https://www.cambridgetimes.ca/news-story/10803900--it-s-moving-ontario-back-30-years-former-planner-environmentalist-on-controversial-bill-s-impact-to-waterloo-region/

'It's moving Ontario back 30 years': Former planner, environmentalist on controversial bill's impact to Waterloo Region

Expert says while affordable housing is needed in the province, Bill 23 isn't the best way to go about it.

[Seyitan Moritiwon](https://www.cambridgetimes.ca/cambridge-on-author/seyitan-moritiwon/DD20BC5D-5082-4E50-A193-2AAD2184291C/)

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There has been an Ontario-wide uproar since the province passed a controversial housing bill on Monday, Nov. 28.

Bill 23 — the More Homes Built Faster Act — is the Government of Ontario’s effort at building more homes faster but not without a negative impact on the Waterloo Region, said former director of community planning at the Region of Waterloo Kevin Eby.

Established in 1973, Waterloo Region is comprised of seven municipalities: Cambridge, Kitchener, Waterloo, the Townships of North Dumfries, Wellesley, Wilmot, and Woolwich.

Through long-term thinking and regional planning, Eby says the region has been shaped into a more sustainable one.

“It has brought us so many things that would never, ever have happened if in fact, we had left it to the seven local municipalities to make all the decisions,” Eby said.

The most recent regional plan includes plans for 121,000 housing units and the development of 15-minute neighbourhoods in all cities and townships, while protecting the region’s natural and agricultural resources.

“We just went through a two-year process to develop a regional plan to guide growth for the next 30 years. And the community bought into it … and all of a sudden, it's gone,” Eby said. “It is so short sighted. It's moving Ontario back 30 years."

Eby said there is ample land available in the greenfield areas and the built-up areas of the region that are already zoned for development.

“There is nothing that the province is proposing that we're not already doing or are embarking on,” he said.

Although every municipality in Ontario could use more affordable homes, Bill 23 isn’t the way to go about it, Eby said.

“If they really wanted to do that (affordable homes), what they needed to do was to pull together a coalition of all kinds of groups and sit down and figure out how to deliver more affordable housing.”

Region of Waterloo staff say the new bill will cost the region about $535 million over the next 10 years.

Developers are not going to pay municipal development charges, parkland dedication levies and community benefits charges.

Kevin Thomason, vice-chair of the Grand River Environmental Network, said, “while Bill 23 is very bad news for all of Ontario, it's particularly devastating for Waterloo Region.”

“If the developer isn't paying for it, that leaves the taxpayers on the hook. And if the taxpayers are on the hook for it, that means your property taxes are going up,” he said, adding that the only people this bill benefits are developers and land speculators.

While Wilmot Township's mayor Natasha Salonen said she doesn't expect that the bill will change collaborative partnerships between the seven local municipalities, she agrees the bill will impact taxpayers.

"The Township’s 10-year capital forecast is reliant upon funding from development charges, and Bill 23 will impact the township’s ability to collect these fees," said Salonen. "In the absence of any transitional funding assistance from the province, additional tax levy and/or user pay funding will be required to ensure a sustainable capital program."

Ward 4 councillor for Wilmot Township, Steven Martin said he’s been hearing complaints from his constituents about the controversial bill and its impact on the Greenbelt and environmental, development costs and affordable housing.

Agreeing with Eby, Martin said it’s important to have affordable housing.

“I think that's what the intention is," said Martin. "I hope that the decision that the provincial government has made will help move things in that direction. And I guess time will tell as to how that works.”

The new council hasn’t had time to meet and talk about this bill in an official meeting to date, however Martin said he wants to co-operate with the new council and see how we can together use our voice in co-operation with the province.

Thomason believes there’s absolutely nothing that people — including councillors and mayors — can do other than rise up in the streets and protest.

“And that's the hope now that if enough municipalities and enough mayors and enough councillors and enough citizens all rise up … if we can speak up loud enough, the government will repeal it.”

**STORY BEHIND THE STORY**: *With Bill 23 passing on Nov. 28, New Hamburg Independent spoke to experts to find out how this bill impacts the Waterloo Region.*