This page was exported from - King Weekly Sentinel
Export date: Thu Apr 25 4:05:08 2024 / +0000 GMT

Bill 66 undermines the environment

I know that most people who live in King Township care about protecting the environment. They care about clean drinking water, strong self-sufficient communities and effective public involvement in government decisions that affect them.
Bill 66 (Restoring Ontario's Competitiveness Act), being proposed by the provincial government, opens the door to undermine all of these things. Under the pretext of supporting business and job creation, this bill grants municipalities the option to designate lands for employment purposes anywhere, ignoring the requirements of the Greenbelt Act, the Oak Ridges Moraine Act, the Clean Water Act, the Lake Simcoe Protection Act, the Planning Act and the Places to Grow Act, without any requirement or recourse for public input or appeal.
So what is the provincial government trying to do?
Providing employment ? So let's examine this more closely. I live in Schomberg. This is a tight-knit community of residential neighbourhoods and commercial and light industrial businesses that provide services and jobs. It is functionally walkable and provides opportunities for both outdoor and indoor recreation. It meets many of the requirements for a ?sustainable? community. Included in the Village of Schomberg is a large area east of Highway 27 designated as employment lands. Much of this land has been left vacant for years. In fact every community in the GTA, through public consultation and the desire to build strong communities, has already designated employment lands ??there is no shortage. Effort needs to be made to develop the existing employment lands where services and infrastructure are already provided or planned for and where there is a local employment pool.
Cutting red tape ? The government is trying to streamline the development process by cutting red tape. I don't know about you, but the acts that safe-guard our drinking water, protect our right to effective public consultation and protect agricultural land and important environmental services and areas, do not seem like red tape to me.
Downloading the development process to the municipalities ? On the surface it looks like the provincial government is giving municipalities more authority, and in some respects they are. However, it also gives municipalities more burdens and responsibilities. Let's say the Township decides to designate industrial lands adjacent to the 400. Makes sense, until they are required to take on the burden of building and maintaining services and infrastructure and start getting complaints about increased traffic, noise and pollution. Bill 66 forgoes all checks and balances and promotes only a single consideration in the planning process. Where is the vision? And if something goes wrong or there is public back-lash, the Province gets to wash their hands of it.
I have to ask this question. Who is the provincial government listening to? The only people who benefit from this legislation are developers, who own large chucks of land throughout the GTA, and big business. I doubt if many of the jobs created would go to existing local residents. There may be some tax benefit but will that be offset by the new costs. In the end it will push our villages closer to bedroom communities and farther from the sustainable communities that we want.
Are you concerned? Not everyone has time to get involved in large picture planning considerations like this one, but there are a few things you can do. Contact your councillor.?Mine is Bill Cober (bcober@king.ca), the Mayor Steve Pellegrini (spellegrini@king.ca) or the Township CEO Susan Plamondon (splamondon@king.ca). And you can contact your MPP Stephen Lecce (stephen.lecce@pc.ola.org). Ask questions. Let them know what you think. For more information or to sign a petition you can go to environmentaldefence.ca.

Mary Asselstine