



Sabrina Byrnes / Metroland

PICKERING -- Laura Drake from the Pickering Museum Village chatted with David Boccia at the open house hosted by Ward 1 Regional Councillor Bonnie Littlely at the Petticoat Creek Community Centre on Oct. 17. Local organizations set up booths to inform the public about issues related to climate change, urban growth and food security. October 17, 2009

Pickering council hopes for airport referendum

October 29, 2009

By Kristen Callis

PICKERING -- Pickering residents may be voting on more than who will be running their city next November.

At the latest council meeting, Ward 2 Regional Councillor Bill McLean introduced a motion that the question of whether residents support a possible airport in north Pickering be added to the municipal election ballot in 2010. He felt public opinion is an important factor to be considered regarding plans for the land, expropriated by the federal government in 1972 and now sitting mainly vacant.

The ballot would include the question: 'Do you support the City of Pickering's position to oppose construction and operation of an airport in the City of Pickering? Yes or No.'

"This I think is an important question to put on the ballot," Coun. McLean said, adding council is strongly opposed to an airport.

He said many people new to Pickering don't even know about the federal government's plans. Plus, he feels the referendum would encourage people to get out and vote.

Ward 3 Regional Councillor Rick Johnson felt it would convolute the election process and did not support the motion. Plus, he's expecting an answer from the Greater Toronto Airports Authority by the end of 2009 on whether the airport will go ahead.

"The people in Ward 3 know our position," he said, referring to council's opposition.

Ward 1 City Councillor Jennifer O'Connell said it would send a message to the Region of Durham, which currently has a Pickering airport mapped out in its official plan. Also, not everyone gets involved in political matters, she said, and this is a good time to let those residents express their feelings on the topic.

Ward 3 City Councillor David Pickles didn't support the motion, since after putting forward many motions in opposition to an airport, he feels it's obvious most Pickering residents don't support one either.

But Ward 2 City Councillor Doug Dickerson felt the question is necessary.

"At some point you have to ask people the question," he said. "It's been floating around for 37 years."

Five of the seven councillors supported the motion.

This is only the first step in a long process for the possible referendum, which will include giving notice to the public and holding a public meeting, said City Clerk Debi Wilcox.

"This is basically step one," she said.