

# Province seeking public input on MZO

**MZO FROM A1**

and proposed a similar complex be built through a provincial initiative known as transit-oriented communities (TOC), which is not required to conform with local policies and is typically authorized through an MZO.

The Ministry of Infrastructure is now seeking public input on the request for MZOs for the Oakville TOC until Jan. 2.

Council members have repeatedly objected to the TOC plan. In November, the province slightly revised its plan for the high-density development. It lowers the tallest building height from 59 storey to 56 while trimming 20 residential units down to 6,881.

Oakville Coun. Janet Haslett-Theall called the changes “minus-cule” and said her concerns remain about the “mega density” of the proposed development.

“What we need is responsible density. We need some common sense about how many people you put in such a small area,” the councillor said.

Haslett-Theall said Oakville council continues to be blindsided with the province’s plans over the development.

She said she only learned about the MZO proposal from a member of the community who stumbled upon it on the Environmental Registry of Ontario website.

Ash Milton, a spokesperson for the Office of the Minister of Infrastructure (MOI), said the TOC program will deliver homes of different sizes near GO transit and “community benefits that wouldn’t exist without this program.” Using MZOs “provides critical zoning certainty, enabling new homes and public amenities to be built quickly,” he said.

A previous Star investigation found that Distrikt Developments and affiliated companies spent more than \$120 million buying the four plots of land from 2020 to 2024 that now make up the TOC. One of the landowning companies is co-directed by Christopher Bratty. Bratty is a developer who sat at Table 3 at Ford’s daughter’s September 2022 wedding, according to a copy of the reception’s seating plan. Ford had told Ontario’s integrity commissioner that the developer attendees were personal



**Oakville Mayor Rob Burton, who opposes the transit-oriented community plan, said he appreciates the province’s voluntary posting of MZO proposals as “an additional opportunity for public consultation.”**

COLIN MCCONNELL / TORONTO STAR FILE PHOTO

friends. Bratty and Emil Toma, president of Distrikt Developments, have been active donors to Ontario’s Progressive Conservatives since Ford became the leader.

Distrikt also hired Amir Remtulla to lobby the Ontario government for intensification in Oakville’s Midtown area. Remtulla worked as chief of staff to the late Rob Ford, the premier’s brother, from 2011 to 2012.

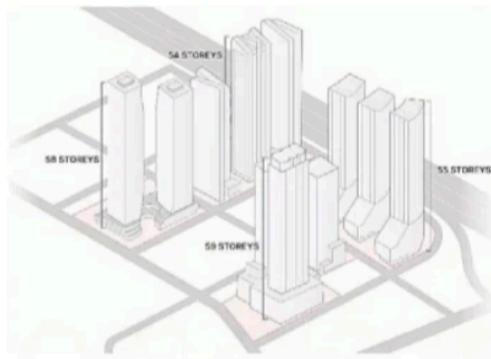
Distrikt’s Toma has previously defended the proposed development, saying it “will provide new housing, privately-owned publicly accessible open spaces (POPS), office and retail spaces, as well as public amenities directly next to the busiest GO station, other than Union Station, in all of Ontario.”

“Locating density on underutilized lands next to existing transit infrastructure to meet population growth targets makes sense and is widely supported by planning professionals and provincial policy direction,” Toma told the Star earlier this year.

Critics in Oakville say the province’s approach is an unsettling echo of the Greenbelt scandal, where Ford government decisions that disproportionately benefited certain developers were imposed over local objections.

“Once you get the zoning, then he’s (landowners) got the money. It’s all about the zoning,” Allan Elgar, a town and regional councillor, said, noting the developer may sit on the land and wait for the best time to maximize returns.

The transit-oriented communi-



MCKENNA HART/TORONTO STAR ILLUSTRATION

**An illustration of the province’s original November 2024 plan for the transit-oriented community near Oakville GO station. The province slightly revised the proposal a year later, lowering the tallest building height to 56 storeys.**

ties program is a provincial initiative designed to increase housing supply, create jobs, build complete communities and offset the cost of station construction. Upon approval, the Oakville TOC development is expected to be built in 25 years, according to the TOC website.

“How does this accelerate housing? It’s the opposite,” Elgar said.

Distrikt and the province did not answer questions about when the construction is expected to start.

It’s unclear who first suggested Distrikt’s lands could be developed as a transit-oriented community.

Oakville Mayor Rob Burton told a council meeting that “Distrikt was approached by the province.” In an interview with the Star, Burton would not elaborate on his statement except to say it was accurate and he stood by it.

Burton, who says his opposition to the TOC plan remains unchanged, told the Star that he appreciates the province’s voluntary posting of MZO proposals as “an additional opportunity for public consultation.”

In early 2025, the town council voted unanimously not to endorse the province’s TOC plan and passed its official plan amendment for its Midtown area, which includes the four parcels owned by Distrikt.

The Distrikt land sits roughly 300 metres away from the Oakville GO Station, and makes up just five per cent of what Oakville’s planners have dubbed “Midtown,” a 103-hectare belt of underutilized commercial and industrial land just south of the QEW.

Under Oakville’s official plan amendment for Midtown — which is still awaiting approval by the province — the development of the Distrikt land would add less than half of the population the provincial TOC plan would bring, as the amended plan set maximum residential density and tower height threshold much lower than what the province put forward when it designated the area a transit-oriented community.

The province can override Oakville’s plan for the land through an MZO.

Last December, Ontario’s auditor general released a report that found the province had used MZOs 114 times from 2019 to 2023 under Premier Doug Ford’s government, which is a 17-fold increase in usage from the previous 20 years.

The report also found that infrastructure and site servicing issues were often not identified before the province issued an MZO. This has resulted in significant delays in roughly one-in-five projects.

An Oakville staff report said the traffic volumes from the TOC will exceed the capacity of the already-congested roads, and could block buses from getting in and out of the Oakville GO Station and affect GO transit operations.

Distrikt plans to build new roads within the TOC to address the increase of vehicle traffic, as well as widening existing roads, the minister’s spokesperson Milton said, noting the proposal also includes pedestrian-friendly streetscapes, bike paths, green spaces, and community amenities.