

Minister rejects Mayor's calls to revoke MZO on Bloomington lands

Minister of Municipal Affairs Steve Clark has rejected calls from Mayor Tom Mrakas to revoke a Ministerial Zoning Order (MZO) issued last year that would redevelop Provincially-owned lands on Bloomington Road near Yonge.

Clark's word came as Council prepares to consider a motion from the Mayor next week calling on local lawmakers to voice their opposition to the plan, which would make way for a long-term care (LTC) residence and a housing development, and formally call on the Ministry to withdraw the order.

'The MZO was issued without prior consultation or support from the Town,' says Mayor Mrakas in his motion. 'The land is already zoned institutional and a MZO is not required to achieve the purpose of developing LTC.'

Official Plan Amendments, he notes, only allow for two housing units per gross acre for residential developments in the area, but the MZO would allow 18 units per acre.

'Our government has been clear that every MZO on non-provincially owned land has been at the request of the local municipality,' Minister Clark wrote in a letter to Mayor Mrakas on Tuesday, which was also shared with the media by the department. 'As you are aware, the Subject Lands are owned by the Province of Ontario and therefore do not fall under this category.'

The Province, he said, has committed to building 30,000 new long-term care beds in the next decade and, in order to achieve this goal, surplus land owned by the Province is being 'put out for bid with Infrastructure Ontario, alongside minimum numbers of long-term care beds that must be included as any part of a successful bid.'

'The subject lands have been identified as one such surplus property and we have put in place a requirement of building a minimum of 128 long-term care beds at the site,' wrote Clark. 'At this time, the lands are still out for bid by Infrastructure Ontario and no final decisions have been made as to the future of the property ' with the exception of the long-term care bed requirement.

'It is my understanding through the Provincial Land and Development Facilitator that the Town wanted to use these lands for soccer fields and/or a sports complex. While I appreciate the importance of good recreation facilities in Ontario's municipalities, it is our commitment to leverage surplus provincial properties to accelerate provincial priorities ' in this case the construction of long-term care beds.

'I also recognize the importance of listening to local municipal councils, however I believe it is important to inform you that prior to the Council vote on the subject lands that, while any individual can make an application, I do not intend to initiate a revocation of the zoning order.'

Minister Clark's letter, in turn, prompted a response from Mayor Mrakas, who said the letter clarifies that the Province did not consult with the Town prior to issuing the MZO.

'My view would be, just because you can, doesn't mean you should,' wrote Mayor Mrakas. 'We are pleased that this government recognizes the need for additional LTC beds. It's unfortunate that it has taken so long for this matter to be recognized as a 'provincial priority.' A much-needed LTC facility should have been built years ago and our community would welcome it.

'However, as you know, the land for the LTC facility does not require any rezoning. It is already appropriately zoned for that use and can be built immediately. Aurora would certainly do its part to facilitate speedy approvals so construction for a much-needed LTC facility could begin quickly. Our concern is that rezoning the rest of the land to allow for a potential eight-fold increase in housing density does not align with our Official Plan. Our community feels strongly any development should be a natural extension of the existing community and not a source of revenue for the Province.'

The Mayor went on to state that there was 'no confusion' in Aurora on the 'purpose and impact' on the MZO.

'Through my many conversations with the Premier, I have repeatedly indicated that I am available for a discussion on this important matter any time. It has always been my hope that we could find a mutually beneficial outcome that supports the Province's desire to increase LTC beds yet respects the local Official Plan.'

By Brock Weir Editor Local Journalism Initiative Reporter