

Local governments lose power as new law takes effect

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A contentious law that will strip municipalities of some of their autonomy will take effect today.

The Association of Manitoba Municipalities and the City of Winnipeg had criticized the Planning Amendment and City of Winnipeg Charter Amendment Act for allowing their planning decisions to be appealed by a municipal board consisting of provincial appointees.

In a news release Thursday announcing the legislation will take effect, Municipal Relations Minister Derek Johnson said it delivers on the PC government's "commitment to modernize and streamline planning processes, and will create more efficient, transparent and streamlined planning processes across the province."

Winnipeg Mayor Brian Bowman's office issued a statement expressing surprise the legislation will be in effect before more details are made public and Manitoba's new premier — to be chosen Saturday — has agreed to it.

"The mayor's understanding from the city's public service is that the province has yet to release important details necessary to implement this bill," the statement said. "It was also surprising the provincial government would not have waited for a review by the incoming premier who may have a more collaborative approach to this important planning matter."

The legislation creates new rights of appeal for applicants on a range of local planning decisions. It sets timelines and performance standards

for municipalities and planning districts to process planning applications across the province, the government release said.

The province said Thursday the regional planning authority and major development agreement sections of the legislation will be proclaimed at a later date, following consultation on associated regulations.

More appeals will create "exactly the kind of delays in development planning that the government claims it was trying to prevent in the first place," said the president of the Association of Manitoba Municipalities, Kam Blight. The president of the association said in a *Free Press* op-ed earlier this month that Bill 37 should've been included with five other contentious pieces of legislation the PC government withdrew once Brian Pallister resigned as premier.

"In its current form, Bill 37 may encourage frivolous or vexatious appeals, which would slow development and economic growth as Manitobans look to recover from the ongoing pandemic," Blight wrote. "Even filing a doomed appeal will give critics or competitors a shot at delaying a project for many months or even years."

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