



October 15, 2023

To: Office of Legislative Counsel

From: Mayor Wendy Donovan, Town of Wolfville, NS

Dear Committee Members:

It was with concern that I, along with many of my peers, learned on Friday that the Province was planning a “A sweeping government bill...to speed up the creation of housing in HRM...”. Further, in the words of the Minister of Housing that communities “...in the Annapolis Valley...Truro..[and the] South Shore” are also in the Minister’s sights.

Four things in particular raise alarm.

1. The narrow focus on approvals in the absence of robust attention to increasing the number of tradespeople, supply issues, financial resources, interest rates, seems a bit of a “wag the dog” situation. These are areas where the Province can make a difference. Having participated in Councils where development approvals were given, only to have projects lie dormant for year after year, it is clear to me that, while important to the process, municipal approval is not the stumbling block this legislation would suggest. Municipalities in our Province – those large like HRM and small like Wolfville – are desperate for provincial support, cooperation and collaboration. I appreciate these are difficult and intransigent issues, the Province, the Ministers of Housing, Labour Skills and Immigration, and Advanced Education, must focus on these areas of their responsibility, while municipalities strengthen theirs.
2. **Creation of a “Trusted Partner Program”:** To me this smacks of cronyism. Classes of Applicants! Absolutely, the items listed in the Bill that indicate how one becomes a “trusted partner” are important. Having a process of vetting would-be developers should be something all levels of government do to benefit the health, safety, and transparency of their constituents. This process as it has been discussed in the press and elsewhere is reminiscent of the special status given to some developers in Doug Ford’s government with respect to development on escarpment lands. That did not bode well for Premier Ford, and it will not bode well for Nova Scotia.
3. **No or reduced requirement to consult:** Of all the things that delay approval processes, I acknowledge that consultation with stakeholders is the most time consuming. Municipal Councils do not have the luxury of ignoring their constituents – even if this can be



frustrating at times. That is what our democracy is about – it is messy and time consuming, but in that process, we also learn and do our best to mitigate consequences. Consultation also provides opportunities for education and awareness of the things our residents may anticipate. We are a democracy, and this approach erodes the very transparency the Bill wishes to achieve.

4. **Freezing and elimination of Fees:** Fees charged by municipalities are designed to support the cost of new development so that existing residents are not paying those costs. As the cost of everything increases these fees should be allowed to keep pace with inflation, otherwise extension of infrastructure, cost of streamlined administration, and in the case of HRM the need to provide services to many marginalized residents who chose to live in HRM due to the availability of services will be unfairly done on the backs of existing residents.

In summary, I urge the Province to focus its attention on those areas where our Municipalities do need support – enhancement of trade availability, helping to address supply issues, providing resources to municipalities to upgrade services in a timely manner. The need for all types and ranges of housing is a serious one for municipalities large and small. Our infrastructure and administration is not designed to take this amount and speed of growth. We desperately need Provincial support – not as a bully but as a partner. I urge the Province to respect municipalities. While a 150⁺ year-old constitution created the unfortunate situation where municipalities became “the creation (children) of the provinces” surely, we have matured from that unfortunate expression. Consultation and collaboration between municipalities and the province to do what each of us does will create a better outcome than autocratic pronouncements, which only breed distrust.

Sincerely

Wendy Donovan
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