

Proposed changes would allow municipalities to impose fines for misuse of lands

By Mark PavilonsEditor

Legislative changes aimed at preventing illegal land uses, especially illegal truck yards, come as good news to municipalities who have been struggling with the issue for years. The amendments would enable municipalities to impose administrative monetary penalties for illegal land uses, including illegal truck yards that are frequently established on rural, agricultural or residential properties. Several municipalities have asked the government for more tools to address illegal land uses, including trucks illegally parked on agricultural, rural, and residential lands, said Rob Flack, Minister of Municipal Affairs and Housing. That is why we are pleased to support this locally led solution, protecting our communities, including the surrounding farmland, and ensuring the health and safety of residents. Illegal land uses, such as truck depots, can impact rural, agricultural and residential lands that are not zoned to accommodate significant numbers of large vehicles. This can create safety hazards, damage local roads and generate noise, odour, lighting and drainage issues for nearby residents. Illegal truck yards have been a major concern for residents across Caledon, disrupting rural communities, damaging local roads and threatening the integrity of our agricultural land, said Sylvia Jones, MPP for Dufferin-Caledon. These proposed changes would give municipalities the stronger enforcement tools they need to crack down on unlawful land uses, protect our communities and preserve the farmland that is so important to our region. While municipalities can currently prosecute offenders who contravene zoning bylaws, it can require significant staff time and take years to resolve through the courts. Allowing municipalities to issue administrative monetary penalties gives them an additional tool to immediately address inappropriate land uses. I would like to thank the Ford government for hearing us. This means a great deal to Caledon and other municipalities facing this issue, said Caledon Mayor Annette Groves. We have advocated hard for more ability to enforce illegal land use. This now gives us more tools to keep our community safe. The changes, which are aimed at strengthening municipal enforcement powers related to illegal land uses and unauthorized truck yards, represent a significant win not only for Caledon but for municipalities across Ontario facing similar challenges. The announcement also reflects years of advocacy led by Mayor Annette Groves to secure stronger enforcement measures and better provincial support for municipalities. Caledon's advocacy intensified after Mayor Groves appeared before the Standing Committee on Heritage, Infrastructure and Cultural Policy in August 2024, urging provincial action on illegal truck yards and unlawful land uses. Since then, she has continued to push for stronger enforcement tools and intergovernmental collaboration to address historical gaps in land use controls that have impacted residents and rural lands. This is a win for our community and a significant step toward addressing the spread of illegal truck yards across Caledon and within our natural areas, said Mayor Groves. I want to thank the Province for recognizing the seriousness of this issue and for providing municipalities with the tools needed to take meaningful action. Today's announcement reflects the value of sustained advocacy and strong intergovernmental collaboration. Since 2024, the Town of Caledon has prosecuted over 40 illegal truck yard operations and event centres as part of its ongoing efforts to protect public safety, preserve agricultural lands, and uphold community standards. King Township is not immune to the problem. Residents of King and Vaughan know all too well that our communities have become a hot spot for illegal land use. This is why we are supporting municipalities in cracking down with new penalties that better ensure rural, agricultural, and residential lands are for farmers and families, not illegal trucking yards. This policy will give municipal by-law the enforcement teeth and confidence they need to keep our communities safe, said King Vaughan MPP Stephen Lecce. On behalf of King Township and the Small Urban Mayors of the Greater Toronto and Hamilton Area (SUM GTHA), I want to thank the Province for working with municipalities on this locally led solution an issue SUM GTHA and King have strongly advocated for. These changes will reduce red tape, strengthen enforcement, and deliver real cost efficiencies for taxpayers by reducing the need for lengthy and expensive court proceedings, noted King Mayor Steve Pellegrini, who is also chair, Small Urban Mayors of the Greater Toronto and Hamilton Area. As Chair of the Small Urban Mayors of the Greater Toronto and Hamilton Area (SUM GTHA), I want to thank the Ford government and MPP for King Vaughan, Stephen Lecce, for collaborating with municipalities to implement a locally led solution to halt illegal land use. Allowing municipalities to impose administrative monetary penalties (fines) for illegal land use is a pivotal tool necessary to enforce zoning rules, protect farmers and residents, and ensure we can keep our streets and communities safe in the process. Administrative monetary penalties can be issued directly by a municipal official, without having to go to court. They are intended to encourage compliance rather than provide a punishment and allow municipalities to deal with violations more efficiently than a formal

prosecution. The Ministry of Transportation is currently sourcing appropriate lands that can accommodate truck and trailer parking in high-priority areas such as Peel, York and Halton regions. Administrative monetary penalties are a discretionary tool. Amounts are set by individual municipalities, subject to legal constraints, and are intended to promote compliance with local by-laws. They may include criteria for increasing penalties in cases of continued non-compliance. Any non-payment of administrative monetary penalties could be added to the tax roll and recovered through property taxes. In 2025, Halton Hills had over 50 illegal truck depots and more than 40 active investigations. The largest fine for a successful prosecution was \$115,000 ? which did not cover the prosecution and enforcement costs. ? Illegal truck yards often create serious safety concerns for families and communities, while putting added pressure on local roads and infrastructure. These changes are part of our government's commitment to protecting Ontario by giving municipalities stronger enforcement tools to crack down on illegal activity and help keep communities safe, ? said Michael Kerzner, Solicitor General. ? Rural communities should feel safe, protected and respected. Illegal land uses can create challenges for residents and municipalities. These proposed changes will give municipalities stronger tools to respond more quickly and help to ensure rural communities in Ontario are locations people are proud to call home, ? added Lisa Thompson, Minister of Rural Affairs.