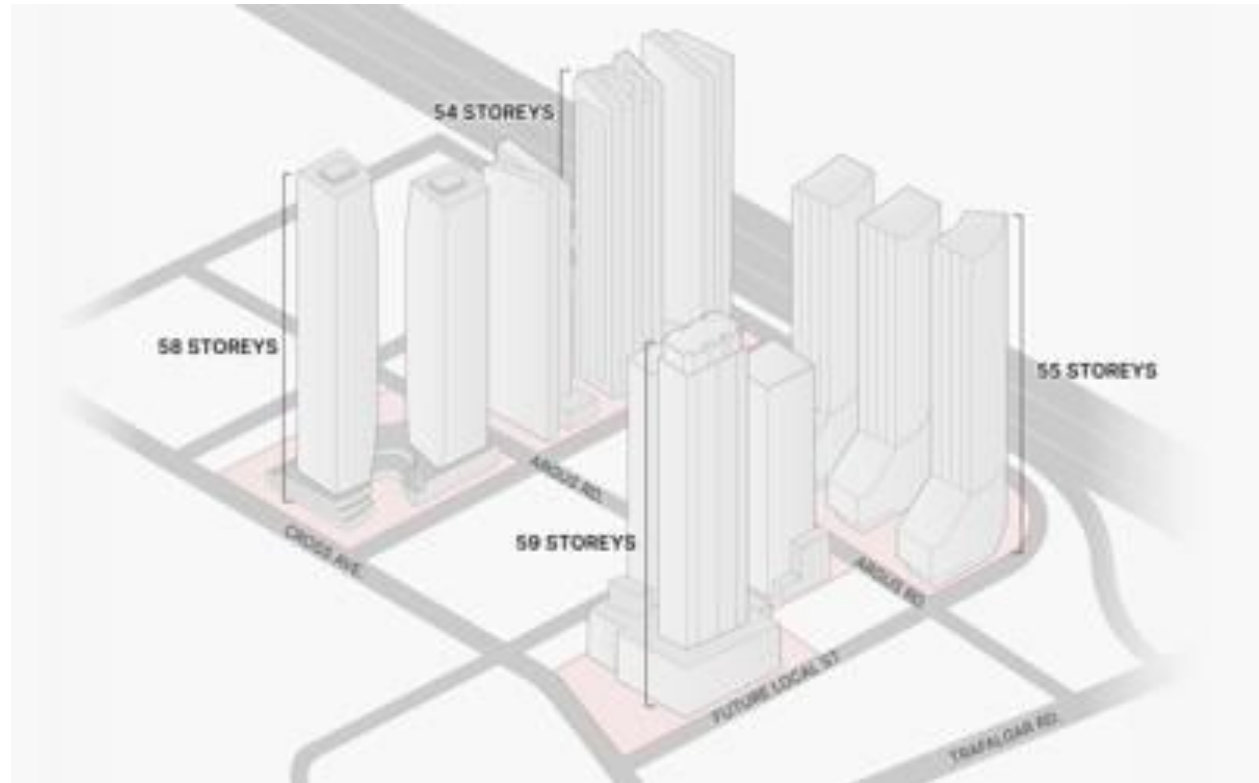


## Oakville councillors blindsided as Ford government steps in with plan for developers' stalled condo project

Provincial officials have said the cluster of condo towers near the GO station will deliver new housing, jobs and community amenities.

Feb. 26, 2025 8 min read

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The 11 condo towers the province has proposed for the development of Oakville's "transit-oriented community" near the GO station in Midtown.

McKenna Hart illustration

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By [Sheila Wang](#) Investigative Reporter

Premier Doug Ford's government is pushing for a controversial condo-tower development in Oakville that would benefit developers while disregarding the town's vision for the land.

The development would see 11 condo towers, ranging from 46 to 59 storeys, built in an area roughly the size of the Rogers Centre.

After Oakville did not approve the original building applications filed by the developers, the [Ontario government stepped in](#) and proposed a similar complex be built through a provincial initiative that can override local planning.

Oakville council members say they were blindsided by the province's proposal, which a staff report warns advances developers' interests while offering few benefits to the community.

Distrik Development Holdings had applied to build the thicket of towers across four parcels of land, one of which is owned by a company 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.

The province's proposal mirrors Distrik's blueprints — except it would allow slightly more units. The proposed [transit-oriented community, or TOC](#), would include more than 6,900 condos, mostly one-bedrooms.

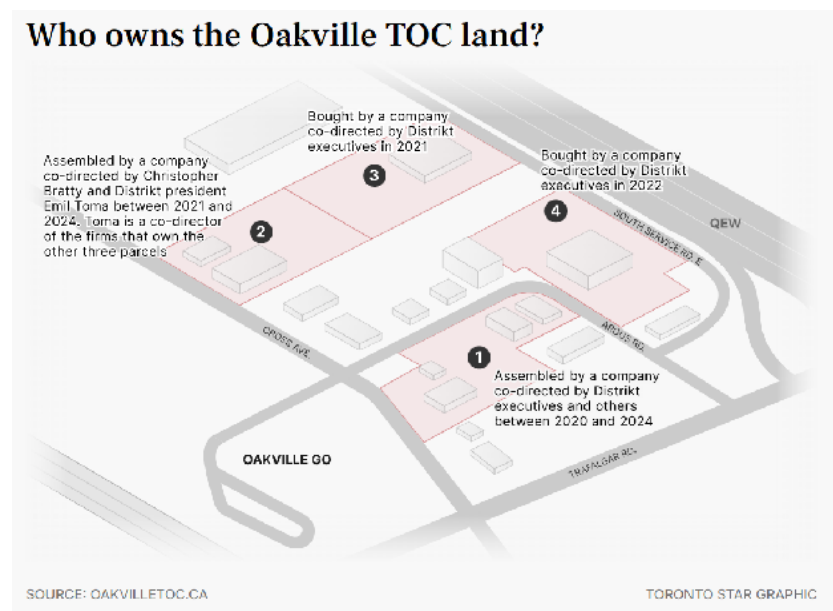
### For some, reminders of the Greenbelt scandal

Oakville council unanimously voted last month not to endorse the province's proposal, which town staff say disregards the province's own objectives of transit-oriented communities. The plan includes no provision for affordable housing units, and it's silent on if or how the developers will contribute to any new infrastructure at the nearby Oakville GO station.

"Overall, the TOC proposal appears as a private development proposal with very little to no community benefit for either the town or the province," Oakville planning staff told the province in a December 2024 letter.

For many in Oakville, the situation unfolding there is an unsettling echo of [the Greenbelt scandal](#), where Ford government decisions disproportionately benefitting certain developers were foisted onto local communities.

### Who owns the Oakville TOC land?



Neither the premier's office nor the ministry of infrastructure responded to the Star's questions. At the time the province advanced its proposal, an Infrastructure Ontario spokesperson [told the Oakville Beaver](#) that the town's GO station is the second busiest in the network and the province wants to transform nearby under-used properties into complete communities with numerous transportation options that could alleviate road congestion.

The province's proposal raises troubling questions about who gets to decide how communities are reshaped — and whose needs are prioritized.

As the province tries to tackle the housing shortages, the housing minister declared that “municipalities know best where and what types of homes are needed to address the unprecedented population growth we’ve seen.”

But critics say the province is taking away Oakville government’s decision-making.



Critics of the development proposal say Premier Doug Ford’s government is imposing a condo tower plan that is not in Oakville’s interest.

Nathan Denette THE CANADIAN PRESS

“The bigger picture here is they are consistently overruling duly elected councils, suspending good planning rules to reward their developer buddies with ultra-high densities in compact clusters of super high towers,” said Victor Doyle, an urban planner widely credited as the architect of Ontario’s Greenbelt.

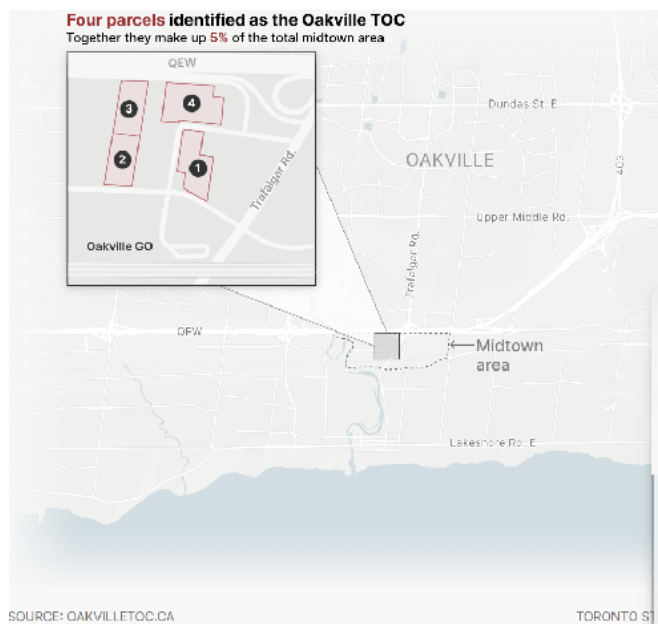
The four parcels sit roughly 300 metres away from the Oakville GO Station.

They make up just 5 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.

Since 2017, Oakville staff have eyed it for redevelopment.

Under Oakville’s plans, Midtown would become a vibrant mix-used community, an urban mosaic of residential, commercial and civic buildings complemented by open public spaces. It would have a variety of housing options and building heights catering to different residents’ needs including affordable housing and purpose-built rental.

Distrikt aspired to build 11 towers with more than 6,800 condo units on the four parcels of land, according to its applications to the municipality.



“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,” said Emil Toma, Distrikt’s president, in an email response on behalf of Distrikt and Bratty.

From 2020 to 2024, Distrikt-affiliated companies spent more than \$120 million buying the four plots of land, according to property records reviewed by the Star.

Toma is registered as a director for each of the corporations that own the land.

One of those companies is Cross Realty, a joint-venture Toma has with developer Christopher Bratty.

Bratty and his wife were guests at the wedding of one of Premier Ford’s daughters in September 2022, according to a seating chart obtained by the Star. The premier had said the developer guests were “[friends of the Ford family](#),” and in some cases have been for decades,” according to the office of the integrity commissioner.

Bratty and Toma joined forces in 2023 to secure the last of the four land parcels. According to corporate records, Bratty is not a director of any of the companies that own the other three properties.



Developer Chris Bratty, shown here in a 2017 photo, co-directs a company that owns one of the four parcels of land that is now subject to a development proposal by the province.

Steve Russell Toronto Star

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Bratty and Toma have been active donors to Ontario's Progressive Conservatives since Ford became the leader. Between 2018 and 2024, Toma and Bratty contributed more than \$21,000 to the PC party and associations. Of that, Toma donated \$3,500 in total directly to the PC party's electoral district association in Oakville in 2020, 2022 and 2023.

While names match, the Star cannot independently verify they are the same people. A Star reporter sent the donation records to the developers and they did not dispute them.

Distrikt has hired Amir Remtulla to lobby the Ontario government for intensification in Oakville's Midtown area.



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Remtulla worked as chief of staff to the late Rob Ford, the premier's brother, from 2011 to 2012. The Star previously reported that Remtulla was hired to lobby the provincial government on behalf of developers including TACC Developments, headed by Silvio De Gasperis. De Gasperis was [one of the landowners whose properties were to be removed from the Greenbelt](#) before the plan was reversed. Remtulla's lobbying was to be on issues related to "environment" and "housing"; his registration did not mention the Greenbelt.

Records show Remtulla had lobbied the provincial government on behalf of Distrikt with targets including premier Ford's office, the ministry of infrastructure and housing minister's office from 2022 to 2024. The lobbying goals, the records show, were "Intensification and future growth potential of the Oakville Midtown urban growth and major transit station area."

Remtulla did not respond to the Star's questions.

### **More condo units under Ontario's plan**

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.

Distrikt had appealed its development applications to build the condos to the Ontario Land Tribunal (OLT) after it said Oakville failed to make a decision on the applications within the required time.

In November 2024, the province revealed its own proposal for Distrikt's lands to be developed as a transit-oriented community. In the meantime, the appeal to the OLT has been put on hold.



Oakville Mayor Rob Burton, seen here at a recent transit announcement, said the province approached the developers with the idea to proceed with plans under the transit-oriented community program.  
Lea, David Metroland

Oakville Mayor Rob Burton, seen here at a recent transit announcement, said the province approached the developers with the idea to proceed with plans under the transit-oriented community program.

Lea, David Metroland

The Ontario government's proposed TOC development wasn't just what the developers had asked for in its original applications. It was more.

The TOC would bring the total number of residential units from the Distrikt-proposed 6,829 to 6,908.

Ultimately, Burton said, "council got dealt out of the planning process for this application because the province decided we were taking too long in public consultation."

### **Province says daycare, YMCA part of plan**

Under the province's transit-oriented community proposal, some 11,600 residents would be expected to live just on the 5-hectare site — almost half of the population Oakville has planned for the 103-hectare Midtown.

The TOC proposal significantly exceeds the province's own density targets. According to an Oakville council motion, the proposal would add 2,350 people and jobs per hectare, which is 10 times the province's minimum requirement.

"It does make sense to intensify around the transit hub and in underutilized land. We totally agree with that. What we don't agree with is this hyper density proposal where they've done a backroom deal with one developer to give them actually taller and more populated buildings than they even applied for in the first place," said resident George Niblock, a representative of the grassroots organization We Love Oakville.

Toma, president of Distrikt, said that there have been many public engagement meetings about their development applications and they were "generally in line with" the town's initial draft plan for the area. Toma said the town has been "very involved" in the TOC process from the beginning.

A report justifying the TOC proposal prepared on behalf of Distrikt says that the proposed Oakville TOC would provide not just new housing but also privately owned but publicly accessible open spaces, office and retail spaces, as well as community amenities including a daycare and a YMCA.

### **Does Ontario's plan meet its own objectives?**

When Ford's government passed the Transit-Oriented Communities Act in July 2020, it was intended to increase housing supply, create jobs, build complete communities, and offset the cost of station construction.

But the proposed condo development fails to meet these objectives, according to Oakville's planning staff.

In a December 2024 letter to the ministry of infrastructure, staff pointed out that the current version of the proposal does not require affordable housing in any of the 11 planned towers. It also does not include sufficient space for retail office and commercial use, and the parkland will be insufficient for the number of residents.

"You can't just plop 11 high story buildings on a couple of pieces of land and expect that to function over time. You need all the community centres, the parks, the libraries, the schools, the infrastructure," said Doyle, an urban planner.

In its letter, Oakville staff say the province failed to explain how the developer will offset the cost of new station infrastructure — or even what, if any, new infrastructure is being proposed.

“There’s nothing out there that benefits the community, nor does it really advance the objective of transit ... it doesn’t address the additional congestion they will drive,” Councillor Janet Haslett-Theall said.

Oakville GO is part of the Lakeshore West Line GO Expansion project, one of the province’s largest infrastructure investments. Introducing a TOC to Midtown Oakville can optimize investment and will offer more Ontarians access to housing, quality employment, services, and recreational opportunities, according to a third-party report the province is using to support its proposed development.

In an email, Distrikt’s Toma also defended the proposal, 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. “

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

### **Oakville casts vote, but will it matter?**

On Jan. 27, hundreds of residents filled the chambers where Oakville council was expected to take an official stance on the province’s plan for Distrikt lands.

The vote on the council was unanimous: Oakville does not endorse the TOC plan.

“Satisfying the desire of one is not good planning,” Councillor Haslett-Theall, who brought forward the motion, said at the council meeting.

The motion called the TOC proposal a dangerous precedent that prioritizes mega-density at the expense of balanced and sustainable development. The proposal also disregards the town’s own plans for the area, the motion said, despite that Oakville continues to meet provincial housing goals.

Oakville is one of 29 Ontario municipalities that have been assigned housing targets by the province through the More Homes Built Faster Act. Oakville was expected to add 33,000 additional units in 10 years. The town reached 80 per cent of its housing construction targets in 2023 and was rewarded with \$7 million from the province last November.

For years, Oakville has been charting its own path. On Feb. 18, Oakville passed its official plan amendment for the Midtown area, which includes the four properties owned by Distrikt.

Oakville’s plan “will result in needed housing sooner than the impractical, unrealistic and over-ambitious TOC proposal ever could,” the mayor told the council.

The amendment sets the maximum residential density and tower height threshold much lower than what the province put forward for the transit-oriented community. It would see the Distrikt land add 4,181 people and 1,314 jobs. The province’s TOC proposal would bring more than 11,000 people and 555 new jobs to the same area.



Council has requested Ontario's Ministry of Municipal Affairs and Housing to approve its official plan amendment. Even if it does, the province could still go ahead with the proposed TOC, which is not required to conform with the town's adopted policies.

Transit-oriented communities are typically authorized through a [minister's zoning order \(MZO\)](#), a blunt provincial tool that bypasses municipal planning authorities and is unappealable.

The province would not say if an MZO is being considered for the proposed Oakville TOC.

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