

NDP needs to check the facts, King mayor says

By Mark PavilonisEditor

An attempt by the NDP to discredit the Ford government for its changes to the Greenbelt plan dragged King Township into the fray. At a press conference last week, (incoming) NDP Leader Marit Stiles said some people and businesses may have been "tipped off" prior to Queen's Park releasing the actual announcement. "There's deep concern about it and also a really deep sense that there's something shady or something smells fishy," said Stiles, during the televised press conference. The provincial government revealed last Nov. 4 that 7,400 acres of land would be removed from the Greenbelt and converted into housing developments. Apparently, some developers had bought parts of this land just weeks before the government's announcement. One of parcels, at the northwest corner of Davis Drive (Highway 9) and Bathurst, was affected by the changes. King council, late last year, endorsed the lands as a perfect spot for the expansion of Southlake Health Centre. Councillors also approved the motion which calls for the Province to approve a new hospital on the lands and fast-track the approval process. The motion further directed staff to work with the landowner, Province and Southlake Regional Health Centre to expedite development approvals for these lands, and directs the clerk to forward a copy of this resolution to the Minister of Municipal Affairs and Housing, the Minister of Health, and to the President and CEO of Southlake Regional Health Centre. The NDP say this land was sold on Sept. 15, 2022 by Schickedanz Bros. to Green Lane Bathurst GP, a company controlled by Michael Rice of the Rice Group. They further claim the company offered to convey the lands for a nominal fee, in a conversation with Mayor Pellegrini and Southlake staff. "It is evident that King Township did know about the removal of this land from the Greenbelt and did discuss this information with representatives of the Rice Group prior to the Nov. 4 announcement," the NDP say. The information was obtained through the Office of the Integrity Commissioner of Ontario. "I was disappointed to read of the false information being disseminated by Marit Stiles, the incoming leader of the Provincial NDP, regarding the Township of King and the Greenbelt. I was equally disappointed that Ms. Stiles did not reach out to King to check the facts," said Mayor Steve Pellegrini. "It is important to know that I have not spoken with the Municipal Affairs and Housing Minister Steve Clark, or Premier Doug Ford, about the Greenbelt and Oak Ridges Moraine in King." "The incoming NDP leader mentions a meeting with the Rice Group and the Township. The Township did meet with the Rice Group just prior to the Province's announcement of redistribution of land identified as Greenbelt. It is common to meet with new landowners in the municipality," the mayor pointed out. Pellegrini said the idea of a hospital in King is not a new one. "I have been moving this idea forward since 2019 on different lands, with different landowners. At the time of our meeting, I brought the idea of a hospital forward to the Rice Group and they were open to discussion," he said. "Southlake Regional Health Centre needs a new location, and King is open to providing it. This is not a done deal. It is a complex decision that needs to be made by Southlake with the Province. King is one of many nearby municipalities that is interested in hosting the hospital. Notably, the Province does not require the removal of lands from the Greenbelt to build a hospital. They may build Provincial infrastructure on any lands that they deem suitable. The mayor added King has a "solid track record" of protecting and enhancing our natural areas, including the Greenbelt and the Oak Ridges Moraine. King has two council resolutions related to these lands that have been sent to the Province. "I sincerely hope that when referencing King in the future, Ms. Stiles does her homework, recognizing our commitment to the green space around us and the resolutions Council has brought forward to ensure we protect our municipality. We should all be working together for the future of Ontario. In April 2022, Southlake received a \$5-million planning grant from the provincial government to support our planning for a new state-of-the-art hospital and the redevelopment of our existing Davis Drive campus. This will transform Southlake into a leading two-site hospital system.