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STAR INVESTIGATION

Oakville residents want Doug Ford's government to pause an 11-tower condo project over developer vetting concerns

Developer Emil Toma has said his company Distrikt Developments is qualified to help build the transit-oriented community.

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Michael Reid and other Oakville residents are speaking out against Ontario's plan to build a cluster of condo towers and questioning the suitability of the province's private-sector partner.

Andrew Francis Wallace Toronto Star

By Sheila Wang Investigative Reporter

Premier Doug Ford's government should freeze its plan for a [massive condo development](#) in Oakville until it can disclose how thoroughly it vetted the developer picked to lead the project, a local citizens group is demanding.

In a letter to the province, the Oakville Community Association, which represents more than 2,000 residents, asked for an independent review of Ontario's use of four minister's zoning orders (MZOs) to fast-track the development near the [busy Oakville GO station](#). The group also urged the provincial government to reveal the results of any due diligence it conducted on the developer's finances and expertise.

The letter went to the Minister of Infrastructure Kinga Surma shortly after the publication of an Aug. 27 [Toronto Star investigation](#) that found the province's private building partner, Distrikt Developments, had no prior experience in

building highrise condos, and that its president, Emil Toma, had faced a succession of legal and financial battles since he started as a builder in 2009.

Most recently, Toma saw a Toronto apartment project managed through a separate company collapse into receivership without ever breaking ground.

Oakville councillors and planning staffers have [long opposed the project](#), which would allow Distrikt Developments to build a cluster of 11 highrise condo towers and add more than 6,800 homes to an area roughly the size of the Rogers Centre. The [MZO bypasses local planning processes](#) and cannot be appealed.

Did the province vet the developer?

Distrikt has told the Star that it has successfully built residential communities, and it is qualified to deliver this project's housing and employment opportunities, as well as other public benefits.





Emil Toma

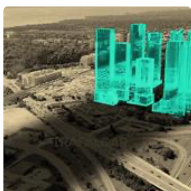
www.distrikt.com

For this story, Toma said Distrikt has invested “as a minority partner” in the Oakville TOC, which is “majority owned and sponsored by major institutional partners, together with established lending institutions and investment partners.” Distrikt’s role is to “lead the development process,” including land assembly, planning and approvals, while its project partners handle construction.

In its five-page letter to the province, the association is asking for a hold on the project until an independent review is complete. The province must revoke the MZOs, the letter said, if the review does not establish that orders were justified.

“How do they continue to have a company who has all these issues have MZOs to pretty much do this huge development? They really need to save face,” said Michael Reid, president of the Oakville Community Association, who wrote the letter on behalf of the group.

In a separate email to the Star in July, Toma said many of the Star’s questions “conflate unrelated companies, individuals, and historical disputes into a single narrative about Distrikt. These matters involve different entities and circumstances and have no bearing on Distrikt Developments or the Oakville Transit-Oriented Community.”



STAR INVESTIGATION

Ontario picked this developer to transform Oakville’s skyline. The company has never built a highrise

The Ministry of Infrastructure did not say whether the government will consider reviewing or revoking the zoning orders. In an email, it referred the Star to previous statements provided by Infrastructure Ontario (IO).

IO has told the Star that it “conducts a robust reputation and financial due diligence to ensure the building partners have the expertise, experience and access to capital to build housing around transit stations and hubs.

How big is the Ford government’s plan?

IO manages Ontario’s transit-oriented community (TOC) program. The program, launched by Ford’s government in 2020, aims to increase housing supply near transit and save taxpayers’ money.

The Oakville land, now consisting mainly of parking lots and low-slung strip malls, was tapped as a TOC in November 2024. In April, the Ford government issued four MZOs to expedite the project.

A December 2024 auditor general’s report found that under Ford’s government, minister’s zoning orders were [often approved without clear rationale](#) and showed “the appearance of preferential treatment” for some developers. In April 2024, the province revoked six MZOs as part of an effort to crack down on stalled developments that had seen little progress.

The province should consider adding the Oakville MZOs to their revocation list, Reid said.

“The Ford government sometimes rushes to do something and then afterwards they realize, oh, wait a minute, maybe we shouldn’t have done that and then they roll it back,” he said.

When the Ford government picked Distrikt to lead the TOC development, Toma, his brother and their other company had defaulted on a multiple-million-dollar loan for a lowrise apartment project in Toronto, which then went into receivership. Lenders then asked an Ontario court to issue a bankruptcy order against Toma. The proceedings are ongoing, according to the bankruptcy and insolvency records database.

Distrikt has said that like every major master-planned community in Ontario, projects of this scale are delivered by experienced teams of professionals, “not by one individual or one company acting alone.”

At a local advisory meeting in 2025, IO was asked whether Distrikt had funding for the project, and an official said the firm has partnered with Remington Group and had institutional financing and rental options planned on the TOC development.

Remington's president Christopher Bratty was one of the developers who attended Ford's daughter's wedding and was described as a personal friend of Ford.

"These concerns are matters of clear public interest," the letter reads. "The public should not be asked to simply assume that the necessary financial, technical and organizational capacity exists. The province should be prepared to demonstrate that it does."

Under Oakville's original plans, a 103-hectare area in midtown just south of the QEW would become a vibrant, mix-used community with a variety of housing options and building heights to house 12,000 new residents.

The Ford government's TOC plan would bring that many people to an area less than five per cent of that size.

As of Friday, Reid told the Star they haven't heard from the province on their requests but he felt "hopeful" the government would do the right thing.



Sheila Wang is an investigative reporter for the Star. Reach her via email: sheilawang@thestar.ca.

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