

The Uxbridge COSMOS

YOUR UNIVERSE

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our two cents

?Time for a deadline

?The waste has gone on long enough.

Although our cartoonist John Wood treats the subject lightly opposite, the matter of the Pickering

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Airport Lands has long ceased to be a laughing matter. Certainly for all the farmers and other residents expelled from their land, only to see it totally unused for decades, there never has been anything to laugh at, even darkly, in this whole mess. Only heartache.

The ironic thing is that the lands are now so used to being ignored and lifeless, that the unlucky fellow who got caught using them for cultivating cannabis was probably only the latest in a long string of illegal farmers. He just got careless and drew somebody's attention, something very difficult to do in that area these days.

It was Pierre Trudeau's government that first dreamed up the idea of a Pickering Airport in the first place. We suspect the current P.M. doesn't know where, or even what it is. But Trudeau's other successor, Liberal Leader Michael Ignatieff, met with the Pickering-Ajax Board of Trade earlier this month and told them that as far as he had ever seen, there was no business case for a Pickering Airport. Many of the project's long-suffering opponents would contend that a viable business case has never existed. They hope now that an Ignatieff government, in the unlikely event such a creature ever came to pass, would immediately quash the project, putting dozens of Dept. of Transport bureaucrats out of work, and begin the delicate process of putting the land back to work.

The polls, however, are not predicting an Ignatieff government, but another Harper one, either minority or majority. Polls are often wrong, but considering how the Canadian people have resisted Ignatamania, we suspect they may be right this time around. Nevertheless, a federal election looms within the next year, and it's time that MP Bev Oda and her opponents took some hard stances with regard to the airport.

In a nearer time frame, we'll be electing new municipal councils on Oct. 25. We need to know where the candidates stand on the airport issue. We need to ask the candidates for Ward 1; it's in their ward that hundreds of acres lie fallow, dozens of buildings sit shuttered. But we also need to ask the mayoralty and regional council candidates what they think, and what action they'll take if elected, because it's Durham Regional Council that needs to press the federal government on the issue.

And what Regional Council needs to do is give the feds a deadline. They've dithered long enough. We would suggest March 31, 2012 (a day later and they might get the idea that we think they're fools). By that date, the government must either make a decision on the project - to go ahead or to give/sell back the land - or face legal action from the Region on behalf of their taxpayers.

Acting on the assumption that Ottawa will finally admit the folly of the airport project, Regional Council should use the intervening months to come up with a plan for returning the land to activity. Should it be sold at market value? Returned at a bargain price (or even free) to the families from whom it was expropriated? Should there be compensation for the buildings destroyed or rendered useless from neglect?

These are difficult questions, but the starting point is something almost everyone can agree on: put the Pickering Airport on the scrap heap, and set the land free.

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