

Law Amendments

Bill 225 HRM Charter Amendments – Authority to Nullify HRM By-Laws

Mayor Mike Savage speaking notes

Oct. 31, 2022

In 2008 the Progressive Conservative government brought in the Halifax Charter, in recognition of the important role and unique nature of this province's capital city

Today Halifax is one of the fastest growing and most successful cities in Canada with record population growth, propelling NS to over one million people.

We have unprecedented development across the municipality; we have become an innovation and tech hub; and are attracting people and companies from across the country and around the world.

We have responsibly managed our finances, kept tax rates well below other cities, and invested in key infrastructure needed to support growth.

While the Charter is imperfect, it validates the growing role of Halifax in leading the provincial economy, and adjustments have been made by various governments to make it more effective.

Bill 225 is a direct intrusion into municipal affairs, and it happened without any consultation with us.

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Indeed, this bill was introduced without notice in direct contravention of the provisions in the Charter that requires notice.

To call it concerning would be an understatement.

We all agree that housing is needed, all forms of housing, but most importantly affordable housing, if we are to remain a livable, desirable city for people across the socio-economic spectrum.

This city's remarkable growth has turned around the meaning of "going down the road". Instead of people leaving here to go to Toronto and points west, people are coming here. HRM planned for this growth, it was no accident.

In anticipation of population increases, HRM introduced its Regional Plan to accommodate growth, setting responsible targets for urban, suburban and rural development.

The downtown plan known as **HRMByDesign** has helped density the core of the city by allowing as-of-right development.

We followed this with the **Centre Plan** for urban and near-urban neighbourhoods. This plan enables 37,000 units, as of

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right, and another 22,000 in designated growth nodes while incentivizing much needed affordable housing.

It passed Council a year ago and was adopted into planning law by the Province. The Regional Plan review now underway could add another 25,000 units to the mix throughout HRM.

We are doing the hard work of preparing for population growth, that aligns with our **People, Planet, Prosperity Economic Strategy**, our **HalifACT** climate action plan, and our **Halifax Transit** plan. This means greater density where it can best be accommodated – in sustainable, connected, communities that we can service with transit, recreation centres, libraries, parks and playgrounds.

But, here's the thing: development is not as simple as permissive planning and longer construction hours.

Today we have projects totalling 10,000 housing units with building permits in hand, which is evident from the three dozen cranes dotting the horizon. But we also have 3,000 units under permit that have not broken ground.

Developers and builders are struggling to find trades and unskilled labour; they are faced with increased interest rates, and have encountered costly supply chain disruptions. In short, the fundamentals have changed.

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Last year the government introduced ***Executive Panel on Housing in the Halifax Regional Municipality***. We did not, and do not, feel it was necessary.

But we cooperated, with our most senior city planners working alongside provincial staff in every way possible to ensure ministerial approvals recognize sustainable growth areas.

Minister Lohr and I communicate regularly, and I have appreciated the relationship. This is why it was so disappointing that Bill 225 came with no notice, and no respect for municipal authority.

The recent **Deloitte report** commissioned by the Housing Panel identified a number of measures to spur housing, most of which are well underway. The report spoke to our orders of government working together and implementing solutions. Bill 225 is not “working together” and the measures it proposes are nowhere to be found in the report.

Minister Lohr has indicated that this bill is largely targeted at a new bylaw passed last summer by HRM that moves construction hours from 9:30 pm to 8 pm. The move by the city came about after many complaints from families and others, a staff report, consultation, and a vigorous Council debate.

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I did not vote for the changes, but I also recognize that we have to live together in this community, even (perhaps especially) as we are building it. I respect the decision of the Council I chair.

Council's decision was not out of line with other growing cities. Toronto for example stops construction at 7 pm. And our by-law allows for exemptions and weekend construction (not allowed in many jurisdictions).

To be overruled without public consultation is distasteful in a democracy. It leads to the question: Which bylaws will be nullified next?

Bill 225 is not about construction and blasting hours; it is about seizing new ministerial powers, while striking a political pen through the Charter's duty to consult the municipality it was designed to govern.

In its potential to put a provincial government in charge of a city that is home to nearly half of the province's population, this bill is out of step with modern democratic principles.

Municipalities are not the gatekeepers; they are places full of people passionate about building livable communities. Like so many cities across this country, we need the help of our

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provincial government to unlock labour, decrease costs, and help us move more housing projects from permit to construction.

We need sustained investments in affordable housing, in public housing and in the most rudimentary of temporary housing with the wraparound supports that help people get back on their feet.

Respect and collaboration are fundamental to any lasting relationship. You have a willing and capable partner in us, and I urge you to work with us to build a great city for all.

Thank you for this opportunity.