

Mayor Mike Savage Response

Bill 329 - Respecting Amendments to the Halifax Regional Municipality Charter, and the Housing in Halifax Regional Municipality Act Respecting Housing

Nova Scotia Legislature - Law Amendments Committee October 16th, 2023

Thank you. I would like to begin by acknowledging that we are located in Mi'kma'ki, the, the ancestral, unsundered land of the Mi'kmaq people.

1. This legislation is unnecessary, and harmful

This legislation is based on a demonstrably false premise, introduced with absolutely no notice or discussion. It is an autocratic intrusion into Municipal Affairs and completely ignores the biggest problem it claims to address.

We need housing in HRM. This is something Council has been focused on for years. Before other orders of Government were even aware of the situation our Council was bringing in planning regimes to streamline approvals and were approving construction against public input.

There are elements of this legislation that are welcomed and will help HRM streamline housing development, but by and large this legislation is an egregious over-reach and, is not a solution to the housing crisis.

➤ *Does little to address the real challenges of building short falls*

This Bill is performative and addresses a problem that doesn't exist. As part of that (regulatory) solution it enables a single person with no planning experience or any knowledge of our municipality to single-handedly approve projects – to go ahead with no requirement for accountability, or justification.

Consolidating power with a provincial minister, erodes public process and transparency, and undermines HRM's legislated mandate to deliver public service to our residents.

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From the Royal Bank of Canada Summer 2023: *“Soaring construction costs will hamper Canada’s homebuilding ambitions.”*

RBC cited:

- High interest rates
- Shortage of workers
- Stagnant supply of new materials
- Residential construction price index has soared 51% since start of the pandemic.

The actions under this legislation such as restricting HRM’s ability to charge development fees, effectively transfers those costs from private sector builders to the residents of HRM.

This will raise taxes for municipal taxpayers.

I urge the Province to focus its efforts on improving the economic and social conditions that are directly impacting housing availability and development.

➤ *We’ve been focused on housing*

The common complaint when we approved housing used to be, *“Where will the people come from”?*

We had a growth plan, and with our colleagues at the Halifax Partnership we worked toward those goals. When COVID surprisingly led to a huge influx of new residents we passed plans such as Centre Plan which fast tracked over 60,000 units of housing, enough to accommodate 150,000 people – that’s one plan.

Yes, we need housing. We all play a part. We don’t build it (but) we do enable it. That’s what we do. Right now, more than 11,000 units are fully approved, ready to be built, but almost half of those are not being built.

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What we have is an issue of math, not legislation. Our development fees are among the lowest in Canada, our processing times have been reduced remarkably. We are doing our part, and then some.

HRM has improved building capacity to enable more, and easier development. HRM has made extensive changes to planning policies and regulations to jump-start more housing development and to pave a clear path for development to move forward.

We've done the work to upzone our plans to enable faster development approvals and facilitate innovative housing like secondary and backyard suites. We've removed single-use zoning in all residential areas of the Municipality with new shared housing regulations.

HRM is getting permit approvals done faster and easier so that property developers, landowners, and businesses can get their projects built.

We need 87,600 housing units to support 650,000 people by 2030. That's 12,500 housing units a year.

We have 11,000 housing units approved now and ready to go, 7,000 of those units are under construction and the other 4,000 can move forward when developers are ready. We've enabled another 250,000 housing units, which can be developed as-of-right. When developers and property owners are ready to move forward, HRM will support their projects with streamlined approvals and processes.

HRM has secured \$79 million in Housing Accelerator funding from the Federal Government to build 2,600 units in the next three years.

We've funded 177 units of affordable housing being built now through the federal Rapid Housing Initiative.

HRM's Density Bonusing Program has created 254 units of affordable housing.

2.) We don't just permit housing, we build communities

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We became the fastest growing large city in the country, with the fastest growing downtown, because HRM, with our development community, is building a city where people want to live.

➤ *Community Plans and Strategies Undermined*

HRM has modernized plans and regulations to pave the way for housing development.

HRM is supporting the rapid building of housing while working to ensure that communities have the services they need to support that development.

From housing to environmental stewardship to infrastructure, HRM's plans and investments reflect the people who live here, who contributed to our public processes. HRM staff and Council use these plans each and every day to make thoughtful, smart decisions that facilitate development.

Our plans do not sit on the shelf. As officials who are elected here, we are held to account by the people we represent.

We're building homes not just for today, but homes that will support families and individuals for generations to come.

We're building complete communities with a range of housing types and options for the diverse needs of our population. We plan carefully for growth where it can ensure community livability – so people have access to transit, parks, recreation, and other services.

3.) HRM is a Partner

Two years ago, the (NS) Government brought forward legislation to create the Housing Panel. We didn't feel it necessary, or correct but we put senior people on it, and worked to make it productive. In two years, we have heard of no issues

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from the Government about the Panel. Even the night before this legislation was introduced the Minister never indicated what was to happen the next day.

➤ *Collaboration the way forward*

Let's be clear, housing has been stalled for reasons that do not fall on the Municipality's shoulders.

By-passing HRM as a critical partner in solving the region's housing crisis will hurt our communities, compromise our region, and erode trust in democratic process.

HRM has, and will continue to be, a champion for communities and a partner in the mission to build housing for the people of HRM.

On the day that this Bill was tabled, I was sharing a podium with Federal Housing Minister Sean Fraser to announce Halifax's Accelerator funding, one of the first Cities in Canada. The Minister recognized Halifax as a leader in creating housing for its citizens.

I urge you to consider actions that will allow our governments to work together, in-sync, and on behalf of community, to get housing built proactively and with urgency.