



# **Policy Related to Land Use for Unlicensed Event Venues**

AMO'S SUBMISSION TO THE STANDING COMMITTEE ON HERITAGE,  
INFRASTRUCTURE AND CULTURAL POLICY

**August 6, 2024**

## **Introduction**

AMO appreciates the opportunity to provide comments on policy related to land use for unlicensed event venues.

Municipalities recognize the importance of providing Ontarians with safe and affordable public spaces and supporting the entertainment industry to local economic development and community well-being. From festivals and concerts to wedding venues, many municipalities are welcoming diverse activities across their communities.<sup>1</sup>

At the same time, Ontario's municipalities are concerned about the potential negative repercussions associated with unlicensed event venues. Particularly, municipalities urge the members of this committee to consider the following:

1. **Safety:** large gatherings, particularly those with loud music and active alcohol consumption, have a high-risk for numerous health and safety hazards. Municipalities are responsible for the ambulance, police and firefighting services that respond to these emergencies and are committed to the safety of residents and event attendees.
2. **Public Health:** when unlicensed events are organized in unconventional venues, such as barns and other agricultural lands, there is a concern that there is a lack of the necessary infrastructure to abide to public health standards, such as food storage, water, and wastewater.
3. **Community Well-being:** when unlicensed events are held in residential zones, residents are often disturbed and reach out to local authorities for enforcement requests. Municipal governments are often tasked with addressing the complaints and requests from the affected residents. This has been particularly true in short-term rentals. Operators, such as Airbnb, play a critical role in preventing unlicensed events from taking place (e.g. by limiting guests, etc.)
4. **The Economy:** those who operate licensed event venues incur additional costs than those who do not go through the licensing processes, creating a clear competitive disadvantage. Municipalities are committed to fostering a healthy and competitive business environment. Similarly, given the role of venue licensing as a municipal revenue generator, municipalities are concerned with the potential financial impacts associated with unlicensed event venues.

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<sup>1</sup> For example, see [Saugeen Shores](#).

5. **Agriculture:** barn event venues can result in negative impacts to local farming operations, such as being unable to conduct active intensive agriculture when it is necessary or degrading agricultural land. They can also be incompatible with neighboring farming operations, putting pressure on municipal resources to address complaints like odor, water contamination, among others. Further, agricultural operation barns are not built to the same building code and standard as event venues – they are built under federal code meant to protect livestock and machinery. The Ontario Building Code imposes a higher standard to protect the health and safety of people attending events in converted barn these spaces. Unlicensed events run the risk of holding events in barns not built for large gatherings, risking human health and safety.
6. **Municipal Enforcement and Resources:** there is a cost to municipal bylaw officers investigating complaints or suspected unlicensed facilities, often exceeding the available resources. With municipal finances being under considerable strain, municipalities are challenged in hiring more staff to enforce bylaws at these events. Similarly, there is a challenge and impracticality of municipalities investigating those unlicensed events which are “pop-up”, temporary and unpredictable.

## **Recommendations**

AMO provides the following comments and recommendations to ensure that municipal governments are best equipped to provide a safe, affordable, and vibrant entertainment landscape to our shared constituents:

1. **Keep Ontario’s Land Use Policy Framework in Place:** Municipal governments should maintain control over the zoning bylaws of their communities and should remain equipped to determine the regulations and actions that make sense to their local contexts.
2. **Commit to AMO’s [Social and Economic Prosperity Review](#):** Bylaw enforcement requires resources, and the fiscal framework that enables municipalities to do this work is broken: in 2022, municipal expenditures in areas that fall under provincial jurisdiction outpaced provincial contributions by almost \$4 billion, and property tax is not an appropriate or sufficient revenue tool. These fiscal pressures limit the amount of bylaw officers municipalities can hire, so a Social and Economic Prosperity Review would be helpful in ensuring municipalities are sustainably resourced to deliver on their responsibilities, including having adequate bylaw enforcement capacity. The provincial government must join AMO, Ontario’s municipal governments, and opposition parties in committing to a comprehensive, province-wide conversation across public sector services.

3. **Support Bylaw Enforcement:** The capacity to enforce zoning bylaws varies significantly among municipalities. Ontario's large urban municipalities are burdened with a high volume of complex cases regarding unlicensed event venues, while small and rural municipalities often lack the appropriate resources necessary for effective enforcement. To ensure the best outcome for our province's residents, AMO urges the province to develop modernized accessible support mechanisms that consider the specific needs and capabilities of municipalities. Examples could include lowering the threshold for imposing fines to enable municipalities to enforce penalties more easily and creating tax incentives to incentivize venue operators to license their events.

### **Illegal Dumping and Trucking**

An issue closely related to land use for unlicensed event venues is land use for illegal and unlicensed trucking operations and dumping. Municipalities routinely identify illegal hauling, dumping and soil depot operations which cause increased noise, pollution, and environmental impacts to our communities. Municipalities incur costs to enforce local bylaws and legal action against operators. This work is increasingly important for environmental protection and for the health and safety of our communities. Municipalities cannot be expected to monitor and enforce soil operations alone and need provincial support to ensure that these activities are addressed and stopped.

AMO calls on the province to ensure that a strong education, monitoring and enforcement regime is in place for illegal soil dumping and trucking. It is essential that the rules for operators and haulers are clear; that the routine monitoring of soil operations is increased; and that strong penalties are in place for violators. The province must be proactive in this work and direct resources to audits and investigations before complaints are lodged about potentially illegal activity.

### **Conclusion**

To address unlicensed event venues, it is critical for the province to respect municipal autonomy over land use decisions, support zoning bylaw enforcement, and commit to AMO's Social and Economic Prosperity Review. As well, AMO asks that the province ensure a strong illegal soil dumping and trucking monitoring and enforcement regime.