

Feds let slip policy of demolishing heritage during Pickering bicentennial year

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PICKERING – In the lead up to Pickering’s bicentennial year, the Harper government revealed for the first time an insidious policy of demolishing all structures, including heritage structures, in order to return the Federal Lands to a so-called greenfield state.

“What we have here is fresh evidence of an underhanded policy to destroy Pickering’s irreplaceable heritage in the north, and with it, the community,” explained Holland. “It isn’t surprising, but, the fact that the government is openly admitting it is deeply concerning and hints at more demolitions to come.”

The revelation was discovered in official correspondence of the Transport Minister sent over the Christmas holidays in response to a letter co-signed by Ajax-Pickering MP Mark Holland last summer, in which information on the future of the Federal Lands, including release of the so-called airport needs assessment study, was requested. Beyond declining requested information, which was expected, the government also let slip for the first time its intentions to eventually destroy all structures.

Holland pointed out that the government’s brazen decision to move forward now on the demolitions coincides with celebrations marking the bicentennial of Pickering’s founding.

“The government couldn’t have chosen a worse time to bulldoze our history – on the very year that we are celebrating Pickering’s 200th anniversary,” said Holland. “It really is a depraved, insensitive

decision, and one that they must strongly reconsider.”

The Harper government has already broken the moratorium on all demolitions – which Mark Holland worked to obtain from the previous Paul Martin government – announcing last summer dozens of demolitions expected for early this year. Holland recently toured a number of these sites imperiled by the demolition order with Peter Rodrigues and David Pickles, the Regional and City Councilors, respectively, for the north Pickering ward. They renewed their commitment to work together in order to stop the senseless destruction of both the history and the community in the north.

Holland cautioned anyone from reading positive things into the government’s stated interest to return the lands to a greenfield state.

“On the surface, the idea of expanding green areas sounds appealing. But, judging from the government’s record, it’s just new spin for depopulating the lands – and then what?”

“The government has a responsibility to work with the public, our community, and come clean on its plans for our lands.”

BACKGROUND

Transport Canada’s letter, dated December 13, 2010, was in response to a letter sent July 2010, in which MP Mark Holland and co-signatories, Liberal Leader Michael Ignatieff and MP Dan McTeague, requested the release of the airport needs assessment study promised years ago and any decision on future land use for the Federal Lands. Their letter honours a pledge made to the Ajax-Pickering Board of Trade to try to get answers from the Federal Government.

Click on the following to read the government's response:

[TCResponseNeedsAssessmentStudy_13Dec2010\[1\]](#)

In the government's response, Mark Holland noted a number of strange but not surprising claims, including:

- Transport Canada (TC) refutes that there was any conflict of interest in contracting the Greater Toronto Airports Association (GTAA) to conduct the needs assessment study for an airport in Pickering, even though the GTAA is a would-be developer;
- TC is "currently reviewing" the study results. Why, after having possession of the report for years, do they continue to sit on it?;
- TC is withholding release of the study until it has made an "informed recommendation" on any airport. Whatever happened to providing a "final decision" on land use? Does the change of words signal another diversionary or delaying tactic in store?;
- TC is a "diligent and responsible landlord". While the current contract with SNC-Lavalin Profac to oversee day-to-day management of properties has definitely improved the care of tenanted buildings, the fact is that TC allowed countless properties to fall into disrepair over decades, including many of the buildings facing demolition now;
- the letter fails to acknowledge the need for any public consultation – the community continues to be shut out; – the letter fails to acknowledge heritage concerns; and,
- TC completely dismisses the business community's concerns to release the airport needs assessment study or any decision on future land use.