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Land-use tribunal could replace OMB

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Councillors will have to get better at deal-making if the package of reforms to the land-use planning appeal system at the provincial level goes through.

"We have to be more creative without the guillotine of the OMB (Ontario Municipal Board) there to focus us," said College Coun. Rick Chiarelli. "Councillors won't be able to vote against something they know will be overturned at the OMB just to get applause."

The proposed reform, announced May 16, by Attorney General Yasir Naqvi, will be a more streamlined approach that lends a hand to residents and places more importance on planning decisions by the municipal government.

The Ontario Municipal Board would be replaced with the Local Planning Appeal Tribunal.

The reform would also eliminate lengthy and costly "de novo" hearings for the majority of planning appeals. The term de novo describes the practice of considering land-use appeals as though no decision had been made previously.

Mayor Jim Watson, who was minister of Housing and Municipal Affairs from 2007 to 2010, said reform of the process has been a long



Jennifer McIntosh/Metroland

Changes to the land use appeals process would result in the abolishment of the Ontario Municipal Board, Attorney General Yasir Naqvi announced alongside Mayor Jim Watson.

time coming.

"When I was minister, I would sign official plans and often times before the ink was dry there'd be an appeal," he said, adding that almost every "ask" the city had for reform is included in the government's proposal.

"One of the things is the effort on the part of the province (to have) more density around transit-oriented development, as a result of billions of dollars of investment," Naqvi said. "Developments would be protected or shielded to protect density around those zones, as opposed to getting into the kinds of disputes we often see at the OMB."

Sheila Perry, president of the Federation of Community Associations, said the change is a good-news story.

"To make a challenge to the OMB is quite daunting," she said. "You have to have a planner and a lawyer, which is no small expense for a community

one red flag.

The package of reforms includes a piece that would prohibit appeals of development within 500 metres of a major transit station. Transit-oriented development would essentially be insulated.

Naqvi said that's because transit receives investment from all levels of government and the province wants to ensure success by promoting intensification around transit centres.

The most recent example is the approval of a 22-storey building on Scott Street, at the former Trailhead site.

one red flag.

"I know that the height in the current community design plan wasn't going to go ahead, but we could have come up with something that is a better transition," Leiper said.

But overall, he said, the changes will be good news for residents, and keep land-use decisions in the hands of the people who have to live with the decisions.

"There's definitely more responsibility on the part of councillors to ensure good planning decisions," he said.