

https://www.thestar.com/politics/provincial/the-exact-same-problem-as-the-greenbelt-doug-ford-hammered-over-changes-to-municipal-boundaries/article_e9875287-9f6e-55f1-9140-a61864d0440d.html

Home / Politics / Provincial Politics

PROVINCIAL POLITICS

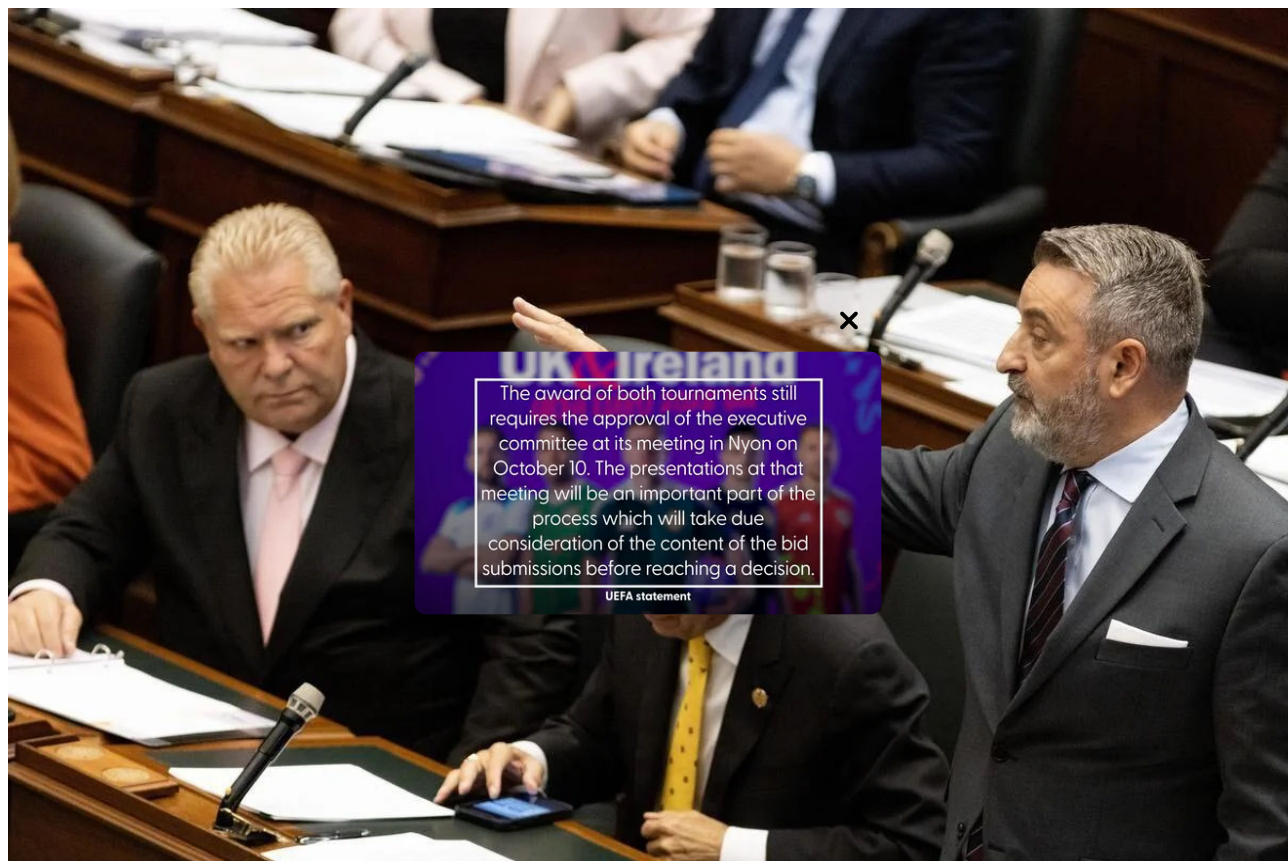
‘The exact same problem as the Greenbelt’: Doug Ford hammered over changes to municipal boundaries

The \$8.28-billion Greenbelt land swap scandal is putting Premier Doug Ford on the defensive over forcing municipalities to change their boundaries, taking over farms and “green space” for homebuilding.

By Rob Ferguson Queen's Park Bureau, Kristin Rushowy Queen's Park Bureau, Robert Benzie Queen's Park Bureau Chief

Oct 4, 2023

Article was updated 1 hr ago



Municipal Affairs and Housing Minister Paul Calandra, right, responds to questions as Premier Doug Ford, left, listens in the Ontario Legislature on Sept. 26, 2023.

Carlos Osorio / THE CANADIAN PRESS

The \$8.28-billion Greenbelt land swap scandal is putting Premier Doug Ford on the defensive over forcing municipalities to change their boundaries, taking over farms and “green space” for homebuilding.

Smelling blood after Ford reversed course on more Greenbelt development, opposition parties are shining a spotlight on the boundary changes announced last November at the same time as swaps that “favoured certain developers,” according to a scathing auditor general’s report.

Concerns remain that some developers got preferential treatment in the boundary shifts in Hamilton, Barrie, Ottawa and other areas, and stand to profit from increased property values.

“What we are seeing is act two of the Greenbelt corruption crisis,” New Democratic Party Leader Marit Stiles said Wednesday, calling the provincial override of local land use plans “a conscious attempt to force sprawl” on communities.

“What the Greenbelt taught us is we have to look at this through the lens of how the premier and this government do business when it comes to their friends and wealthy, well-connected insiders,” interim Liberal leader John Fraser told the Star.

Municipal Affairs and Housing Minister Paul Calandra pushed back, citing a housing shortage that has sent prices out of reach of many buyers and the government’s target of building 1.5 million new homes by 2031 in conjunction with municipalities.

“We’re going to continue to focus on making sure the next generation of Ontarians can get out of their parents’ basements and can go find a home of their own,” he told a raucous question period in the legislature that prompted Speaker Ted Arnott to warn MPPs to stop heckling or be kicked out.

“It is our responsibility to sure there is enough land available over the next two decades to meet the targets we are setting,” Calandra added. “We’re going to make sure our municipal partners work with us to build those homes.”

Green Leader Mike Schreiner said the government faces the same problem with the municipal boundary changes as it did with its ill-fated bid to remove 7,400 acres of land from the Greenbelt — there is already plenty of land available.

“They’re going to make the housing crisis worse. Instead of building the homes that people can afford on land already approved for development, once again the premier is focused on carving up more land for development — primarily to benefit wealthy speculators,” he charged.

“It’s the exact same problem as the Greenbelt land swap.”

Stiles released a housing ministry briefing note about boundary changes that also affect Belleville, Peterborough, Waterloo and Wellington County. She said it was obtained from a “whistleblower” in the civil service.

Among other things, the document states “no proposed modifications were shared with Indigenous communities,” and warns “there may be concerns over why the ministry is allowing for lower (housing) density targets” in Barrie.

“The government’s memo warned that these changes would make it harder for the city to meet its own housing targets,” Stiles said.

Another line in the briefing note about changes imposed on Waterloo Region flagged potential concerns “about the lands proposed to be added, including third-party requests that were assessed by regional staff and were not recommended for inclusion

in the urban boundary.”

“It’s yet further evidence that shows this government will stop at nothing to break the system, so long as it helps their close speculator friends,” Stiles charged.

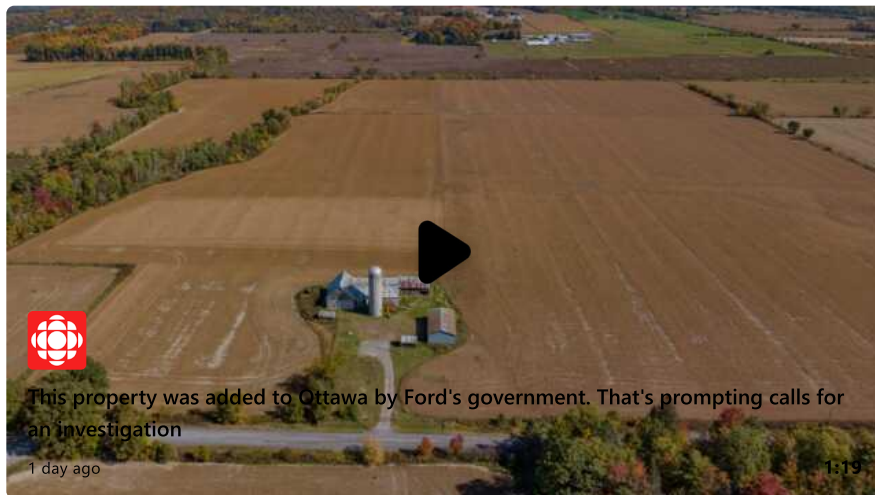
She has asked the auditor general’s office to investigate and assess the financial and environmental impacts of the government’s amendments to the official land use plans of Hamilton, Ottawa, Waterloo, York, Peel, Niagara, Peterborough, Halton and Wellington.

It was a previous request for an investigation from Stiles and her New Democrats that led to a scathing report from auditor general on Aug. 9 that found the removal of 15 properties from the Greenbelt “favoured certain developers” in a process that bypassed advice from civil servants.

Instead, 14 of the 15 parcels of land to be taken out of Greenbelt protection were chosen by Ryan Amato, chief of staff to then-housing minister Steve Clark, following input from developers, some of whom provided Amato with brown envelopes detailing properties they wanted out.

Both Clark and Amato have since resigned amid fallout over the land swap scandal, along with cabinet minister Kaleed Rasheed and Jae Truesdell, Ford’s director of housing policy — the latter two over questions about a 2020 trip to Las Vegas where they encountered a developer with Ford connections who benefitted from the land swap.

Royal Canadian Mounted Police are considering whether to launch a criminal investigation into “irregularities” in the Greenbelt land swap.



Next video



Ford under fire at Queen’s Park for Greenbelt scandal

1 week ago



Ford loses a 3rd cabinet minister. What’s the...

1 week ago



Doug Ford reverses course on Greenbelt development

1 week ago



At Issue | What’s Canada-India rela

1 week ago

Powered by oovvuu



Rob Ferguson is a Toronto-based reporter covering Ontario politics for the Star. Follow him on Twitter: @robferguson1.



Kristin Rushowy is a Toronto-based reporter covering Ontario politics for the Star. Follow her on Twitter: [@krushowy](#).



Robert Benzie is the Star's Queen's Park bureau chief and a reporter covering Ontario politics. Follow him on Twitter: [@robertbenzie](#).

[REPORT AN ERROR](#)

[JOURNALISTIC STANDARDS](#)

[ABOUT THE STAR](#)
