

Greenberg told investigators head of consulting firm was ‘greased off’ while on water board

By [MARTIN E. COMAS](#) | mcomas@orlandosentinel.com | Orlando Sentinel

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Environmentalists are asking local governments to halt any development applications involving former St. Johns River Water Management District board chair John Miklos after it was revealed that disgraced [Seminole County tax collector Joel Greenberg testified under oath](#) that Miklos got “greased off” in exchange for help approving permits for developments in sensitive areas.

Miklos, who has not been charged with any crime, did not return a request for comment.

“Let’s say (a development project) is not approved to be built because there are environmental issues,” Greenberg said this summer in a jailhouse interview with investigators with the State Attorney’s Office and Florida Department of Law Enforcement, a transcript of which was released last week. “Miklos would get greased off or something, and then they would all magically be approved. And this was rinse and repeat, what they would do.”

Attorney David Bear, a Winter Springs resident who is president of the nonprofit [Save Rural Seminole](#), emailed a letter on Saturday to Seminole’s acting County Manager Bryant Applegate calling on the county to “stay the evaluation process for any development which involves findings or opinions from Mr. Miklos” or his firm, Bio-Tech Consulting, because of Greenberg’s allegations.

Bear also asked the county “promptly re-evaluate” any development conducted in Seminole that involved input from Miklos or his company.

Greenberg’s testimony “raises concerns about all developments that Mr. Miklos or Bio-Tech provided findings for or opinions which were relied upon by Seminole County,” Bear said. “There is serious reason to believe that any approval of said projects was based upon fabricated findings or opinion.”

But Applegate said Tuesday that Seminole had no plans as of yet to halt any development applications related to Miklos or his firm.

“The county reviews the applications that are submitted, which are signed off by engineers and depending on the project either approved by the water management district or the DEP (Department of Environmental Protection),” Applegate said. “And all decisions on zoning approvals and land use approvals are based on substantial competent evidence.”

Greenberg has been cooperating with federal and state authorities since pleading guilty in May 2021 to sex trafficking and other crimes while serving as tax collector. His sentencing in federal court is scheduled for Dec. 1.

Greenberg’s claims about Miklos were revealed in a transcript released last week of a wide-ranging interview with Greenberg and state investigators probing the state’s “ghost” candidate scandal.

Miklos started Bio-Tech, based in Orlando, several years ago as a consulting firm for developers and helps secure permits from the water management district for the destruction of wetlands.

In 2010, Miklos was appointed to the St. Johns River Water Management District board by then-Gov. Charlie Crist. Three years later, he was appointed chairman of the board. He remained chairman until early 2019, when [newly-elected Gov. Ron DeSantis revoked his appointment](#) to the board.

Environmentalists long complained that under Miklos the water management board favored development interests.

[A 2016 investigation by the Daytona Beach News-Journal](#) found that after Miklos was first appointed to the district board, his consulting firm had “represented clients in district permitting activities 117 times.”

Chuck O’Neal, president of the non-profit environmental group Speak Up Wekiva, said Tuesday he was going to propose a resolution for Orange County commissioners to approve that any pending development projects that relied on data submitted by Miklos or Bio-Tech be put on hold until an independent environmental consultant can review the information.

“I think it’s only prudent that they review the data before they move forward with any projects that Bio-Tech is involved in,” he said. “Because my concerns are that Miklos was on the take based on Greenberg’s deposition.”

In 2018, Bio-Tech Consulting was hired to put together environmental impact studies for developer Chris Dorworth's controversial River Cross development that called for hundreds of homes and apartments spread across 669 acres just east of the Econlockhatchee River and within the county's protected rural boundary. Seminole commissioners unanimously rejected the project later that year.

Bear called it "a legitimate question to be explored and asked" about Greenberg's accusation regarding Miklos and his firm. He also called on other local governments, including Orange County, the city of Orlando and Volusia County, to look into any development projects tied to Miklos and Bio-Tech pending approval.

"Seminole County residents have been subjected to so much sketchiness," Bear said. "I think the citizens have a right to know if any funny business went on or not. ... There's a crisis of confidence in our governments and that's why I think it's certainly abundantly important to show the citizens that everything was done properly or to catch any funny business that there was."

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