

Standing Committee on Justice: Siting Large Energy

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Association of
Municipalities
of Ontario

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Thank you, for providing the Association of Municipalities of Ontario with the opportunity to contribute to your discussions.

I am the president of AMO, which represents nearly all of Ontario's 444 municipalities. Our role is to support and enhance strong and effective municipal government in Ontario. We share the municipal perspective with policy-makers primarily at the provincial level with the objective of developing stronger public policies with better outcomes.

We understand that part of your mandate is to make recommendations on the future planning and siting of energy services. Ontario's municipalities welcome the opportunity to provide input on this important matter and specifically, on the siting of large energy projects. It is clear that on this front, a better path is needed. My remarks will focus on how we can move forward. It would be inappropriate for AMO to comment on the gas plant cancellation component of your mandate as we have no direct knowledge.

AMO advocates for a new process that demonstrates key principles of municipal government and community involvement early on. This contributes to transparency and is our first area of advice. Going forward, communities need to understand what decisions are being made, how they are made, as well as the costs and consequences of different alternatives. It is essential that the science, the rationale and the options are dealt with in public information sessions and other forums and consultations *before* a project moves to the RFP stage.

Most importantly, the public needs to be engaged – not just notified. Local governments and communities need to have a voice and to know how this voice has been acted upon, as well as why it may not be possible to accommodate certain options/alternatives and concerns.

The new process also needs to recognize that municipalities have a duty to their citizens. We are mandated to protect public safety, to provide adequate infrastructure,

protect the environment, stimulate economic viability and balance corporate well-being against individual's needs and interests.

Given the broad range of concerns and the complexity involved, it seems to us that we need more than just energy experts to plan energy. Choosing the right location goes beyond identifying just the energy needs in a region, but an understanding of local plans, initiatives and concerns – local ambitions. Major development proposals need to be viewed through the “triple bottom line” lens - meaning that social, environmental and economic costs and benefits must be addressed. The provincial interest and local interest need to be mutually evaluated to tackle both local and broader needs.

Finally, municipal governments can provide valuable insight not only on what sites would work best, but also how to maximize public investment by integrating new infrastructure into local land use and other planning. Integration of planning needs must occur earlier on.

Linking into local land use planning early on just makes sense. The planning process in Ontario is a mature one, understood and can be the vehicle to bring forward change.

Doing it well does take time. It is important that the process respects the timeframes required for normal municipal business. The development of municipal comprehensive planning documents can take up to eighteen months before adopted, let alone approved. Good, integrated planning with solid, meaningful input will take time. As a process, it also needs to recognize that across Ontario, municipal governments have different capacities and priorities. It needs to accommodate municipalities that have few staff, lack expertise or the resources to purchase that expertise.

One thing I have learned as president of AMO is that when governments work together, we are able to come up with improved solutions that serve the public good. Thank you again for the opportunity to address this committee.