

Bill 23's passage disastrous for Ontario's Greenbelt and other environmentally sensitive area

By Mike Riley Local Journalism Initiative Reporter

Well, here we go again. The Ford government has once again pushed through legislation that forces itself on the people of Ontario and undermines democracy, much like the now repealed Bill 28 did on CUPE's education workers earlier this month, which would have forced an unfair four-year contract on them and negated their constitutional right to strike.

This time, the legislation being forced on Ontarians, Bill 23, the More Homes Built Faster Act 2022, is intended to spur housing development, with a goal of 1.5 million homes built in Ontario over the next decade. However, Bill 23 will cause incalculable harm to Ontario's Greenbelt and other environmentally sensitive areas.

Back in 2005, Ontario created the Greenbelt to protect agricultural and environmentally sensitive lands in the Greater Golden Horseshoe area from being developed. However, despite promises not to do so, the Ford government is doing just that; taking land from 15 different areas of the

Greenbelt so that 50,000 homes can be built, while adding acreage elsewhere.

Kelly Wallace is the managing director of the Think Turtle Conservation Initiative, one of many organizations against Bill 23's passage, and calls it "a giant step backwards for environmental protection in Ontario that will impact us all." Wallace emphasizes that TTCI is not against development or building affordable housing but not on protected land.

"Many industry leaders and experts, including Ontario's Housing Affordability Task Force have stated there is not a

shortage of land designated for development in areas housing is needed. There are 86,500 acres within the GTA currently zoned and ready for development which is more than enough land that could be used to meet government targets," she says.

Critics of Bill 23 also allege the new bill will lead to higher municipal property taxes, cuts to municipal services, and homes that when built will not be more affordable to those who need them most. Bill 23 freezes, reduces and exempts fees that developers pay to build affordable housing, non-profit housing and inclusionary zoning units and some rental units. These fees would

normally go to municipalities and are then used by them to pay for services to support new homes and developments. The lack of these fees will leave municipalities in a funding shortfall, and there is no guarantee that developers would pass along these savings to homebuyers to make homes more affordable.

Conservation authorities will also find their role in planning diminished, according to Wallace, making it easier for developers to build on environmentally sensitive lands.

"Further to this, conservation authorities are prohibited from using 'pollution mitigation' or 'land conservation' as

factors in considering prospective developments. [They] will be required to complete an inventory of lands they own or control, to identify any parcels of land that could support housing development," she says.

The First Nations in Ontario are also not happy as they were not consulted on Bill 23, thus negating the province's duty to consult with them and practice reconciliation.

While the province's idea of building more homes, and affordable ones at that, for Ontarians who need them is a great idea, Bill 23 is not the way to do so. Once the lands inside the Greenbelt,

and other environmentally sensitive lands are torn up and developed, all the plant, aquatic and animal life that is currently there will be destroyed or displaced. The preservation of these lands so that future generations can still have them and appreciate them decades and centuries from now will also potentially be gone forever.

Now that Bill 23 has passed, many organizations like Wallace's TTCI are focusing on getting it repealed before any irrevocable damage is done. If you are against Bill 23's passage, get in touch with Wallace at www.thinkturtle.ca where they have a ?Repeal Bill 23? page, with links to petitions to sign, letter

writing information, environmental registry links and upcoming rallies. You can also contact her at 647-606-9537 or at thinkturtle@yahoo.ca.