

PBC 15-Minute Cities Blog Draft

Suggested headline

****B.C.'s Housing Laws and the 15-Minute City Debate: What the CityHallWatch Legislation Tracker Reveals****

Source link:

<https://cityhallwatch.wordpress.com/legislation-tracker/>

Short share caption

B.C.'s recent housing laws are not just about "more homes." They are also about density mandates, transit-oriented zones, reduced parking requirements, fewer public hearings, and a major shift of planning power from municipalities to the Province. CityHallWatch has created a detailed tracker of the bills from 2022 onward. If you are following the 15-minute city debate in B.C., this is required reading.

Blog post

The phrase "15-minute city" gets used in many different ways.

To supporters, it means convenience: a neighbourhood where people can walk, bike, or take transit to daily needs like groceries, schools, parks, clinics, and services.

To critics, it raises a deeper concern: whether governments are using pleasant planning language to justify top-down control, density mandates, reduced car access, restricted parking, and less local say over how communities are changed.

That is why the CityHallWatch ****B.C. legislation tracker**** is important.

The tracker lays out a series of B.C. provincial laws from 2022 onward that have reshaped housing, zoning, transit-oriented development, infrastructure approval, and municipal authority. Whether or not the Province uses the phrase "15-minute city," the direction of the legislation overlaps with many 15-minute-city concerns.

The key issue: who controls local planning?

The biggest question is not simply whether B.C. needs more housing. Most people agree housing is a serious issue.

The bigger question is:

****Who gets to decide what our communities become?****

Should neighbourhood planning be decided mainly by:

- local councils,
- local residents,
- public hearings,
- neighbourhood plans,
- municipal infrastructure capacity,

or by:

- province-wide mandates,
- ministerial powers,
- housing targets,
- transit-zone density rules,
- reduced local discretion,
- fewer public hearings?

CityHallWatch argues that the Province has moved rapidly toward the second model.

Bill 43: the starting point

CityHallWatch identifies ****Bill 43, the Housing Supply Act, 2022****, as the beginning of the current wave of provincial housing control.

The tracker says the bill was introduced shortly after David Eby became Premier and moved through the Legislature quickly.

The concern is that Bill 43 gave the Province power to set housing targets for municipalities and enforce compliance. That means municipalities could be pressured or directed to meet provincial housing numbers, even where local infrastructure, public opinion, or community plans do not align.

This matters because once housing targets become binding, local planning changes from public deliberation to target compliance.

Bill 44: ending single-family zoning in many areas

****Bill 44****, passed in 2023, is one of the most important laws in the 15-minute city discussion.

CityHallWatch describes it as the law that effectively ended traditional single-family zoning in many parts of B.C.

The bill requires many municipalities to allow multi-unit housing on lots that previously allowed only single-family homes.

The key concerns:

- Multiplexes are allowed more broadly.
- More density is required near frequent transit.
- Public hearings are removed for many residential rezonings that fit the Official Community Plan.
- Parking requirements are reduced or removed in certain situations.

This is not just a zoning change. It is a change in the relationship between citizens and local government.

If a project fits the new provincial framework, the public may have much less opportunity to object or shape the outcome.

Bill 47: transit-oriented density

****Bill 47****, also passed in 2023, focuses on transit-oriented areas.

This is the most obvious connection to the 15-minute-city model.

The law creates provincial rules around transit hubs such as SkyTrain stations and major bus exchanges. In those zones, municipalities may be limited in refusing density or height that meets provincial minimums.

CityHallWatch highlights concerns about:

- high-density zones around transit,
- mandatory minimum heights,
- reduced municipal control,
- no residential parking requirements in designated areas,
- major neighbourhood change without the usual local veto.

Supporters say this is smart growth.

Critics say it is centralized control dressed up as planning reform.

Reduced parking and the car question

One recurring concern in the 15-minute city debate is whether governments are trying to make driving harder.

B.C.'s laws do not say "you cannot drive." But they do push planning in a direction where car use is less prioritized.

Examples include:

- removing or reducing parking minimums,
- requiring more density near transit,
- encouraging development patterns that assume walking, cycling, and transit,
- limiting municipal ability to require parking in some areas.

For some people, that is good urban planning.

For others, especially seniors, tradespeople, families, disabled residents, rural residents, and people who work across multiple locations, it raises serious concerns.

The question is not whether walkable communities are good. The question is whether people are being given real choice - or whether choice is being quietly designed out of the system.

Public hearings and democratic input

One of the biggest democratic issues is the removal of public hearings for many housing decisions.

Supporters of removing hearings argue that public hearings slow down housing and allow small groups to block needed homes.

Critics argue that public hearings are one of the few ways ordinary residents can speak directly before major land-use changes.

When hearings disappear, decisions can become more administrative and less democratic.

That does not mean every hearing is perfect. But eliminating hearings should not be treated as a minor technical change. It is a major shift in civic power.

Bills 13, 14, and 15: expanding provincial power

CityHallWatch also focuses on the 2025 bills, especially ****Bills 13 and 15****, while also noting

Bill 14.

The tracker argues these bills continued the same pattern:

- fast-moving legislation,
- limited consultation,
- use of closure/time limits,
- major implications for municipalities,
- strong pushback from local governments, First Nations, and civic commentators.

Bill 15, the Infrastructure Projects Act, received major attention because of its implications for infrastructure and provincial project approvals.

CityHallWatch argues Bill 13 also deserves attention because it affects municipal powers and local democracy.

Bill M216: professional reliance controversy

The tracker also follows ****Bill M216, the Professional Reliance Act****.

According to CityHallWatch, the bill drew a large number of submissions, with the vast majority opposed. The tracker says the relevant committee was reviewing submissions and had a statutory deadline to report back.

This matters because professional reliance can affect how planning, development, environmental review, and technical approvals are handled.

Judicial review: municipalities pushing back

A major development noted by CityHallWatch is the municipal judicial review initiative associated with View Royal Mayor Sid Tobias.

The fact that municipalities are discussing judicial review shows that this is no longer just online debate.

Some local governments are questioning whether the Province has gone too far in overriding municipal planning authority.

This is one of the most important parts of the story.

If cities and towns begin challenging the laws, the future of B.C. planning could be shaped not only in the Legislature, but in the courts.

Why this matters to ordinary people

These laws can affect:

- neighbourhood density,
- property values,
- rental supply,
- redevelopment pressure,
- traffic and parking,
- tree canopy and green space,
- public hearings,
- school and utility capacity,
- municipal taxes and infrastructure costs,

- local democracy.

Even people who support more housing should care about whether the process is democratic, transparent, and realistic.

The 15-minute city question for B.C.

The key question is not whether people should be able to walk to stores or take transit. Most people like convenience.

The real question is whether the Province is building a future where:

- density is mandated from above,
- parking is reduced without local consent,
- public hearings are removed,
- neighbourhoods are transformed faster than infrastructure can keep up,
- local councils lose authority,
- residents are told change is inevitable and they have little say.

That is why the CityHallWatch tracker should be shared widely.

It gives people a starting point for understanding what has already changed and what may be coming next.

What to do next

If you are concerned:

1. Read the CityHallWatch tracker:

<https://cityhallwatch.wordpress.com/legislation-tracker/>

2. Look up the bills directly on the B.C. Legislature / BC Laws websites.

3. Contact your MLA.

4. Contact your mayor and council.

5. Ask whether your municipality supports a judicial review.

6. Ask how much infrastructure will cost and who pays.

7. Ask whether public hearings and local input are being protected.

8. Share this issue with neighbours before the next round of planning changes arrives.

Bottom line

B.C.'s housing legislation is about more than housing.

It is about local democracy, provincial power, infrastructure, mobility, density, and the future shape of communities.

People can disagree about the best housing policy. But everyone should agree that major changes to local governance deserve full public debate.

Source:

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