

# Toronto Mayor John Tory condemns Ontario move to rewrite city's development plans

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Excerpts from the article in the Toronto Star:

“Toronto Mayor John Tory is condemning what he calls a fiat from Queen’s Park that rewrites his city’s own plans for its midtown and downtown areas and will instead allow more and taller buildings while loosening other rules for developers.

It was reported on Wednesday that Ontario Municipal Affairs Minister Steve Clark was sending back two massive official plan amendments to the city with substantial changes that he says will address the housing crisis, reflect his government’s recent policy changes and allow many more new housing units near public transit stations.

The city spent years consulting the public and drafting its two original plans, one covering its fast-growing midtown area and the other its downtown, before submitting them for provincial approval last year. But Mr. Tory says his only warning of the impending sweeping revisions – which cannot be appealed – was a text from the minister Tuesday evening, and then The Globe article Wednesday morning.

“The discussions that take place that are in any way meaningful dialogues where there’s two people talking are almost non-existent, if not completely non-existent,” Mr. Tory said of his relations with the province. “And instead we get these kind of fiats that come from Queen’s Park that say, ‘this is the way it’s going to be,’ and the notification that you get of it is an article that appears in the newspaper. And that is not acceptable.”

Hours after his comment, just before 4 p.m. on Wednesday, city staff received the complex documents. Gregg Lintern, the city’s chief planner, said late Wednesday that city staff were still reviewing the documents.

Speaking to reporters on Wednesday morning, Mr. Clark said he would meet with the mayor after the city had reviewed the changes: “The mayor and I have had ongoing conversations through texts. [His] last text to me last night was that he looked forward to speaking to me over the next couple days. I look forward to doing that after the modifications have been forwarded.”

He said the changes are needed to make the most of his government’s \$28.5-billion transit expansion plan, for which Ontario has committed \$11.2-billion.

The province's rewriting of the plans is just the latest spat between Toronto and Queen's Park, which have clashed over spending cuts and Premier Doug Ford's move to slash council almost in half last summer.

Midtown City Councillor Jaye Robinson, chair of the Toronto Transit Commission, said the area around Yonge Street and Eglinton Avenue was already at "a breaking point" with new high-rise construction resulting in overcapacity schools and even concerns about the water system keeping pace.

New condo owners routinely get notices that local schools may not be able to accommodate their children, she said. And the already jammed Yonge subway will only get worse with planned new transit lines still many years away.

Ms. Robinson said the city's original plans were meant to get a grip on the development, and ensure the city and its services could keep up.

The Yonge-and-Eglinton neighbourhood has already exceeded its population targets in the 2017 version of the province's growth plan by 50 per cent, she said. Already home to more than 60,000 people, the broader area's population will soon be 90,000 just with the housing units already approved, she added, even without any new boost in population density from the province. Meanwhile, the councillor said, her residents complain about a lack of parkland, and increasing traffic.

"It's really become almost like a concrete jungle," Ms. Robinson said, adding that developers will inevitably seek even greater heights than in the government's plan. "And we're supposed to be building complete neighbourhoods, and this is about the furthest thing from it."