

LAW AMENDMENTS

Councillor Pam Lovelace
Halifax Regional Municipality
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Kwe, Good afternoon, Bonjour, thank you for the opportunity to speak and be heard today. My name is Pam Lovelace, I am honoured and privileged to represent the most beautiful district in Halifax Regional Municipality, Hammonds Plains -St. Margarets. I am also a Halifax Water Board Commissioner and member of that Audit and Finance Committee; I sit on HRM's Environment and Sustainability Standing Committee, Vice Chair of HRM's Transportation Standing Committee, Board member of Nova Scotia Federation of Municipalities, Vice Chair of the National Transit Management Board for the Canadian Urban Transit Association, past Deputy Mayor, among other positions.

I represent close to 30,000 constituents in my district with twice the number of electors as my MLA represents. Almost all of Hammonds Plains-St Margarets is outside the urban service boundary, yet we are seeing immense growth putting pressure on our transportation network, ground water table, environment, first responders and emergency services, and our social network including food banks.

I would prefer if HRM Council had the opportunity to work constructively with the provincial government in writing amendments to the Halifax Charter, rather than this volun-told approach which is feeling old and tired. It wasn't that long ago I was sitting in this chair explaining to you all why Bill 225 was inappropriate and out of line.

Yet, here we are again. Honestly, colleagues, we really do need to stop meeting in this way.

Collaboration and partnership are what our shared constituents expect and deserve.

Last Thursday, I was shocked to find out that Bill 329 was tabled in the Legislature without any consultation with HRM or Halifax Water. As you know, HRM has over 11,000 units currently under construction and another 200,000 units ready on developable land.

These housing units are all being built under the guidance of our Regional Plan, Centre Plan, and Municipal Planning Strategy, which are growth plans enveloped by the Integrated Mobility Plan, Green Network Plan, HalifACT Climate Action Plan and of course, our Moving Forward Together Transit Plan. Halifax Water, Nova Scotia Power and all utilities and telecommunications companies depend on these plans to ensure we are all aligned and growing sustainably together.

I know that you know that municipalities in Nova Scotia are not the roadblock to housing. Many developers who are not building to their capacity right now identify market forces as the fundamental barrier to building such as labour shortages, cost of borrowing, cost of materials, and ongoing supply chain

challenges. The Consumer Price Index rose to a 40 year high last year of 6.8% and remains higher than what has been experienced in Canada on average over the past four decades.

Bill 329 does nothing to address those very real barriers to building more units faster.

While the provincial government coerces HRM to accept this ill-informed approach of designating our entire municipality as a Special Planning Area, our council colleagues representing smaller, rural municipalities look on with uncertainty and unease. As the province removes community consultation from the development and HRM's collaborative community building process in this inadequate attempt to speed up housing construction, the accelerated outmigration of people and workers in rural Nova Scotia to HRM appears to be this government's plan.

The promised Student Housing Strategy remains a myth; this inattention to the student housing crisis will result in lower student recruitment and retention for all universities in Nova Scotia and will have detrimental impacts on rural communities that rely on the economic microcosm that universities generate. Enabling economic factors to shift the housing market toward affordability

requires a provincial Housing Strategy, which this province has tossed out the window.

As creatures of the province, municipalities are ruled by the Premier. In 1995 when the province dissolved all four duly elected councils to create an amalgamated HRM, the new regional council spent the first three council terms consolidating and developing the building blocks toward governance and administrative sustainability. The next decade HRM Council worked towards economic sustainability, community safety and urban density. And, now, all this work alongside our communities, businesses, valued stakeholders, and marginalized residents, is devalued by the Members of this Legislature.

The voices of Haligonians are being silenced.

HRM has intentionally planned to grow, already reaching our 2030 population growth target. And, our intentions are well founded to support marginalized and vulnerable communities, including historic African Nova Scotian communities.

On Jan. 10, 2023, Halifax Regional Council adopted amendments for my district's Land Use Bylaw, which now require proposals for multiple unit dwellings and townhouses to be considered by development agreement in the Upper Hammonds Plains area. This is to allow for community input on higher density development, in response to concerns from this historic African Nova Scotian community about its social cohesion and longevity.

Is this provincial government opposed to the longevity of African Nova Scotian communities in HRM, which were originally guaranteed by the Crown through land grants over 200 years ago?

Bill 329 removes the voices of African Nova Scotians and ignores the work of the African Nova Scotian Road to Economic Prosperity Plan.

The Road to Economic Prosperity Action Plan is an opportunity for all orders of government, partner organizations, and allies to support African Nova Scotians in addressing historic and systemic anti-Black racism and chart a new path forward for economic inclusion, development, and sustainable growth.

What will this government achieve with Bill 329?

It won't initiate a simple amendment the municipality requested in June 2023 following the devastating wildfire in my District, which saw over 16,400 people evacuate, over 200 buildings destroyed, including over 150 homes and businesses.

The request was to permit the municipality to offer commercial tax relief to businesses that were destroyed by wildfire. Section 71(2) of the Halifax Charter restricts HRM from granting "a tax concession or other form of direct financial assistance to a business or industry."

The provincial government not only ignored our request, but we were told that it would take too long to make amendments to the Halifax Charter.

But here we are today, making amendments to the Halifax Charter.

Residents and businesses of HRM know that with Bill 329 the Premier has shifted the burden of growth from developers to current property taxpayers and ratepayers, removed the valued voices of our community members, and facilitates the ongoing division between residents and developers.

I am grateful for the developers, home builders, and all construction industry workers who partner with the municipality. They have all stepped up to work collaboratively with HRM to address the housing crisis in an intentional and purposeful approach considering the obstacles in our collective way, which we cannot control.

Why won't the provincial government commit to being a partner with Nova Scotia's capital region?

If you had asked, you would know that Trusted Builder Program is the reason why homes destroyed by wildfire in my District are being rebuilt so quickly. Because we work together with our partners to resolve problems. Unlike the provincial government, which imposes unenlightened mandates to intentionally cause imbalance in our fragile economic ecosystem and social networks.

In closing, my advice to you is to read award winning regional economic development scholar, Donald Savoie, and learn. For many years he has asked: "Why has the Maritime region not developed as well as other Canadian regions, and what can we do about it?"

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The answer: because the province continues to hold back our capital region from reaching our potential.

The intentional provincial meddling and destruction of the features that make our communities unique, sustainable, safe, and vibrant, will result in population and economic decline.

What a shame the provincial government doesn't see the canary in the coal mine.

Thank you, Merci, Wel'aliq