

Delegation to Markham City Council on the topic of the Inter-governmental Agreement in Principle for the Yonge North Subway Extension Transit-Oriented Community Sites.

2022-04-25

Mr. Mayor, Mr. Chairman, Councillors, City Staff, and Members of the Public,

Thank you for your time today. My name is Graham Churchill from Richmond Hill.

I made a similar delegation to Richmond Hill City Council last Thursday as they were voting to approve the Province's Agreement in Principle for the High Tech TOC site. At the exact time on Thursday, when Premier Doug Ford was at the Langstaff GO Station announcing the TOCs and praising the mayors of Markham and Richmond Hill for having been so cooperative, Richmond Hill Council passed a motion directing staff to re-engage with the Province and for the Mayor to send letters to the Province and Richmond Hill's two local MPPs, expressing their concerns relative to the eMZO process and the issues still not addressed. A further Richmond Hill Special Council meeting is scheduled for this Friday, April 29th, 2022 where they will consider the responses received from the Province and the MPPs.

I will repeat my initial address to that council but I have included some new words.

Democracy dies through a series of acts done under cover of night. It only survives when citizens rise and elected officials take action. It requires people of integrity and courage who will demand open transparent processes and public engagement.

At a time when Canada is trying to help Ukraine retain its democracy against autocracy and oligarchy, we must be wary of autocratic moves by our government that are establishing power in an oligarchy. I believe this EMZO is such an autocratic move and that it follows several other autocratic moves that have taken place over the past four years. Municipal power in this province has been progressively eroded and given to the development industry at the expense of municipalities, citizens, and their communities. We are at a "break glass in an emergency" moment and we need elected officials of integrity and courage to take a stand.

At an earlier date, I presented to this council the analysis of others and myself on the causes of the housing crisis. Statscan data is clear – housing growth has exceeded population growth over the past 20 years. That and other data confirm that we are not experiencing a "housing supply crisis", as Doug Ford insists. We are suffering a "housing affordability crisis" brought about by "supercharged demand", "low-interest rates", and the "financialization of the property market". People are buying and hoarding properties. The people who are being hurt are entry-level buyers and people who rent. This problem exists across the country. Prince Edward County, a rural area of 26,000 people whose population is shrinking, has a "housing crisis". Last week, Nova Scotia, a sparsely populated province, passed a law putting a 5% tax on properties purchased by people outside the province. They have a housing crisis.

Doug Ford is putting the blame for the housing crisis squarely on the backs of municipalities calling it "red tape". In reality, his actions have exacerbated the problem. The property financialization craze is rampant throughout the development industry. In Ontario, some 400,000 units have been approved that are not being built. If Mr. Ford wants to make an immediate impact on getting houses built, he should bring in "a use it or lose it law" that forces developers to build or lose their approvals.

Developers have realized they can double, triple, and quadruple the value of their land overnight by winning density rights. It's a financial game. They are going directly to the OLT to overturn official plans and to Minister Clark to get MZOs. The Wynne Govt issued 4 MZOs in 4 years. Ford has issued about 90 MZOs which you can find on the website, yourstoprotect.ca. In my opinion, and as Mark Winfield, Professor of Urban Studies at York U has stated, these actions may be fueling the housing crisis.

The Yonge-407 TOCs are part of that game. Ford's doubling of the densities of the TOCs and his taking away of community centres, schools and parkland instantly raised the value of the TOC lands for the landowner by billions of dollars. The Ford government has publicly said its actions on the TOCs were done to secure funds from the developer to pay for the subway. The problem is that this transaction is not in the public record. No one knows how much money the government is extracting and who is benefiting. Nevertheless, some basic calculations on what the municipalities would normally get from the developer based on parkland cash-in-lieu, development charges, and others are clear. We know the transaction is in the billions. As I said earlier, this is a game. It is questionable whether the developer will build. Now that it has achieved an increase in its land value, it may sell it to someone else.

This is where we have a serious problem. I understand that the funding agreement for the subway was a 40/40/20 split by the Federal Govt, the Province, and York Region. If the province is taking money that would normally flow to the municipalities to pay its portion of the subway, then the municipalities are paying not only their 20% but the province's 40% too. Ford passed legislation to delay the release of its budget until after this and other MZO transactions were passed. Why? Are they trying to make the budget look good ahead of the June 2 election while taxes in York Region may go up? Given that the landowners of the TOC may also own lands around Hwy 413 and the Bradford Bypass, and that these landowners are among the biggest donors to the Doug Ford Govt, these secret transactions look extremely dubious.

This situation needs full transparency. I call upon this council to pass a motion asking the ombudsman, and or the Auditor General, to investigate. At the very least, before this council can put any stamp of approval on the AIP, you must be given a full public accounting of the money going to the subway from the developer and an analysis of how this deal will impact taxes in York Region.

Those who know me know I am a keen student of history: Thermopylae, The Battle of Britain, and today in Ukraine. History turns on the acts of individuals of integrity who

have brave hearts. I ask this council to show your brave hearts and make history today. While everyone is watching, you must make a stand.

Thank you for your time today.