs? well, it needs to come from somewhere. It's either through property tax increases or through drastic cuts to services.

Growth does not pay for growth. For every dollar that a municipality collects in taxes we must expend \$1.30 to cover hard and soft service costs. Reductions in DCs means that even more of that burden falls on the taxpayer to make up the difference.

Bill 108 also has significant impacts on the environment. The current government argues that the changes to the Environmental Protection Act and the Endangered Species act are necessary to help speed up the development process and eliminate red tape while at the same time allowing 'better protections.' With greatest respect, that is just not true. In the interest of allowing more growth, more development, these changes allow developers to now cut a cheque rather than protect a natural habitat that's home to an endangered species. It's a 'pay to slay' approach to development that will have serious consequences for our current and future environment.

And what about heritage? Bill 108 also makes changes to the Heritage Act. With the passing of this Act, any appeal of a designation of property will now go the 'new' OMB (Still called LPAT but might as well be called OMB) and not the Conservation Review

Board.

So, what's the difference you might ask? The OMB is a binding decision and the Review Board is not. A municipal council still makes the final decision. What this means is that an unelected, unaccountable OMB adjudicator, that has never stepped foot in Aurora or know any of the history of our Town, will decide what is historic and what is not.

And speaking of the OMB, one of the most serious impacts this Bill will have on our communities is its impact on local governance and municipal authority to plan our own community.

Bill 108 reinstates the scope of powers of the OMB and reduces municipal councils once again to bystanders in the community planning process. Our Official Plans ? provincially approved planning documents that outline how and where development occurs in our community ? will not be worth the paper they are printed on.

Local municipal Councils, the frontline workers of elected government, will once again have little real say in land-use planning decisions within their communities.

What is especially galling about the passing of this Bill and the reinstatement of the OMB is the fact that many of those members currently sitting in the house are the same members that supported the passing of Legislation in 2017 that abolished it.

Fully 22 MPPs currently sitting in the House, voted with the last government to abolish the OMB and give local Councils more authority to decide how their communities grow and evolve through appropriate development; abolishing the OMB, and recognizing the importance and authority of local government in land-use planning decisions, had all party support.

Yet just last week, these same 22 MPP's flip-flopped and voted to reinstate the OMB.

What changed? Frankly nothing. This is not evidence-based policy. And these 22 flip-flopping MPPs are proof positive that that when it comes to provincial government, it's all about party first, and ?the people? second.

Bill 108 seriously undermines the authority and the ability of local government to protect our community's environment, our heritage and even our vision for how will grow and develop.

What remains to be seen is what, if anything, we can do about it.