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Laurie Scott, MPP
Chair, Standing Committee on Heritage, Infrastructure and Cultural Policy
99 Wellesley Street, Room 1405
Whitney Block
Toronto, ON M7A 1A2

RE: Strong Mayors, Building Homes Act

Dear Chair Scott and Members of the Committee;

I write to you on behalf of the Council of the City of Mississauga regarding our concerns with the proposed strong mayor powers and the recently introduced *Strong Mayors, Building Homes Act, 2022*. I have attached a resolution tabled by Councillor Parrish and endorsed by Council on August 10, 2022 for your review.

While we are aware that the Act only applies to Toronto and Ottawa at this time, we understand it will likely extend to other cities in the years to come. Our Council's concerns are related to consultation, achieving the goal of building 1.5M homes, and the potential of the Act to create gridlock in decision-making and politicize the municipal public service.

Consultation

Our Council is concerned that there has not been any formal consultation on these new powers, many of them a significant departure from current operations. We are also unclear as to how the powers were determined and which cities requested them. While we are told that many of the details will be found in future regulations, it is unclear at this time exactly how these proposed new powers for mayors will work in practice. Prior to this legislation and the powers contained being expanded to other municipalities, we ask

that that the government take the time to consult with municipalities, as well as better understand the outcome of the use of these new powers in Toronto and Ottawa.

Meeting the Goal of 1.5M Homes

Mississauga Council is also unclear as to how this legislation will expedite the building of housing. Many of the hurdles cities face to approve developments are legislated through the *Planning Act* and it is mandatory that municipalities adhere. The Ontario Land Tribunal already overturns planning decisions made by municipalities, creating an appeal mechanism different from other provinces.

In 2021, Mississauga issued \$2.1B in building permit value – a record for our City. Year to date, Mississauga has already issued building permits for over 6000 new residential units. We continue to meet building permit approval targets over 85 per cent of the time and our planning approval system is one of the quickest in the GTA, including being fully digital through EPlans. Yet we continue to review and refine our processes, including conducting a Lean review, to ensure we are as efficient and effective as possible. And, we are preparing for the implementation of Bill 109 in January, which includes many administrative process changes.

Mississauga is not deficient in approving or building new housing. We have enough developable lands designated in our Official Plan to easily meet our 2051 growth targets and through our recent Major Transit Station Area policy, we added new residential development permissions along the Hurontario LRT and Dundas BRT corridors. We are also entering one of the fastest growth periods in our history. Construction is at its highest in 30 years with 17,300 units currently in development. We have also issued zoning approval to allow for an additional 20,000 properties should the owners choose to develop them. On this point, we encourage the province to explore a sunset period between development approval and building permit application to encourage developers to get shovels in the ground quickly.

Through our unlimited height and density pre-zoning policy in our downtown core, 40,000 units could be built relatively quickly when landowners choose to do so. When the waterfront communities of Brightwater and Lakeview come online in the next few years, another 11,000 units will be available. Mississauga does not have a housing supply issue, but a significant affordability issue.

As a Council, we are seeking greater clarification on how providing mayors with greater powers, such as those prescribed in the Act, will fast track approvals or get more housing built. As well, more clarity is required around what constitutes a “provincial priority.” Before any legislation or powers are given to other municipalities, we ask that consultation be undertaken so municipalities can not only provide feedback, but better understand what is being asked of us. In the last year, municipal planning has undergone significant changes and many municipalities are struggling to keep up and adapt. This legislation, if extended to other municipalities, would place yet another burden on our already taxed teams.

Partisanship and the Erosion of Good Decision Making

Our Council is concerned that the proposed powers for Mayors will weaken local democracy and the voice of City Councils, as well as introduce partisan politics and political parties into local government. While every councillor has partisan leanings, the absence of political parties at the local level has been effective at creating a forum for stronger debate and ultimately, good decision-making. Operating on consensus as we often do in Mississauga has proven to be effective. The proposed veto powers in this legislation may actually grind decision-making to a halt and create a less efficient and effective decision-making process.

At the same time, one of the hallmarks of municipal government is a professional and non-partisan public service. Under the proposed legislation, this standard could be weakened through the direct appointment of CAOs and other senior staff by the Mayor. Our municipal public service needs to provide strong, unbiased recommendations without fear of reprisal. We are concerned that the proposed legislation will weaken the public service and make it more partisan and beholden to the Mayor, not Council. We believe a strong, independent CAO and staff is good for local government.

The Role of Municipalities

Cities like Mississauga are willing partners with the government and the development industry to build more housing. What cities really need is greater autonomy to make decisions and the proper revenue and legislative tools to implement these decisions. Cities only receive 9 cents of every tax dollar collected, yet own two-thirds of all infrastructure. The math simply does not add up, especially when the list of municipal responsibilities continues to grow. The property tax is regressive and simply not equipped to address the significant capital and operating pressures cities currently face, including the building of housing.

What we need right now is a discussion on a new deal for cities, including municipal revenue tools to allow Mayors and Councils to build our cities and communities and address the growing list of challenges we face from housing to climate change, to homelessness and the opioid crisis. At present, we are being asked to build 21st Century cities with 19th Century tools. Toronto has the *City of Toronto Act* and a suite of powers that no other municipality possesses. Providing these powers to all municipalities, or at least those over 100,000 population, would be a good place to start to level the playing field and help cities like Mississauga meet its responsibilities.

We request that the province engage in meaningful discussions with the municipal sector on the role we play, who does what, and how we fund our operations and the building of our communities. This is an important discussion that is long overdue. As we seek to recover socially and economically from COVID, now is the right time for this conversation.

Regional Government

Toronto and Ottawa are single tier municipalities. Mississauga however, is a lower tier municipality, part of the Region of Peel. The same is true of many municipalities around the GTA. As such, greater clarity is needed about how strong mayor powers would work

in a regional municipality, especially in Peel where the Regional Chair is unelected. Moreover, housing is mostly the responsibility of the Region, creating even more challenges and confusion. We ask the government to include a consultation with cities on how strong mayor powers would apply to two-tier governments.

Moving Forward

Mississauga will watch closely as the cities of Toronto and Ottawa take on these new powers. Our Council and our City are supportive of bringing more housing to market, including meeting the government's 1.5 million housing goal. We have a number of recommendations to do so, which we shared with the government and the Standing Committee in April during the discussions on Bill 109. I would be happy to discuss these recommendations further, as well as the actions Mississauga is taking to streamline our processes and get more housing built. I look forward to working with my colleague Mayor Dilkens and the Housing Supply Action Plan Implementation Team in the months ahead to do this.

Thank you for your time and consideration. I would be happy to speak further about the proposed act, as well as increasing housing supply and modernizing the planning system in Ontario, at your convenience.

Sincerely,



Bonnie Crombie
Mayor

Cc., Hon. Steve Clark, Minister of Municipal Affairs and Housing
Hon. Michael Parsa, Associate Minister of Housing
Members of the Standing Committee on Heritage, Infrastructure and Cultural Policy
Hon. Kaleed Rasheed, Minister of Public and Business Service Delivery
Rudy Cuzzetto, MPP (Mississauga-Lakeshore)
Nina Tangri, MPP (Mississauga-Streetsville)
Sheref Sabawy, MPP (Mississauga-Erin Mills)
Deepak Anand, MPP (Mississauga-Malton)
Natalia Kusendova, MPP (Mississauga-Centre)
Association of Municipalities of Ontario
Ontario Big City Mayor's Caucus