

Intelligence MEMOS



From: Peter Weltman
To: Housing Affordability Observers
Date: May 21, 2025
Re: **UNPACKING ONTARIO'S AMBITIOUS NEW HOUSING ACCELERATION BILL**

On May 12, the Government of Ontario tabled Bill 17, the [Protect Ontario by Building Faster and Smarter Act, 2025](#). It has a long title and proposes a suite of changes to multiple statutes with the stated goal of removing unnecessary barriers to building homes.

I admit to being intrigued by both its title and its scale. The bill makes changes to three key pieces of legislation: the *Planning Act*, the *Development Charges Act*, and the *Transit Oriented Communities Act*.

The bill – accompanied by a detailed [technical briefing](#) – articulates the province's desire to standardize several heretofore disparate requirements and standards, such as road building and road design standards. It also proposes measures to streamline and standardize the rules around municipal development processes; to reduce the number and scope of studies that municipalities can require, to require municipalities to allow for some variations to zoning by-laws without further studies, and to standardize the rules and improve transparency around development charges. It also designates all provincial transit projects as "priority projects" that will enjoy new flexibility under the provisions of this bill.

Some of these are long overdue, especially those that limit the number and scope of municipally mandated studies faced by developers. The proposed amendment would block municipalities from requiring new complete application studies/reports beyond those currently set out in their official plans, unless approved by the province. From my experience on the Peel Transition Board, developers have become frustrated with the seemingly endless requirements for additional studies during the approval process, despite what is spelled out in an official plan. This change also serves to prevent individual city councilors unreasonably delaying or deferring development applications opposed by their constituents, but that might be beneficial for the municipality as a whole.

The province has also signaled, through this legislation, its intent to simplify and standardize permitted land use designations across the province, which should make it easier for developers, who won't have to navigate the 444 different codes and standards while trying to get projects launched. It will also make it easier for the provincial government to start to collect data and streamline processes across municipalities, which are, after all, creatures of the province.

We are in a difficult situation with housing. There is a generation entering the conventional prime home-buying years with no hope of affording a home. Bill 17 is valuable in that it does address some key irritants, and sensibly only promises to build houses "faster and smarter." It doesn't pretend that "enough" homes will be built to address the current housing crisis.

Our inability to build sufficient homes is a testament to that.

The fact that Bill 17 is being introduced now as a catchup measure supports my contention that provincial governments have been very reluctant to get ahead of this housing crisis, potentially being perceived to ride roughshod over existing neighbourhoods with planning legislation devised at the provincial rather than the local level.

As homes continue to become less and less affordable, we will eventually run out of people who want or are able to move here to buy our homes. That is a far more dangerous and significant problem, because if that happens, it means that our society will be depopulating, our economy will have shrunk significantly, and there will not be enough revenue for things like healthcare and education, let alone new housing. I think the collection of regulations that encumber housing policy and have contributed to our current crisis, are the result of a deeper problem worth exploring.

People's homes and neighborhoods are deeply embedded in their people's feelings of security, and not just physical but also financial. In 1971, the baby boom generation began to enter their home-buying years just as principal residences were exempted from capital gains taxes. Home ownership grew from 60 percent to 69 percent in the ensuing 40 years and then started to back off in 2011. At the same time, exclusionary zoning, a feature of land use planning that makes it possible to restrict certain types of building in certain areas, had been in place for about 50 years. And it was used largely to protect single family homes.

It's time to take a much deeper look at the root causes of the housing crisis, including the economic incentives that have gotten us here such as the principal residence exemption, and the drivers of exclusionary zoning.

The housing crisis is just that – it's confined now to housing. But if it persists, it will become an economic crisis in due course.

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