



**Media Release:**

***City Councillors and Neighbourhood Reps Demand Real OMB Reform from Provincial Government***

TORONTO, THURSDAY, OCTOBER 6, 2005 – Yesterday at Queens Park, a group of six Councillors from across the city along with representatives from the Federation of North Toronto Residents' Associations (FoNTRA) met with the NDP and the Liberals, respectively. FoNTRA collectively represents 21 residents' organizations in Toronto.

Since May, this is the second time this group has met with the Liberals and the first time meeting with the New Democratic Party (NDP) regarding real reform of the non-elected, quasi-judicial Ontario Municipal Board (OMB). Last week, this same group met with Conservative MPP John Tory on this issue.

MPP Michael Prue, NDP Municipal Affairs Critic, said strongly, "I feel the OMB should be abolished for large municipalities such as Toronto but I know that will not happen under this present government. Nonetheless, due to the many examples of OMB decisions overturning City Council decisions occurring under the current OMB process, this Liberal government needs to deliver on its promise of real reform of the Ontario Municipal Board."

The issues raised by the Councillors and neighbourhood reps identify the need for reform now to strengthen local input and decision-making powers while substantially reducing the OMB's scope of influence in community planning matters.

"Currently, the City Planners are operating in the shadow of the OMB. They are making their recommendations based on the high probability that the development application will be heard by the OMB and justifications for higher densities will occur. This cannot go on – it is compromising the future-building of this city and creating an infrastructure deficit that we will not be able to sustain," said Councillor Jane Pitfield (Ward 26, Don Valley West).

The group presented the following four key OMB reform proposals developed by FoNTRA (Federation of North Toronto Residents' Associations) that are based on the principles of accountability, fairness, legitimacy and predictability:

1. Municipal Councils must become the focus for development decision-making.
2. The OMB must only be an advisory body, allowing elected representatives on Municipal Councils throughout Ontario the right to override an OMB decision by a 60% Council majority.

3. The OMB must consider the citywide impact as well as the precedent setting nature of proposed developments and not consider appealed applications in isolation.
4. The OMB, in dealing with appeals, must only be allowed to hear evidence previously presented at Municipal Council.

The current provincial government campaigned during the 2003 election on a promise to implement real reform of the OMB. The government has yet to give any concrete timetable for reform. By meeting with representatives of all the provincial parties, the Councillors and FoNTRA are seeking an all-party agreement that will lead to meaningful reform of the OMB and usher in a new era when Municipal Councils would become the focal point for local development decision making.

"We've now consulted with all the parties of the Legislature and the elements for an all-party agreement are now in place. It now just takes the goodwill of the provincial government to carry through," said Councillor Cliff Jenkins (Ward 25, Don Valley West).

Liberal MPP Brad Duguid, Parliamentary Assistant to the Minister of Municipal Affairs, indicated that OMB reform will be dealt with separately and also there will be some supporting amendments to the Planning Act and the Provincial Policy Statement, as well as elements for reform in the anticipated new City of Toronto Act. "Common elements need to be included in all three Bills to ensure continuity," said MPP Duguid.

"Good. Reform of the OMB needs to be dealt with separately from the City of Toronto Act," responded Councillor Michael Walker (Ward 22, St. Paul's). "Major changes need to happen at the provincial level concerning the appointments of OMB members and their accountability to the residents whose lives they so deeply affect."

"As apparent in the city now more than ever, we need to return to a rules-based system of decision-making instead of the present culture of exemptions," said Michael Visser, member of FoNTRA from Oriole Park. "We'd have a much stronger and more beautiful city if the rules were adhered to more often, especially with the consideration of mega-developments such as Yonge & Eglinton's Minto mega-50 storey, 2-tower skyscraper that is being cited as a precedent to the OMB and City Planning."

Now, after meeting with all three provincial parties, the group of Councillors and neighbourhood reps can see no good reason for the provincial Liberals to delay new legislation that would address the issues raised by so many residents of Toronto.

"Except for developers, I don't know one person who supports the present structure of the OMB or what their decisions are doing to the stability of Toronto," said George Milbrandt, co-chair of FoNTRA.

- 30 -

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