

Pickering heritage homes spared for now

Federal transport minister agrees to hold off on demolitions

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PICKERING -- Heritage homes that were facing demolition on the federal lands in Pickering are safe for now.

"Transport Canada will not demolish any of the structure in question until there has been further discussion with the City," Minister of Transport, Infrastructure and Communities Chuck Strahl said in a letter to Mayor Dave Ryan.

In January, the City sent a resolution to the minister asking that seven heritage homes in Pickering be saved from demolition. Transport Canada is currently demolishing more than 40 homes on the land, which it expropriated in 1972 for a possible airport. No decision on whether an airport will go ahead has yet been made.

After council received results from a study and learned seven buildings are significant to Pickering's heritage and culture, council unanimously agreed the "irreplaceable cultural heritage resources on the Pickering lands site" have to be saved.

Council also asked that Pickering be fully reimbursed for its costs to undertake the assessments of the buildings, and that Transport Canada reconvene the local heritage steering committee to develop a heritage strategy for buildings deemed locally significant.

Mr. Strahl's decision fell on the day Ajax-Pickering MP Mark Holland presented a petition in Parliament to protest the federal government's plans, which hundreds of residents signed.

Mr. Strahl said in the letter dated Feb. 10 that Transport Canada officials will work with Pickering staff in the coming days to discuss the future of the structures.

"Please rest assured that Transport Canada remains committed to working with the City of Pickering on this issue," he said.

Mr. Holland said in a press release that while he welcomes the minister's assurances, he remains concerned that the battle isn't over yet. He's asking the City to remain vigilant and keep the pressure on the federal government during the discussions, and to demand that the feds protect and pay for the preservation and restoration of heritage structures.