



Loreena McKennitt - Rally #2 Remarks
November 30, 2020
Market Square, Stratford, Ontario

Fellow citizens of Stratford,

Thank you for coming out again today. We all greatly appreciate the efforts everyone is making in following along on this challenging matter. I will try not to be *too* long.

For those who would like a copy of my remarks, along with many of the documents and media coverage woven into this matter, I invite you to go to our new website WiseCommunities.org.

I would also like to thank the local group [Get Concerned Stratford](#) for their tireless work and contributions, including organizing this event.

Over the past week, it has become apparent that there are now *two* subjects of concern, not just one. Firstly, there is the suitability of the proposed glass factory for the City of Stratford.

Secondly, there is the absence of open communications and the democratic process itself. This has left many citizens in the dark where it should have led us to enlightenment. The absence of a process, rich in veracity, transparency and timeliness has shocked many citizens to the core. We are now demanding an explanation from our officials. It comes down to trust.

Since last week, my quest has been to examine how and why these failures occurred and how things might be done better in the future. But in order to understand that we need to inquire into the darkness and address inconsistencies where they lie.

Upon close examination, what appears to be abundantly clear is that the mechanics of our democracies are declining and eroding at a shocking rate – at both the local and provincial levels. And the misuse and proliferation of Ministerial Zoning Orders (MZOs) are facilitating a decimation of our natural environment, our children’s future and more.

Even as we stand here today, some of these undemocratic MZO instruments are being embedded into the provincial government’s November budget under the title ‘*Protect, Support and Recover from COVID-19*’ Act. By Thursday it will all be a done deal.

According to an [editorial in yesterday’s Toronto Star](#), “*David Crombie, chair of the province’s Greenbelt Council, has joined the chorus of groups urging the government to abandon its changes to environmental laws and cease and desist its extra-ordinary use of ministerial zoning orders, which circumvent local planning rules and public consultation.*”

The government’s actions, Crombie says, are “*contributing to a growing public concern that the end result will be a widening of the path of political influence on behalf of special interests...Tucking legislative changes into budget bills is designed to avoid proper scrutiny, debate and public consultation.*”

At a local level, this approach is compounded by an abundance of closed-door meetings (known as in-camera). These types of meetings circumvent citizens’ involvement and scrutiny and by doing so compromises our cherished democracy, potentially resulting in irreversible consequences to the environment and more. It is not my intent to run through all the things we are learning in relation to this glass factory proposal. That will come. But there are some key points people should know.

In last week’s November 23 article in the Beacon Herald, entitled [‘Restrictive Zoning Order ties Stratford’s hands: Matheson,’](#) the mayor is quoted as saying that “*Xinyi then proceeded to have numerous discussions with the minister with respect to the application of the ministers zoning order, only on those lands needed for the float glass manufacturing facility*”. Yet, when the minister’s office was contacted, it furnished three letters the mayor had sent between November 2018 and April of this year, clearly showing it was *him* requesting the zoning orders, not Xinyi.

When these letters became available to the public last week, I contacted Paul Parlee, a former solicitor for the City of Stratford, who had shared with me his letter to council regarding his concerns with this project.

We jointly felt more inquiry was needed. We sent council [a list of our questions and requested a moratorium on the project](#) until some explanation was given to the

citizens of Stratford. Why has this complex project become so advanced, with so little public awareness and consultation, and what did the councillors know and when concerning the MZOs?

Much has been made about the role of ministerial zoning orders, which the Mayor of Stratford requested three times between November 20, 2018 and April of this year – the third letter urging the minister to reconsider his earlier decisions to deny his MZO requests.

Although it has been commonly understood that these Minister's Zoning Orders could be secured with no public consultation required and no appeal possible, we recently learned that indeed public participation *is* desired. During a [TVO interview on July 10th of this year](#) (only two days after the MZO for Stratford was issued), the minister said the following:

“For now, we’re quite happy with the dozen or so (MZO’s) I’ve done...that have been driven by a council decision, in a public council meeting, before it comes to my desk. That makes sure the public is aware there is a request, it communicates there is a priority of a council, and then it’s up to us to decide whether we want to move forward.”

After learning this, I asked myself when *were* those public consultations before each of the MZOs the Mayor applied for? Was I out of town touring?

And was it discussed and voted on at a public council meeting as per the minister's remarks? And is there a record of that vote? Was that supplied each time to the minister when each of the mayor's three requests were made?

It is also clear there was a lack of familiarity among some council members about MZOs. Councillor Henderson shared during the November 17th council meeting that [she'd been a councillor for 14 years and was only then learning about MZOs \(at 09m54s\)](#).

One has to ask if there are other councillors who either weren't privy to what was being requested of the minister, or simply didn't understand what an MZO was. Did they understand the repercussions and consequences when a transparent and democratic process was denied?

Was there any significance to the Mayor making the first application for the MZO between the municipal election of 2018 and when the new councillors were settled in? Could this not have waited until everyone had taken their seats in council chambers? Could it even have waited for the New Year?

Or did the Mayor act unilaterally? We have reviewed the city by-laws and are unable to find anything indicating the Mayor of the City of Stratford is endowed with that level of authority. If this was done unilaterally with the knowledge, consent and direction of council, we will expect to see this in their response to us this week.

And because people's trust in the system has been compromised, the people are understandably asking more questions.

In these past 10 days, which feel like 10 months, many, many people have approached me with their concerns. All are in unison over the lack of notice and democratic process, from the woman at the corner shop who sells me my newspaper, to many business owners, including some who pioneered the hospitality industries which have contributed to making this city such a jewel.

It would be disingenuous to frame opposition to this project as an industry or anti-industry position, or to suggest that it's the artists and lefties at it again. I can hardly remember a time in my 30 years of living here where I have met so many people – across all political stripes and social economic backgrounds – who share these concerns.

People understand the importance of industry, revenue and jobs. But citizens are also seeking wise, complementary and forward-looking industries that respect the environment, human rights and climate change, to mention but a few.

There is even debate about how meaningful the number of jobs might be and great concerns that the proposed plant would *not* be allowed to unionize.

But what people are most concerned about is the lack of transparency.

I will now speak to the subject which arose in some communications over the weekend and which was raised in [Mr. Rickett's online opinion piece](#) circulating yesterday. Although his piece may have contained some helpful suggestions, it was his implication of racism or xenophobia which must be addressed.

I will only say, I have yet to meet a single person who has expressed anything racist or xenophobic in the nature of their concerns. This unfortunate effort to re-frame and deflect only clouds the real issue concerning China and which some people may be reluctant to express.

It is witnessed by the mere fact that we are living in a country which allows us to gather here today and share our thoughts, even differences of opinion.

I would refer you to [Mr. Parlee's excellent letter to council](#) last week where he speaks to this dimension and I will read some of it here today. Hopefully you have seen a copy too. He writes:

“I wish to start out by saying that we ought not to conflate the population and people of China with the Government of China or the Chinese communist party (CCP) and Government policies.

“So what is the connection between the Chinese company Xinyi –and the people’s Republic of China Government and the CCP? The Chinese Government passed the National Intelligence Act which requires all Chinese organizations and companies to provide access, cooperation and support for Beijing’s intelligence – gathering activities. Moreover, the CCP has a Party committee which is involved in the management of China based and owned corporations with a view to ensuring that the activities of the corporation are consistent with and support the best interests of the Nation of China. Because the CCP is embedded in and arguably can control Xinyi, any activity of Xinyi which gives rise to a divergence between the political or financial interests of China versus Canada will be resolved by Xinyi in favour of China.”

He goes on in his letter to state, *“The Chinese Government is engaged in a large-scale systemic oppression of millions of people, in particular the Uyghurs, Tibetans and ethnic Muslim populations.*

“The CCP has punished any opponents to its policies by hostage diplomacy, and has jailed for almost 2 years without any trial or hearing, (Canadians) Michael Kovrig and Michael Spavor. The Chinese Government has imposed unjustified punitive tariffs on Canadian pork, canola and lobster, and has simply banned the sale of other Canadian products in China.

“The House of Commons recently passed a motion requiring our Government to develop a plan to combat China’s surveillance and intimidation of Chinese Canadians in Canada and their families in China.

“The Canadian Security Intelligence Service (CSIS) warns that this Chinese state sponsored harassment in Canada in part, is part of a global campaign of intimidation and harassment which threatens Canada’s sovereignty and the safety of Canadians.”

This is clearly not a matter of racism, but of national sovereignty, and I would urge everyone to read Mr. Parlee’s letter in its entirety.

So, I say to Mr. Rickett that for him to distort citizen's concerns, whose forbearers fought and died in two world wars to protect and advance the freedom and liberty which we enjoy here today, but is denied in China and Hong Kong, is an egregious failure of awareness.

To the Mayor, I will say this.

We have researched and come to know that there is nothing technically preventing the minister of Municipal Affairs and Housing from rescinding that MZO he granted you last July. Your hands aren't as tied as you thought they were. You just have to ask for it.

To our councillors, I would ask you to speak up. We acknowledge that perhaps not everyone was aware of or understood MZOs. We just need to understand why.

And we accept that 2020 is very different than 2017 and there is no shame in changing your minds. We all know what it's like to come into new information and evolve in our positions. In fact, we applaud it and offer our admiration and respect.

But we do need to know what happened.

Even if it is simply to tell us which of the many in-camera meetings held over these past few years pertained to this subject. We don't even know that yet.

And to all citizens here today, I must thank you for your concern and perseverance.

We must take care of our democracies and be fully engaged, as we are today. We must keep up the pressure and know it is our legal and democratic right to be involved in the process which shapes our communities.

We must continue to demand for an accounting of what has happened here. We deserve nothing less.

To those of you who have come here today, or came last week, or who will come here in the future to this public square – near to where our elected officials hold our trust each day – you are our honour guard and I thank you for your service.

Canadians uphold the values of democracy, human rights and the rule of law.

Defending it begins at home.