

Timeline: 1976-2012

Entry into Limbo / V.O.C.A.L. / Land Over Landings

Entry into Limbo

1976

- What follows the shelving of the airport plan is the decades-long strangulation of the remaining farming community and the relentless neglect and demolition of structures on the Federal Lands, punctuated by repeated attempts to get the airport plan revived.
- **May** – Transport Minister Otto Lang announces that, without Pickering to relieve Malton, air traffic will be diverted to Mirabel, overflying Toronto. Says Malton will not be allowed new air carriers for at least 5 years. Malton accuses MOT (formerly DOT) of stalling improvements to Malton to create a need for Pickering. MOT sub-group says Malton expansion would cost more than building a whole new airport. MOT Minister supports the statement, insists on a new airport.
- **July** – Ontario's Ombudsman reports that Pickering area residents were cheated and misled by government land agents.

1977

- Transport Canada (TC, formerly MOT) releases Contingency Plan, warning that Malton (soon to be renamed Pearson) faces fierce congestion and that urgent action is needed.

1978

- Transport Minister Otto Lang tells House of Commons that Malton will not be allowed to expand; halts study into 4th runway.

1984

- After years of inaction, Ottawa moves to sell off much of the Pickering site. Conservationists fight the idea, as the sale would open development floodgates and destroy some of Canada's best agricultural land. The plan dies.

1985

- In Ste-Scholastique, meanwhile, where Mirabel has never been completed and is struggling, the federal government deeds or sells back to farmers over 80,000 acres of expropriated land.

1991

- Transport Canada releases an Environmental Impact Statement, declaring that the best medium-term alternative for dealing with air-traffic increases in Toronto is by adding 3 new runways at Pearson. However, TC immediately follows the Statement with an "Alternatives" document in which Pickering again figures.

1992

- The fine Bentley House in Brougham is granted federal heritage designation.
- **Aug. 3** – TC draws up a “Plan Showing Pickering Lands 1992 Disposal.” In all, 238 units of land (lots) on the airport site are to be sold. They include lots all around the periphery, notably, those right across the northern part of the site, including all of Altona, and those along the north side of Hwy 7, including all of Brougham. It is a tacit admission that the 1972 land grab was far larger than needed. There is no evidence that this plan was made public or acted on in any way.

1994

- In Ottawa, the Southern Ontario Area Airports Study (SOAAS) is under way.
- Responsibility for developing and operating Pearson is transferred from Transport Canada to the Greater Toronto Airports Authority (GTAA). The GTAA will be headed up by ex-Transport Canada executives.

V.O.C.A.L. (Voters Organized to Cancel the Airport Lands)

1995

- Ottawa releases the SOAAS report, which has concluded that Pickering airport will be needed between 2012 and 2025. Transport Canada views the report’s conclusions as a green light for building a future airport, and gears up.
- **V.O.C.A.L. (Voters Organized to Cancel the Airport Lands)** is formed and a new wave of protests begins.

1998

- Transport Canada initiates regulatory action to protect the option of developing a Pickering airport.

2001

- The Pickering lands are classified as an airport site under the Aeronautics Act.
- Transport Canada asks the GTAA to undertake “interim planning work” to help Ottawa decide whether to “proceed with a regional/reliever airport.”
- Transport Canada issues many orders of “eviction for the purposes of demolition.” For the second time (the first was in 1973), the Barclay family is ordered to leave Tullis Cottage, its ancestral home, built in 1840. Demolition is scheduled. The Barclays fight back with a media campaign and assistance from local politicians and historians, and win. They are allowed to stay as long as they promise not to talk to the media for two years.
- Ottawa announces that 7,200 acres on the north and west sides of the airport site have been designated as Green Space in perpetuity – no great concession, as no airport construction was ever planned for those buffer areas. The plan is never formalized by Ottawa.

2002

- After undertaking renovations totalling \$500,000, the GTAA opens its Pickering Airport Site Office in the historic Bentley House in Brougham.

2004

- Zoning regulations are passed for an airport at Pickering, even though Pearson has been expanded after all and can expand again.
- The GTAA submits its *Pickering Airport Draft Plan* to Transport Canada. The plan is for a large 3-runway “regional/reliever” airport on the site.
- Transport Canada, clearly anticipating a go-ahead to build the airport, stops re-renting vacated properties, foregoes revenue, and boards up houses instead.
- Passenger flights cease at Mirabel. Only cargo flights are left. Mirabel is dubbed one of the costliest white elephants in Canadian history.

Land Over Landings

2005

- Zoning regulations for Pickering airport go into effect.
- **Feb.** – **Land Over Landings** is formed as Transport Canada orders further evictions (including Tullis Cottage yet again). Demolitions begin but some tenants choose to fight eviction and refuse to leave. Local councillors object to the demolitions, and MP Mark Holland obtains a temporary halt while the community scrambles to protect heritage structures and family homes.
- **Mar. 10** – The moratorium ends and demolitions resume.
- **October** – The Federal Liberal caucus supports an immediate moratorium on evictions and demolitions until the entire process can be reviewed. Pickering City Council approves a heritage designation of 5 buildings on the Lands. Tullis Cottage tops list, followed by Brougham Hall and the old Brougham schoolhouse. Council asks Transport Canada to rescind the order to evict the Barclays and demolish their house.
- Land Over Landings stages the Brougham Uprising to prove “we’re not dead yet!”

2006

- Transport Canada removes the demolition order from Tullis Cottage.
- Court tribunals study the tenants’ complaints and blast the federal landlords. Public Works loses the right to manage the Lands.
- TC hands over Public Works’ former responsibilities to a private land-management agency. Long-overdue property repairs are undertaken and properly handled at last.
- LOL turns to getting the Lands preserved as foodland, through the creation of a Land Trust.
- The newly elected federal Conservative government reneges on Transport Canada’s promise to the Liberals to implement a peer review of the GTAA’s next proposal for a Pickering airport. Grants the GTAA the right to review itself. There is public outrage.

2007

- **Feb.** – The Montreal Airport Authority announces that much of the Mirabel site is to be turned into a giant amusement park. (The plan will die in 2010. Part of the site will be turned into an ICAR motosport racetrack.)
- **May 9** – Transport Canada announces it has given a 6-month contract to the GTAA to study need for a Pickering airport (the same airport the GTAA recently spent 3+ years planning). As likely developer and operator of a Pickering airport, the GTAA has a serious conflict of interest, but the study proceeds.
- Land Over Landings and all concerned citizens in the area nervously await the GTAA report, expecting a strong pitch for an airport, even though it would destroy prime farmland just when an international food crisis looms, and when airlines keep going bankrupt.

2008

- Deadlines for release of the GTAA report come and go; there is no news from Ottawa.
- Lived-in properties on the Lands continue to be maintained. For the first time in years, tenants are offered other homes on the Lands if their houses are deemed too costly to repair. But the population is declining. Houses of families that are moving away, or houses of elderly tenants who move out, or who die, are boarded up. Few new tenants are allowed to move in.
- A new business opens in Brougham in the old hardware store, but closes within months.
- Another takes its place, and a coffee shop opens next door, as the government allows new tenants in commercial buildings.

2009

- **Oct.** – The needs assessment report still hasn't been made public (has it even been submitted to TC?), but the GTAA quietly packs its bags and one might moves out of the Bentley House.

2010

- **May 10** – Ottawa finally confirms what has been widely suspected: the *Needs Assessment Study Report* has been in Transport Canada's hands since March. It will be released, the public is told, only after a "due diligence review" by TC. Pro-airport Regional Chair Roger Anderson, believing he knows the report's conclusions, vows to "market the hell out of it."
- **July** – Opposition Leader Michael Ignatieff visits Ajax-Pickering Board of Trade and publicly states that the Liberal Party of Canada is opposed to an airport on these agricultural lands. With MPs Mark Holland and Dan McTeague, he joins the APBOT in calling on the federal government to release the findings of the Needs Assessment Study.
- **August** – What Transport Canada releases instead is a list of 42 vacant structures, many of significant heritage value, that are slated for demolition. Before a formal attempt can be mounted to save the houses, two of them mysteriously burn down.
- **December** – New Transport Minister Chuck Strahl responds to the July letter from Ignatieff, Holland, and McTeague, stating that the government's intent is to eventually clear all buildings from the Lands.

2011

- **Jan.** – The City of Pickering asks Transport Canada not to demolish 7 potential heritage structures and asks Ottawa to fund the cost of heritage research and reinstate the heritage steering committee (involving Pickering, Markham, and Ottawa), which Ottawa had abandoned.
- Minister Strahl and Transport Canada give the houses a reprieve but refuse to fund research or upkeep, calling this a municipal responsibility – even though Ottawa has been owner and landlord of the properties for 39 years. The steering committee is not reconvened. Instead, TC issues a list of 60 more structures to be demolished.
- **Jul. 11** – Transport Canada finally releases the Needs Assessment Study's recommendations. The Report states that the Pickering Lands should be retained for a future new airport, now thought to be needed "most likely" between 2027 and 2037, but maybe as late as 2041 – or later. "If and when required" is the final word. A close reading reveals the report's arguments to be weak, contradictory, and based on flawed data. No business case has been made.
- Land Over Landings prepares a Response to the Needs Assessment Study: Pickering Lands. Various local politicians make vague noises about how the report provides a resolution to the situation.
- Ottawa's new mantra is now this: the solution must combine "job creation, economic activity and environmental stewardship." Land Over Landings, Green Durham Association, and other groups argue that intensive food production under a Land Trust would meet those criteria perfectly. Transport Canada, according to Ottawa, will "work on a land use and management plan for the 7,530 hectares."
- The pride and joy of Brougham, the City, and the Region – Durham Sustain Ability, founded by Jack McGinnis, world-renowned father of Blue Box recycling – is forced to vacate Brougham's Commercial House after draconian changes to the rental agreement. Brougham's coffee shop closes. But the City of Pickering leases the showpiece Bentley House as Parks and Recreation offices – welcome news within the much-diminished community.
- **Sept. 12** – Finance Minister Jim Flaherty, addressing Ajax-Pickering's Board of Trade, says: "This is about economic development in Durham Region ... It's our turn to grow ... To do that we need highways ... we need to improve our airport facilities."
- **Nov. 20** – Ajax-Pickering MP Chris Alexander hosts a townhall meeting in Claremont: "Forty Years Later: How Should the Pickering Lands Be Used?" He says he is 100% against an airport. The large and passionate audience is virtually unanimous in demanding that the site be preserved for agricultural use and as a natural heritage area.
- **Dec. 23** – The *Toronto Star* reports: "Plans for the land remain vague, but a footprint for the airport is expected to be completed by next spring, according to Paula Fairfax, a Transport Canada spokesperson." Meanwhile, the demolitions continue....