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## Empty house revives Pickering airport fears

December 02, 2009

Donovan Vincent

A government-owned house that was the site of a defiant last stand by three women fighting plans for an airport in Pickering 34 years ago has been boarded up.

Aside from renewing decades-old fears that the airport project could be revived if the two-storey 19th century home is destroyed, some local residents are also angry that a home with such historical significance is being left to deteriorate by the federal government, which owns the property.

"This is an iconic building, part of our history," said Mary Delaney, who belongs to Land over Landings, a group opposed to an airport in north Pickering.

Ottawa recently evicted a family that had been renting the home – they're being relocated nearby – because of mould and other problems that are too expensive to fix.

An inauspicious ending for a house that in mid-September 1975 was where three Pickering women – Brenda Davies, Anne Howes and Frances Moore, members of People or Planes – held a sit-in that's believed to have influenced Ottawa in shelving plans for an area airport.



In 1975, women protesting a proposed Pickering airport held a sit-in here. Now area residents are concerned the federal government is trying to get people to leave the area so it can revive plans for the airport. (Dec. 1, 2009)

DAVID COOPER/TORONTO STAR

The trio took over the north Pickering home, at Concession 8 and Sideline 32, to prevent bulldozers from knocking it down.

According to *Toronto Star* stories at the time, Ottawa paid local farmer Ernie Carruthers \$400,000 to expropriate his home; demolition had already begun on buildings nearby to pave room for an airport.

But the farmhouse, known locally as the Bentley-Carruthers house after the Bentley family that built it, stood in the way.

According to a *Star* account, the women took over the building illegally "because we needed a focal point, a centre of attention for our fight against the airport," Davies said at the time.

The two-week occupation made national headlines.

(Though the airport proposal was canned, it's an idea that has never died. A recent report by the Greater Toronto Airports Authority that looked into the possibility again, has been handed to Transport Canada but not released.)

Delaney, of Land over Landings, says Ottawa should repair the home so it can be saved and occupied by another family.

Local MP Mark Holland (Liberal, Ajax-Pickering) says the government's move to board up the property is part of a "strategy to depopulate" a massive swath of federally owned land.

"The fight to save (the) Bentley-Carruthers house isn't over, nor is protecting north Pickering from a government whose clear bias is to clear the community to build an airport," Holland said Tuesday.

"They have a really clear strategy. You just have to drive around northern Pickering to see it. They (Ottawa) evict people for whatever reason they can conjure. Then as soon as (residents) move out, they board up the home, mothball it, and wait for nature to take hold. It's destruction by stealth," Holland said.

He believes that either Ottawa doesn't want to bother managing these properties, or it wants to eliminate the most vocal opposition to an airport – the people who live on these lands. There are about 300 houses there now.

The *Star* contacted representatives of Transport Canada Tuesday who promised to respond later in the day, but didn't. A *Star* photographer and reporter paid a visit to the home Tuesday and found it clearly in need of repair.

As for the family being evicted, David Zangari, 50, who rented the four-bedroom home for close to 30 years with his wife Michelle and their

children, said they were shocked when the notice came about two months ago.

"It hurt a lot when they first called (to say they were being evicted), but we also expected it, knowing this is the airport (land) and we've been here a long time, a lot longer than many people," Zangari said.