

Ministry of Municipal Affairs and Housing

Provincial Planning Branch
13th Floor, 777 Bay Street
Toronto, ON
M7A 2J3

June 26, 2025

RE: Proposed Planning Act and City of Toronto Act, 2006 Changes (Schedules 3 and 7 of Bill 17 - Protect Ontario by Building Faster and Smarter Act, 2025) - [ERO 025-0462](#)

The Atmospheric Fund (TAF) is a regional climate agency serving the Greater Toronto and Hamilton Area (GTHA). We work closely with public and private partners to advance practical urban climate solutions that support affordability, equity, and resilience.

TAF supports a collective effort to increase housing supply, modernize planning and development processes, and reduce the cost of delivering much-needed housing and infrastructure. In TAF's experience working with municipalities to develop Green Development Standards (GDS), we've seen first-hand how these policies have reduced red tape and standardized planning processes, resulting in long-term predictability that housing developers need to succeed. Streamlining development processes has been a cornerstone feature of GDS across Ontario.

Many economic factors have impacted the real estate market and the availability of affordable housing in Ontario. However, we've seen no evidence that GDS have slowed down housing starts or made housing less affordable.

Bill 17 would negatively impact municipalities' ability to implement GDS, limiting their capacity to ensure that new development is not only built quickly, but is also energy-efficient, livable, and affordable over the long term. These standards help lower utility bills, reduce infrastructure costs and cut emissions, delivering lasting affordability year after year. They also provide policy certainty so developers can plan and predict future business.

TAF offers the following comments on the legislative and regulatory changes proposed through Bill 17:

Background on Green Development Standards

Over the past 15 years, the Toronto Green Standard (TGS) has become a regional model for GDS across the GTHA. Since its launch in 2010, TGS has provided a clear, performance-based framework for reducing energy use and carbon emissions in new buildings. Its success has driven widespread adoption. Municipalities across Ontario have been adopting GDS since 2020 using Toronto's sustainable design requirements to reduce expenses for homeowners and the strain on local energy systems. These outcome-based standards are not prescriptive, and they do not conflict with the Ontario Build Code.

Today, all GTHA municipalities with a GDS have aligned energy and carbon performance targets with Toronto. Five cities are aligned with Toronto's current requirements (TGS version 4), and eight others use the same metrics, with targets aligned to TGS version 3. This reflects municipal recognition of the need to move in a graduated fashion to enable local builders to adjust while working within a common framework.

TAF has worked with most of these municipalities in developing their GDS and found that pre-Bill 23 differences stemmed from unclear authorities. Since the passage of Bill 23 and the [clarifying letter from Minister Clark](#), processes are much more aligned. To complete this harmonization, now municipalities need clearer guidance on their ability to require sustainable design.

As the Association of Municipalities of Ontario (AMO) noted in its [response to Bill 17](#), streamlining approval processes must be balanced with strong energy efficiency and green building standards. This echoes what we've heard directly from municipalities across the GTHA: GDS are essential tools for managing long-term costs, keeping property taxes from increasing, ensuring grid stability, and protecting communities from climate-related risks.

In addition to municipal voices, professional associations representing architects and engineers have also emphasized the importance of GDS. The [Ontario Society of Professional Engineers](#) cautioned that Bill 17 could inadvertently restrict local climate action and called on the government to maintain municipal flexibility for higher environmental standards. Likewise, the [Ontario Association of Architects](#) described the TGS as one of the most effective tools available to deliver sustainable development and urged that existing GDS should not be removed. Further, they recommended that these standards be enshrined in the Ontario Building Code to ensure consistent application across the province, supporting both climate action and industry certainty.

Green Development Standards are Accelerating Housing Development

Part of the rationale for creating GDS was to streamline the planning process. GDS consolidate pre-existing sustainability-related planning requirements into a single document with clear expectations. Far from creating greater divergence in planning processes, the harmonization of GDS in the GTHA has created greater consistency. This is reflected in the pace of housing development. Toronto introduced the TGS in 2010, and in the past 15 years, Toronto has consistently led North America in the pace of housing development. Toronto remains on track to meet or exceed provincial housing targets.

Toronto updated to version 4 of the TGS in 2022. Since that time, according to the [Canadian Home Builders' Association \(CHBA\)](#), Toronto has reduced development approval timelines by 22%. Similarly, Pickering approved its first GDS in 2022 and has since reduced approval timelines by 16%. Brampton also updated its GDS in 2022 to harmonize more closely with other GTHA municipalities and has seen its approval timelines fall by 26%. In contrast, the City of Ottawa voted against adopting a GDS in 2022 and has seen approval timelines get 30% slower. Looking across all the Ontario municipalities benchmarked by the CHBA, all of the cities with a GDS have made progress in accelerating approval timelines, and all the cities without a GDS have seen timelines get slower. **The evidence is clear that GDS accelerate rather than slow housing development.**

Study Requirements and Topics

Recommendation: Ensure the proposed regulations governing planning studies explicitly reflect municipalities' responsibilities as outlined in the Planning Act and the Provincial Planning Statement.

TAF is concerned that the regulatory powers in Bill 17 would restrict municipalities to a one-size-fits-all provincially approved list of studies. If not carefully designed, these changes could undermine municipal ability to address matters of provincial interest as specified in Part I of the Planning Act. The Planning Act requires cities, in carrying out their responsibilities under the act, to have regard for the protection of ecological systems, conservation of energy and water, and mitigation of greenhouse gas emissions. Cities cannot exercise this duty if they do not have the flexibility to require appropriate studies as part of a complete planning application. Which studies are reasonably required varies both by the type and scale of the project as well as the local municipal context. Regulations related to Bill 17 must comply with other powers and authorities granted to municipalities to avoid confusion and delays for future developments.

This includes but is not limited to the components of the Planning Act and Provincial Planning Statement below:

Planning Act Requirements for Municipalities
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• The protection of ecological systems• The protection of public health and safety• The protection of the financial and economic well-being of the Province and its municipalities• The orderly development of safe and healthy communities• The adequate provision and efficient use of ... sewage and water services and waste management systems• The minimization of waste• The accessibility for persons with disabilities to all facilities• The promotion of development that is designed to be sustainable
Provincial Planning Statement Requirements for Municipalities
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Improving accessibility for people of all ages and abilities by addressing land use barriers which restrict their full participation in society• Protect, improve or restore vulnerable surface and ground water, and their hydrologic functions• Promote green infrastructure, low impact development, and active transportation, protect the environment and improve air quality• Planning authorities shall prepare for the impacts of a changing climate that may increase the risk associated with natural hazards

- Establishing and implementing minimum targets for the provision of housing that is affordable to low- and moderate-income households

Recommendation: Rather than prohibiting studies completely, restrict studies based on the type of development.

TAF understands the government's intent to streamline the development approval process. However, given the broad range of planning priorities cities are responsible for, restricting planning studies should be approached with caution. For example, the government has identified that sun/shadow and wind studies might be restricted. Rather than prohibiting them outright, the regulation could restrict such studies to high-rise buildings where there is more potential for impacts on adjoining properties. This approach would preserve municipal ability to address their planning obligations while streamlining the planning process for low-and-mid-rise housing.

Certified Professionals

Recommendation: Scope the regulation to prevent conflicts of interest between professionals and developers and prioritize health and safety.

The legislation introduced by Bill 17 implies that submissions prepared by prescribed professionals should be automatically accepted as compliant with related requirements. This would effectively transfer planning approval authority from municipal staff to consultants retained by project proponents, raising serious concerns about impartial oversight and public trust in the development process.

Automatic acceptance would also create unnecessary conflicts of interest and increased liabilities for prescribed professionals. They are contractually obliged to prepare the required documentation on behalf of their clients. In many cases, the submissions do not positively assert that the project complies with all relevant planning requirements. Many of these submissions simply provide information about the planned development, allowing municipal staff to determine if requirements are satisfactorily addressed. If the regulation stipulates that materials submitted by a prescribed professional are deemed to meet requirements, this fundamentally changes the nature of these studies and the liabilities of the professionals involved. In some cases, the professionals may not have all of the information required to determine compliance, such as information about adjacent properties and municipal infrastructure capacity. It also creates a conflict if the professionals have produced the required submittals but are uncertain if the project meets all relevant requirements. Without municipal review, this model could undermine public confidence in the development approval process. The development approval process must require a third party with no pecuniary interest in the outcome (e.g. municipal staff) to review compliance with applicable requirements.

Rather than reducing conflict, the proposed provisions risk increasing the number of disputes at the already overloaded Ontario Land Tribunal, or through the Courts. If a submission from a

prescribed professional is unclear or fails to address a planning concern, municipalities may be forced to rely on legal challenges, creating new uncertainty and delays.

Recommendation: Limit the scope of this regulation to specifying which certified professionals are qualified to prepare the required reports or submittals.

Clarity about certified professionals would ensure consistent definitions Ontario-wide, preventing individual municipalities from mandating their own required qualifications. Municipalities should be required to accept studies and submittals from prescribed professionals but should retain the authority to review the materials for compliance with planning requirements. In other words, the effect should be that municipalities cannot reject submissions from prescribed professionals on the basis of their qualifications.

Impact on the Environment

Recommendation: Ensure municipalities can require environmental studies.

TAF is concerned that the proposed changes regarding study requirements could have negative impacts on Ontario's environment. For example, the province is proposing to prohibit municipalities from requiring studies on outdoor lighting – an important tool for minimizing light pollution, which is known to have harmful effects on both wildlife and human health. Similarly, prohibiting studies related to urban design guidelines could undermine a range of sustainability measures, including bird-friendly design and guidance on sustainable materials. Sun/shadow studies, which assess whether tall buildings will cast shadows that harm plant life on adjacent properties, are another important tool for protecting the local environment that would be limited under the proposed changes.

Conclusion

Our recommendations will allow municipalities to retain the authorities they need to ensure development focuses on health, safety, and long-term affordability for Ontarians while reducing red tape and increasing efficiency. We note that Premier Ford supported and voted in favour of the Toronto Green Standard when he was a city councillor and that green development standards are broadly supported by key industry stakeholders including constructors, developers, architects, and utilities.

We urge the government to carefully design forthcoming regulations to ensure that all stakeholders, including municipalities, can do their part to ensure streamlined approval and construction of efficient, resilient and affordable buildings for Ontarians.

Sincerely,
Bryan Purcell



VP of Policy & Programs

The Atmospheric Fund

bpurcell@taf.ca

About the Atmospheric Fund

The Atmospheric Fund (TAF) is a regional climate agency that invests in low-carbon solutions for the Greater Toronto and Hamilton Area (GTHA) and helps scale them up for broad implementation. Please note that the views expressed in this submission do not necessarily represent those of the City of Toronto or other funders or partners. We are experienced leaders and collaborate with stakeholders in the private, public and non-profit sectors who have ideas and opportunities for reducing carbon emissions. Supported by endowment funds, we advance the most promising concepts by investing, providing grants, influencing policies and running programs. We're particularly interested in ideas that offer benefits in addition to carbon reduction such as improving people's health, creating local jobs, boosting urban resiliency, and contributing to a fair society.