



NEWS RELEASE

For immediate release
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Statement from Mayor Sid Tobias on Bill 15 and Bill 7 “A Threat to Local Democracy and Public Accountability”

View Royal, BC - On May 1, 2025, the Province of British Columbia introduced two pieces of legislation, Bill 15: Infrastructure Projects Streamlining Act and Bill 7: Municipalities Enabling and Validating Act, that are expected to move swiftly through the current legislative session. The Bills are being fast tracked with a vote expected on 28 May 2025. Despite their titles, these Bills do not empower or enable municipalities - they do the opposite. Last night, View Royal Council voted unanimously to support this press release to raise awareness of this legislation to the public and encourage MLAs to reject this legislation.

"History proves that strong local governments lead to thriving communities. British Columbia has benefited from empowered municipalities that understand local needs best. But year after year, we've watched authority shrink while financial pressures grow, downloading responsibilities without the resources to handle them. If this pattern continues, local governments like the Town of View Royal will be left managing crises instead of shaping the future," added Councillor Damian Kowalewich.

Bill 15 grants the provincial cabinet unilateral power to designate infrastructure projects as "provincially significant," allowing them to bypass municipal planning, override local bylaws, and fast-track approvals without consultation.

Bill 7 retroactively validates ministerial interventions that sidestep municipal authority, including contentious housing decisions imposed without local input or due process.

"These titles are designed to suggest empowerment and efficiency," said Mayor Sid Tobias, "but their actual impact is to centralize power, strip local governments of decision-making authority, and diminish public accountability. They are, in effect, the opposite of what their names suggest."

Why This Matters

If passed, these Bills will:

- Undermine the authority of local councils to make planning decisions;
- Shift financial and infrastructure burdens to local taxpayers;
- Eliminate meaningful community input on developments;
- Weaken democratic oversight by bypassing locally elected officials.

A Pattern of Centralized Overreach

“This government has adopted a disturbing trend: declare a crisis, bypass consultation, and impose a top-down solution,” said Tobias. “There is a significant difference between a housing crisis and an affordable housing crisis. The former justifies speed at any cost; the latter demands thoughtful, inclusive solutions.”

At a recent regional mayors’ lunch, many of the attendees, collectively representing over 250,000 residents, had not been made aware of Bill 15 and Bill 7. Unsurprising because there was zero consultation. That municipalities could be blindsided by such impactful legislation reflects a broader breakdown in provincial respect for local governance.

Secrecy, NDAs, and the Collapse of Trust

What is especially troubling is the government’s growing use of non-disclosure agreements (NDAs) with the Union of BC Municipalities and select municipalities during legislative development.

“This is not how a democratic society operates,” Tobias said. “NDAs should never be used to silence or control consultation. When governments consult the public behind closed doors and forbid them from speaking, they are not practicing democracy—they are managing perception.”

This approach contradicts the principles laid out in Section 2 of B.C.’s Community Charter, which recognizes municipalities as an order of government and calls for meaningful consultation on matters of mutual interest.

Consent from municipalities has largely been manufactured as the Province holds the key to grants for infrastructure that make residents’ lives safer.

“I suspect many municipal councils are reluctant to speak out for two reasons,” said Tobias. “One, they did not know about the legislation or its implications and two, they are fearful of being denied funding for critical projects that effect our safety and quality of life such as water, sewer, roads, sidewalks, and transportation.”

Municipalities Will Bear the Cost

These Bills offload implementation and infrastructure responsibilities onto municipalities that had no say in the decision-making. Local governments will be left to fund and support projects they were excluded from planning. The result? Higher costs, deeper strain on services, and frustrated communities.

A Stark Warning

“The erosion of democratic norms does not come all at once - it comes through measures like these,” warned Mayor Tobias. “What we are seeing is the centralization of power, suppression of dissent, and erosion of process that mirrors some of the most troubling trends we’ve seen elsewhere, including under the Trump administration in the United States.”

“These are not theoretical risks. They are present, unfolding, and profoundly dangerous to the integrity of public governance in British Columbia.”

A Direct Appeal to the Premier

Premier Eby, it is time to end the use of non-disclosure agreements in public consultation. British Columbians deserve transparency. Municipalities deserve respect. And democracy demands openness.

“If you want to lead a province committed to justice, affordability, and equity, then lead a government that listens in the open - where the lights are on and the public is watching,” said Tobias.

“You were not gifted leadership to preserve the status quo - you were given it to raise the standard. Reject secrecy. Honour process. And rise to the moment by practicing the very democracy we all claim to defend.”

A Final Call to Action

To MLAs: This is your test. Represent your constituents - not your caucus. Refuse to treat a vote on local governance as a test of party loyalty. Imagine a democracy where no vote is a vote of confidence, but every vote is a vote of conscience. That is the standard the people of this province deserve.

To residents: Engage. Ask questions. Make your voice heard. Demand transparency and accountability from your elected representatives.

Let British Columbia be known not for the apathetic erosion of its democratic norms, but for the courage to reach higher towards transparency, integrity, and genuine leadership.

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