

Readers' responses in the *News Advertiser* to the article "Recouping Canada's \$150-million investment," by Pickering Mayor Dave Ryan on August 23, 2017

[compilation to September 15, 2017]

Pickering mayor seems to be unaware of the number of jobs in agriculture

Opinion Aug 25, 2017, Pickering News Advertiser

Mayor Dave Ryan's column, where he attempts to promote a business-as-usual case for an airport on the Pickering Lands instead of the very best use of the lands for agriculture, simply doesn't reflect the reality of our changing world.

Contrary to the number of jobs he claims agriculture would provide, he's obviously unaware that more than 640,000 people in the province are employed in agri-food industries, and in 2013, agri-food systems provided one in eight jobs in Canada, employing more than 2.2 million people.

Forecasts from the Greater Toronto Airport Authority about capacity at Pearson have proven consistently wrong in the past and if the GTAA had auspices over Hamilton-Cambridge where existing infrastructure would easily support an airport, it would never be making a case for an airport in Pickering. These lands represent 95 per cent of Canada's remaining five per cent triple-A farmland — the very best there is — and this precious and irreplaceable infrastructure comes already included. Maybe Mayor Ryan should concentrate on producing the 25,000 jobs that we were promised Seaton would supply for Pickering, instead of reducing the overwhelming future opportunities that the agri-food industry could supply.

Angie Jones. Pickering

Online Comment re this letter: By Mark, Aug 26 2017 9:15AM

The Mayors comments are spot on. You can not compare the heavily subsidized farm land enjoyed by a dozen farmers to the hard working Canadian farmers in the rest of Ontario and Canada. The mayor is trying to inject sanity into how a multi billion dollar asset owned by the Canadian tax payer should be properly used. The real challenge that we have one airline (with a majority of Pearson's landing slots) and other aviation interests that have invested heavily in Pearson airport and don't want free market competition. The Canadian taxpayers will be watching how the federal government manages its investment. Will free market competition be allowed? Or will the forces currently spending money lobbying against the airport win the day?

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Durham Region needs a vibrant, agriculture-based economy, not an airport

Opinion Aug 25, 2017, Ajax News Advertiser

I read with interest Pickering Mayor Ryan's views about the possible use of the Pickering federal lands but was disappointed that some of his "facts" are inaccurate.

Mayor Ryan is correct that there is a need to include agriculture in a solution for returning the Pickering federal lands into a productive capacity; however, there are flaws in the rest of his argument.

One hundred and fifty million dollars in accumulated federal government expenses to maintain the Pickering federal lands (Toronto Star article, July 30, 2017) is not an investment. It represents funds spent on significant costs for several Transport Canada passenger growth studies for the Greater Toronto Area (GTA). Unfortunately, not one of these studies has ever been accurate regarding the actual passenger growth needs for the GTA.

There has been no funding for the maintenance of the agricultural infrastructure on these lands. If the agricultural productive capacity of these lands was to be restored, many more than the “70” jobs that Mayor Ryan quoted would be created. The “investment” to date has been a colossal exercise in a waste of resources.

With respect to whether or not the GTA needs another airport, an independent study released last year under the guidance of Dr. Gary Polonsky revealed three key challenges with the “build an airport” argument. First, existing airport operators have stated that passenger traffic is essential for the profitability of an airport (pg. 37). Second, two national airlines don’t see the capacity requirements to proceed with adding a new airport (pg. 33). And third, existing airlines don’t want a new airport to split their current operations because it negatively impacts profitability (pg. 37).

If the proposed main clients (airlines) don’t want an airport built, and airport operators need passenger traffic for a profitable outcome, how can you continue to make a case on economic grounds that an airport needs to be built? There is lots of other airport capacity in the Greater Golden Horseshoe that will keep the regional economy rolling along for decades to come.

Regarding the land usage argument, at present, the Toronto and Region Conservation Authority estimates that the rate of loss of farmland in the Greater Golden Horseshoe has slowed to 150 acres per day (TRCA Living City Report Card 2016). The Pickering federal lands consist of Class 1 Farmland – the most productive agricultural land in the country, and we are not creating more of this type of land. How, then, can anyone justify removing 9,600 acres of this valuable arable land for the benefit of an estimated “5,000 jobs” in the process of paving it over for an airport?

Many more families in our region could be supplied with fresh, locally-grown food for generations, and experience increased food security if these lands were preserved as farmlands. Agri-tourism could become a booming local business. Look at the Niagara Region as an example of agri-tourism economic development. Cottage industries would be created as a result of locally-grown food, and fine eating establishments could be established featuring locally-grown produce. With the Rouge National Urban Park right next door, the agri-tourism opportunity is further enhanced.

It appears that Mayor Ryan is beginning to understand that shifting his argument to include agricultural solutions for the Pickering federal lands is necessary because the winds of change are beginning to blow more strongly in the City of Pickering — elections are coming around again.

The time has come to move on from the outdated arguments of the past. Durham Region does not need to host another Mirabel. What it does need is a vibrant, agriculture-based economy that preserves the land, increases food security in the GTA, boosts agri-tourism and avoids all the pitfalls and enormous cost to taxpayers that building a new airport would entail.

Maybe the real change that needs to occur in Pickering is a new mayor and a different city council that have a vision that is sustainable, and that adds to, rather than detracting from, the environment.

David Hogg, Ajax

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Loss of Pickering's federal lands would do more harm than good for generations to come

Opinion Aug 25, 2017, Whitby This Week

The Pickering federal lands are made up primarily of the highest-quality (Class 1) soil for food production. They contain tributaries of the Duffins Creek watershed, a primary source of water for Pickering. They are home to marshes, woodlots, and streams that provide habitat for an abundance of different species of animal and plant.

In our era where food insecurity, water scarcity, and mass extinction are an ever-greater threat to ourselves and the world our children will inherit, we ought to give very sober thought to any decision to pave over these lands for an airport or otherwise. Because once they're gone, they're gone for good.

Laura Springate, Whitby

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Reader agrees Durham Region needs an airport

Opinion Pickering News Advertiser

I agree wholeheartedly Pickering Mayor Dave Ryan's column.

Durham region definitely would be an ideal place for a secondary airport. It can only help with much-needed employment and will encourage businesses to locate here in Durham Region.

Very well articulated by Mr. Ryan.

M. Harper, Oshawa

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"Dave Ryan International Airport:" a mayor's dream is Pickering's nightmare!

Opinion Pickering News Advertiser

Municipal elections must be near! Land developers must be asking for support regarding their interests or projects from the last election and likely continued financial support for the upcoming election. Pickering's Mayor Dave Ryan, while usually silent over serious issues, has chosen to speak out publicly twice during the month of August about the longtime proposed Pickering airport. His guest column your newspaper is fraught with misleading/fact-distorting information and questionable stats in an effort at "recouping Canada's \$150-million investment."

Mr. Ryan should recall, as he was there, that Pickering council voted twice, democratically (Resolution #212/98, 10/19/1998 and again 04/16/2007), that "Council and residents of Pickering do not support the development of an airport." The City of Pickering certainly seems to be quite hypocritical and somewhat spurious in trying to attract developers on the hope that an airport may be built. Mr. Ryan the politician,

in an attempt to cover his b--t and secure public votes, proposes that Pickering can have both an airport and 3,500 acres of farmland.

Mr. Ryan misses the point: Pickering does not want an airport, has never been shown a business case or need for an airport, does not want to lose more of its Class 1 farmland to concrete runways/roads and buildings, and Land Over Landings, the people of Pickering who want to continue the business of agriculture, have commissioned “a comprehensive agricultural/rural-growth economics study of the remaining Pickering federal lands. (Their) goal is to provide a practical, viable, economic alternative to an airport and urban development in this area.” (www.landoverlandings.com). The Agri-Study which will be completely funded by the residents and private sector, as the City of Pickering refused to help in the funding, is nearing its fruition and it will show that agriculture on the proposed lands will create businesses and jobs far beyond the 70 new jobs that Ryan would have you believe.

Mike Borie, Pickering

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Best use for farmland is farming – simple

Opinion Aug 29, 2017 Whitby This Week

It is outrageous to think that some people still think an airport in Pickering is needed.

The best use for Class A farmland is – you guessed it – FARMING! Restoring the agriculture-based communities (like Brougham) is better economically, socially, culturally and environmentally.

No airport ... no way! Shame on Dave Ryan for his out-of-date thinking and disrespect for the need for food and water security for his constituents.

Joanne Brown, Whitby

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Financial interests driving a push by some for a Pickering airport, says reader

Opinion Aug 25, 2017, Ajax News Advertiser

Almost two years ago, we chose the Town of Ajax as our new home. We did so because it is a beautifully planned community with a balance of industrial, commercial, residential and green space, all of which add to a wonderful quality of life for Ajax residents. We looked, but found Pickering to be overdeveloped, congested, poorly planned and crowded, and wondered why Pickering council would allow this level of overdevelopment considering the absence of appropriate infrastructure (i.e. roads etc.) to support it. A bit of research may have partially answered our question. It showed that some Pickering councillors received significant campaign contributions from developers, including those from outside the region.

In a Toronto Star article from April 3, 2016, Ajax Mayor Steve Parish spelled out the problem with that. “I have been talking about the improper influence of certain funds going into the system, and how it improperly affects, often in a negative way, how municipalities are developed,” he said, adding Ajax passed a resolution asking the province to be allowed to ban corporate donations in 2009, but had not heard anything since. In 2017, the province answered. Bill 68 ostensibly bans corporate donations. Of course, developers, their families and employees can still make significant contributions as individuals.

All of this raises the question of why Pickering's Mayor Dave Ryan is now making such a strong pitch that a Pickering airport be built. It is a strange argument since Hamilton and Waterloo airports remain grossly underused, and Buttonville was closed to make way for a huge real estate development.

So why this argument, and why now? And why be willing to sacrifice farmland, green space, and add even more congestion and plane noise to the area?

No doubt some with financial interests in a Pickering airport will support Mayor Ryan's position. But local residents need to ask themselves if they are willing to sacrifice quality of life so that some can benefit financially.

Patricia Spindel, Ajax

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Pickering Mayor Dave Ryan needs to plan for the real challenges this century

Opinion Pickering News Advertiser

Mayor Ryan's op-ed piece is riddled with misleading claims and misapprehensions.

Ottawa's management of the federal lands has indeed cost taxpayers \$150 million – but only since 1998, not 1972, as the Mayor Dave Ryan stated. He ignores the \$275 million in expropriation costs, plus the years of expenditures leading up to the 1972 announcement and following from it. The total could be close to \$1 billion by now. It's no investment. It's lost money.

The airport wasn't planned as a reliever, as the mayor implies. The intent was to replace Malton (now Pearson). The previous government did not announce that "the Pickering airport would indeed be moving forward." It announced that "there will be land set aside" for a future airport. This remains the government's position.

While Finance Minister Jim Flaherty did opine that airport construction might start as early as 2017, he did so in a radio interview, not a government announcement, and the opinion came to nothing. Yet, Mayor Ryan lauds regional plans to proceed with airport-supportive infrastructure — the tail wagging the dog, surely!

If construction of a reliever airport isn't market-driven, that airport will fail. No study has ever shown that Pickering airport is needed or would be a commercial success. Success is driven by the requirements of airlines and cargo carriers, whose interests are best served by being at the hub airport. For them, splitting operations between Pearson and Pickering or even abandoning Pearson for Pickering would be an unpopular, expensive, and risky undertaking. Experiences at other North American airports show that, for Pickering to succeed, Pearson would have to be shuttered or severely restricted. Not on the cards.

The mayor calls the Pickering lands "uniquely positioned to play a strategic role" in a GTA-integrated network. But he must know that Pickering isn't in the plans of the Southern Ontario Airport Network. He continues to tout putting large-scale greenhouses on part of the lands, ignoring how energy-intensive they are and that their presence would destroy Class 1 soil, an irreplaceable natural resource. Taking the narrowest of views, he claims that agriculture creates few jobs. Ontario disagrees, Mr. Mayor. Check the province's stats. Agriculture is a top economic driver here, creating hundreds of thousands of good jobs.

Most worrisome of all, Mayor Ryan ignores the climate breakdown that's already happening worldwide. The future (including aviation's future) won't be business as usual, all growth and no consequences. Quite the contrary. It's long past time for our mayor to start showing creative, responsible leadership by thinking and planning for the real challenges this century has in store. Food security for Canada's largest urban centre is one of them.

Pat Valentine, Claremont

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Land Over Landings rebuts Pickering mayor's airport claims

Opinion Aug 30, 2017 Pickering News Advertiser

It's hard to know what's more concerning about the Pickering mayor's op-ed — his old-fashioned notions of farming, his ignorance (wilful?) of the current state of aviation in southern Ontario, or his blinkered non-mention of climate change.

There is too much to pick apart here, so I can only beg readers to please go to Land Over Landings' website and Facebook page, or contact us for all the current news, reports, studies, and facts, on aviation, and agri-food. We pride ourselves on our research.

But in brief, a few points:

1. The “world-class transportation infrastructure” we need to focus on is rail: high/higher-speed connections between our major cities and (sigh) our existing airport.
2. GTAA forecasts? Don't make me laugh. For fun, check out the aviation forecasts that originally got us into this mess.
3. The agri-food sector is a leading economic driver, especially in Ontario. Canada-wide it generated \$108.1 billion and employed 2.3 million people (Ottawa, Ont. – (Marketwired – May 9, 2016) – Agriculture and Agri-Food Canada).
4. \$150 million spent since 1998 is a drop in the bucket compared to what has been spent – wasted! – since this whole sad saga began in the late 60s.

I couldn't agree more when the mayor argues we must stop looking at issues through a singular lens. This is precisely what certain area politicians have done for years, touting an airport as the solution to everything, and making up jobs numbers to back up weak arguments in an effort to attract votes.

But saving this precious land for an airport that will probably never happen would be the biggest waste of all. Instead, cancel the airport, give long term renewable leases to farmers and related businesses, and allow them to invest and contribute to a revitalized agricultural economy.

We need vision and courage in our politicians. We need them to look forward, instead of back to the 1960s when megaprojects like airports were touted as salvation. Thankfully, with every passing year, there are fewer politicians who argue for paving farmland, and fewer still (at least in Canada) who neglect to at least mention climate change. The visionary ones acknowledge IT as the singular lens through which we must view every policy decision we make.

Mary Delaney, Land Over Landings

Online Comment re this letter: By Dan Sep 4 2017 10:25AM

Oh PLEASE!!! Give me a break. So the spokeswoman for land over landings wants farmland...who would have thought! I've been to Pearson multiple times and it is bursting at the seams. Canada's major hub needs relief. Notice how West of Toronto is developing at a much faster rate than Durham region, a huge reason is because of Pearson. This farmland doesn't benefit the vast majority of people in Durham, but an airport would. Lastly, if you want to write an opinion column, don't write into the letter section, write in like the mayor did. Letters are meant for regular people here and not groups with an agenda.

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A Pickering airport is a good thing for Durham and the GTA, says reader

Opinion Sept. 07, 2017 Pickering News Advertiser

As a businessman and pilot, I was more than a little interested in Pickering Mayor Dave Ryan's column about a proposed regional airport for Durham Region. It is so refreshing seeing a politician standing up for the majority, instead of pandering to NIMBYs (Not-In-My-Back-Yard) and their secret agendas.

Mr. Mayor succinctly laid out all the economic and infrastructure benefits – while protecting the environment – so no need to repeat here.

But it is worth noting who are the NIMBYs so vocally opposed to a much-needed new regional airport. And, perhaps as importantly, who and why others are backing their council packing, picketing, and letter-writing campaigns.

We've got farmers leasing acreage from the federal government at rates far below market value, in the range of \$10-\$100 per acre.

We've got homeowners in Claremont complaining about potential noise and environmental issues. Where do people living in 5,000-square-foot homes and bigger get the credibility to toss stones over environmental issues?

Then we've got the Greater Toronto Airport Authority and its massive \$7 billion debt. The GTAA – which raises rates indiscriminately and still can't make money – is a true monopolist that fears competition.

How about the City of Mississauga and its concerns about losing some of the businesses (and their tax dollars) that have grown around Pearson Airport without thinking about the overall benefits to the GTA for a regional airport eastwards?

There are others fanning the flames, but you get the picture about these NIMBYs: when you look behind the curtain, the Wizard of Oz isn't so great after all.

An airport in Pickering is good for the GTA, Ontario, the economy, and, most importantly, delivers vital infrastructure to Durham Region.

Samer Bishay. Markham

Online Comment re this letter: By Janet Sep 8 2017 10:37AM

So easy to say yes and support this ridiculous initiative, when you don't even live in Durham Region....oh gee, and you are a pilot, that wouldn't have anything to do with it now, would it...

Online Comment re this letter: By Mark Sep 8 2017 8:15PM

A great post, thank you For having the courage to say it like it is! The Pickering lands is a multi billion dollar public investment that has been set aside to future proof our airport system, not for the use of a few dozen farmers who received millions in subsidies over the years. Unfortunately even this paper has bought into the myths promoted by the PR spin of those currently profiting from these lands.

Online Comment re this letter: By Bill Sep 11 2017 8:05AM

The author of this letter must be under the age of 25 and has NO recollection of the white elephant that was built " For years, international flights departing from or arriving in Montreal were scheduled out of Mirabel. But at more than 50 kilometres outside of the city, Montrealers quickly grew weary of forking over huge cab fares to travel to and from the airport"Does this ring a bell? Have we not learned anything from the past? More tax dollars than brains?

Online Comment re this letter: By Kavi Sep 11 2017 1:08PM

Some neighbourhoods in Markham like Cornell and Box Goove are actually closer to the proposed airport than some settlements in Pickering or any other municipality in Durham so I don't think we should disqualify a Markham resident's opinion just because he doesn't reside in Durham. Also, the proposed airport is far closer to high density population centres in Durham and York and no where the distance of the Mirabel airport to big population centres. This airport has to be built sooner rather than later.

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Pickering mayor's column shows he's bereft of new vision

Opinion Sept. 7, 2017, Pickering News Advertiser

Thank you for publishing the op-ed piece by Mayor Dave Ryan. It served to promote a public discussion on Pickering's future. It also allowed Mr. Ryan to show what an old fashioned, old school, old boys network politician he is, pretending to move forward while looking into the rear view mirror.

He is a tired mayor at the head of a tired council, bereft of new vision and unwilling or unable to embrace anything but the status quo.

It also underlines the need for Pickering to clear the decks of the current council. It's long past time to change a decades-old culture of developer-driven politics that persists in Pickering.

Joe Bezubiak, Pickering

Online Comment re this letter: By Bill, Sept. 11, 2017 8:02AM

Joe, I have had this very opinion of 'DAVE' since I first saw him licking the boots of Reg. Chair Anderson. No voice, no spine and unfortunately no HOPE for Pickering. I have never, ever heard him voice an opinion of his own at the Reg. EVER...poor poor Pickering!

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Lack of transit would make airport in Pickering difficult to access

Opinion Sept 12, 2017, Whitby This Week

In a recent edition of Whitby This Week I read of the renewed desire for an airport in Pickering.

I am strongly in favour of any venture that would provide employment in the Durham Region, airports included.

Durham has a problem that many people choose not to recognize. It is very difficult to get to here from Toronto, and vice versa. I needed to travel by transit on a Sunday afternoon, from Gerrard and Dundas streets in Whitby to Shepard Avenue and Yonge Street in Toronto. It took me about an hour-and-a-half, which is not good enough. The eastern GTA, both Toronto and Durham, are woefully underserved by public transit. Areas to the north and also the west have much better service.

Road access to and from the eastern GTA is no better and still lags behind the other areas.

With "Mirabel" still a memory, would the government be wise to locate an airport in a location that is so difficult to access?

Peter Daley, Whitby

Online Comment re this letter: By Mary Sep 13 2017 8:43AM

I believe the original headline on this letter [Pickering needs closer airport] misses Peter Daley's point. To wit – no airport until the crisis in ground transportation in the eastern GTA is resolved. We, at Land Over Landings, couldn't agree more. Infrastructure dollars at all levels should go to improving transit and reducing gridlock to reduce outrageous commuter times that destroy family life and communities. Maximize use and improve efficiency at existing airports, and focus on new rail and other transit. I believe that could create jobs as well – jobs that contribute to a greener future. Sincerely, Mary Delaney

Online Comment re this letter: By Mark Sep 15 2017 12:29AM

It's called Hwy 407, five minutes from the new airport. 90% of Pearson passengers drive to the airport today. There is also a rail line on the property going right to the center of downtown Toronto.

Online Comment re this letter: By Janet Sept 13 2017 9:13AM

What about the Peterborough Airport (<http://www.peterboroughairport.com/>)...it's growing

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And readers' comments from our Facebook page

"Think London, and Tokyo". Um... Toronto has a population of 2.5 million, London has a population of 9 million, and Tokyo has a population of about 9.3 million. So in comparison Toronto is about 1/4 the size

of either of those cities. Even when you include the suburbs there are still only 5.5 million people here. Mayor Ryan is funded by developers and does not care about agriculture. Those 3500 acres he is suggesting we save for agricultural use, don't worry...he will be whining to pave over that land too.

Erick Joyner, August 24, 2017

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That \$150 million is what we would call "sunk costs". It's absurd to somehow conclude that we should spend more money wastefully so that the money which we've already wasted doesn't go to waste, and yet that is exactly what Mayor Ryan is proposing.

Andrew J. Larter, August 24, 2017