

Follow the Money: Who profits from Bill 23 and Bill 39?

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Looking at recent controversial legislation from 2022 - Bill 23 (More Homes Built Faster Act) and Bill 39 (Better Municipal Governance Act) - here is a list of winners and losers:

Winners:

Land speculators and developers who will make a super-profit from their recent purchase of previously-undevelopable Greenbelt lands;

Developers who no longer need to pay development charges or build according to municipal green building standards;

Landlords who can “demovict” tenants and charge future tenants whatever rent they want;

Politicians who receive donations from wealthy developers and landlords

Losers:

Our environment, when climate change is worsened by Greenbelt reductions and loss of energy efficiency building standards;

Our cities, which will lack the development charge revenues they need to fund new infrastructure that development and growth require;

Tenants, who can expect higher rents and fewer rights to remain in their homes;

Those in desperate need of **affordable housing**;

Anyone who believes in **democracy** and **accountability**

Environmental Defense, the ONDP, and others are calling for the OPP to investigate whether developers were tipped off in advance about the Greenbelt becoming open for development. It is difficult to fathom a need for a move that experts agree is going to have a devastating environmental impact on Ontario’s watersheds and wetlands, is unnecessary for building housing, and breaks a BIG promise from Ford not to touch the Greenbelt - unless the only real goal was to reward a few of Ford’s developer friends. If so, Bill 23 might actually be criminal as well as unethical.

Less obvious is that these bills could also indirectly bring huge benefits to corporations that thirst for private profits at public expense. And the destruction of the public good goes even further with Bill 39: the Province recently granted Toronto's mayor super strong-mayor powers, at John Tory's request. He can use these undemocratic powers to ram through municipal laws that align with the following two Conservative priorities with the support of a mere one-third of City Council:

1. Building 1.5 million new residential units by end of 2031; and
2. Constructing and maintaining infrastructure to support housing, including transit, roads, utilities, and servicing

These priorities can be deceiving: Who could oppose new housing or its supporting infrastructure? More housing, and especially more affordable housing, is absolutely essential. However, experts agree that there are many other non-Greenbelt options for the building of housing. **But Bills 23 and 39 threaten to actually UNDERMINE the availability of affordable housing.** Imagine if Tory makes that worse by using his undemocratic powers to sell off Toronto Community Housing units or offer city lands to wealthy developers at cut-rate prices, with no strings attached.

The infrastructure category also allows for very broad interpretation. Tory could privatize big swaths of the TTC to reduce wages and costs to say that he was expanding transit service. Remember Doug Ford’s plans in 2018 to upload and privatize Toronto’s subway system? Or Tory and Ford could use more P3s (public-private partnerships) to build transit and maintain it without thought to the current debacle of the over-budget, behind-schedule Eglinton Crosstown.

These bills are bad for people and bad for our cities and municipalities. They are part of a bigger package of planned neglect and outright attacks on our communities and cities. They have interfered with York Region's democratic process and taken away municipalities' ability to charge development fees to build the infrastructure that they need to accommodate growth caused by the development. The result of these bills is that we will NOT have more affordable housing, but we WILL have more money in the hands of wealthy developers, and the risk of more privatization and contracting out related to infrastructure in Toronto and in York Region.

The existence of Bill 39 demonstrates the might of the left in creating change through democratic elections, and is a result of Ford's and Tory's fear of our collective power. Tory "needed" Bill 39 because he could see he was losing his grip on Council with the election of so many diverse progressive Councillors in the Fall of 2022, including in the suburbs. These progressives are ready to do the right thing and act with integrity on behalf of ALL Torontonians, adding their strength to the existing progressives who are skilled at navigating City Hall.

Cities need help from both the provincial and federal governments just to make up for existing billion dollar gaps for basic services and programs. We also need more financial help to fund the additional infrastructure, services and programs which everyone recognizes are needed to actually deliver a livable city / municipalities for everyone. We have to push back against the austerity that continues to be preached. We have to push back against the privatization and sell-off we can expect when we run out of money because we can't fund the cities we need.

People power and union power is the most effective way to push back against these reckless bills. Working people need to see themselves as the direct winners in this equation, not wealthy developers and P3 consortiums. We must continue to fight and shame Ford and Tory and their wealthy donor friends. Let's focus on a vision of what we need in Toronto and York Region, and allow those needs to drive the fiscal and decision-making framework! We need affordable housing, safe communities, strong and ambitious climate action, high quality equitable public services, accountability, and democracy.

The Labour Council Executive Board resolves that:

- Call on John Tory and all Toronto City Councillors to NOT use Bill 39 powers;
- Call on Toronto City Council to prioritize more deeply affordable housing, building on intensification through lens of right to adequate housing;
- Support calls for an inquiry into Bill 23 and whether some developers purchased land based on insider information;
- Call on ALL our affiliates to speak out against Bill 23 and Bill 39 because they affect ALL of us;
- Ask all unions to expose the inherent risks of the second provincial priority for municipal services (allowing one-third of City Council to pass bylaws about "constructing and maintaining infrastructure to support housing, including transit, roads, utilities, and servicing");
- Build out a four-year Toronto City Hall strategy, including supporting newly-elected progressive councillors, building on the labour partnership with the progressive wing of Council, and establishing a public-facing municipal campaign for a fair deal for cities that centres workers and community;
- Fight for fair 2023 budgets that move beyond austerity in Toronto and York Region by working strategically with community allies;
- Call for an immediate independent third party review of the Eglinton Crosstown P3 with respect to the ongoing delays and increased costs.