

CONFIDENTIAL

Notes on Meeting with Transport Minister Lisa Raitt, Hilton Markham, 21 August 2014

Present:

- Minister Raitt, chief-of-staff Nicholas Pappalardo, and several members of Transport Canada staff
- Chris Alexander, MP for Ajax-Pickering, Minister of Citizenship and Immigration
- Colin Carrie, MP for Oshawa, Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of the Environment
- Corneliu Chisu, MP for Pickering–Scarborough East
- Erin O’Toole, MP for Durham, Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of International Trade (and as a retired Canadian Air Force captain, has aviation knowledge)
- Jim Robb, Kevin O’Connor, and Gloria Rezler, for Friends of the Rouge Watershed
- Brian Buckles, Lori Wilder, Elizabeth (Liz) Calvin, Roy Megarry, for Green Durham Association
- Susan Walmer (executive director) and Patricia Short-Gallé (past chair), for Oak Ridges Moraine Land Trust [Patricia worked for Transport Canada, and was the public servant who managed the Green Space Preserve initiative until her retirement.]
- Mary Delaney, Pat Valentine, Jim Miller, and David Masters, for Land Over Landings

Before the meeting got underway, CA quietly told us that there was a surprising consensus among all groups as to the preferred future use of the Lands: and that we would be pleasantly surprised to know how many participants shared our views. That there was no interest even in a regional airport, only some in a Buttonville-type airport, and that preserving agriculture was often mentioned. He said he would tell us more later.

Knowing that we wanted to speak last, but that ,with the unexpected addition of the ORMLT reps to the meeting, alpha order could no longer be the reasoning, CA said he would see to it (and did).

Minister Raitt: It was decided before the House rose in June that everyone should get together so we could all be made aware of what’s going on. Said she had met with mayors last year, but discussion was only preliminary. The meetings today was part of the promised public consultation. [Mind you, if CA hadn’t intervened, our groups would not have been part of it – so... grain of salt there. – PV] She’d already met with local mayors earlier in the morning, and then with business: some 35 people at that latter session included representatives of three airlines, national aviation organizations, boards of trade, chambers of commerce, Hamilton International, Kitchener-Waterloo International, and CP Rail. She said she had asked 3 questions at each meeting:

1. Do we need this airport?
2. What factors should be considered?
3. When would an airport be needed?

CA: “This is the first time we’ve had formal conversations, as groups, with the Minister of Transport.” We need to ensure an overall plan; it needs to “reflect and respect a long-term solution for these Lands in the GTA. We see this as an enormous opportunity.” ... “Mistakes were made” [in the past], and when the airport wasn’t built yet the land was still retained, “there was a breach of faith”. “Now we can all see economic opportunities in these Lands” – for pleasure, trails, a Park ... “We want a resolution. We want proponents to feel empowered to come forward” and tell the government what they want to see done here. He said that he’d been struck by “the degree of congruence in all the groups. No one was talking of an international or regional airport, or commercial or scheduled flights in the medium term either.” All that’s been put forward so far is a proposal for a small 400-acre airport to replace Buttonville.

Minister Raitt: Referred to LOL's letter of last September (held it up) and said that it wasn't the only reminder she'd received of the need for transparency and openness; that through their recent motions and resolutions, local mayors had said the same thing. That between 600 and 700 online submissions had been received last year, and that her staff would be preparing a summary for her to make public. As for today's meetings, her staff would prepare a letter outlining what had been said at the three meetings, although individual speakers would not be identified – and that all attendees would receive a copy. She will aim at transparency and openness. Transport Canada is continuing to go through the regulatory process [revised Pickering Airport Zoning Regulation, PAZR] for the 8,700 acres currently identified as the airport site. Then, as required by law, there will be a public consultation on the draft regulations, and we will be notified beforehand. The results of all of this will be discussed in caucus. No decision will be made before that. “We need to put this issue to rest.”

Jim Robb then delivered FRW's presentation. (I took no notes at this point because we have copies of the presentation.) The Minister listened attentively, checked maps, and so on. She said, at the end, that Colin Carrie was taking note of everything in order to brief the Minister of the Environment.

Brian Buckles then delivered GDA's presentation. (Again, I took no notes as we have a copy of the presentation.) BB added strong comments several times to drive home his points. Again, the Minister was clearly paying attention to what was being said.

Susan Walmer then spoke far more briefly for ORMLT. [The ORMLT was apparently invited by Paul Calandra, MP for Oak Ridges–Markham. This group hadn't had prior discussions with us and we had no idea they would be attending, much less what they would be saying. But their presentation did not contradict anything in any of ours.] Said that ORMLT supports the Lake-to-Moraine corridor proposal. Explained that the Trust works with conservation easements, whereby owners retain title but there are restrictions on what they can and can't do on their property on the Moraine. Thinks this procedure very successful. The Trust is worried about the “economic development” lands that are on the Moraine. About half of the Trust's properties are in agriculture; the Trust works closely with the Ontario Farmland Trust.

Mary delivered LOL's presentation. Everyone before this had stayed seated while presenting. Mary stood up and said: “I hope I'm not breaking protocol by standing...”

Raitt (with a smile): “As long as I don't have to stand with you.”

Mary: “But Chris promised you would stand with us to protect these Lands!”

Raitt (laughing, as was everyone else): “Well played!”

Once again, I won't précis the speech – we have copies – but when Mary said that the basic ingredient for success is already in place – the Class 1 soil that humans can't manufacture or recreate, Raitt looked into the distance and visibly nodded, as if making a mental note to use this argument herself in the future. At the end of her speech, Mary held up our new brochure, read the question: “Runways or Food Basket?”, then said, “Here's our answer.” And introduced LOL's Treasurer, who held up a spectacular food basket created by Gabrielle, containing produce from Mary's and Gabrielle's gardens. David, in his pin-stripe banker's suit and looking very much “all business,” presented the basket to Ms Raitt with the words: “Agriculture IS business.” The speech and presentation got a big round of applause from the room! In fact they prompted the meeting's only applause! Raitt then asked Mary to repeat the last words of her speech, which were: “As our climate changes, safeguarding what remains of our foodland and fresh water sources should be our highest priority, now and into the future. Land Over Landings will fully support any plan for the Federal Lands that shares this goal.” Raitt nodded and made notes.

A brief discussion period followed: Erin O'Toole mentioned that he'd been born only in 1973, after expropriation, which “just underlines how long this has been going on.” He said that all these years of uncertainty “have not been productive.” And he talked about the hurt that expropriation can cause. In Clarington, he'd talked to Knox family members earlier in the day who'd been expropriated in 1972 for

the airport and who have now been expropriated again, this time for the 407 extension. “People keep having to move further east to find land they can farm.” He said he himself has always consistently supported agriculture but would also like to see food processing as part of the plan; subsidiary businesses need to be part of it. There was agreement in the room – and of course this *is* part of the plan – at least, outside the Park’s confines.

Raitt asked the room whether there was anyone who thought there should be any airport at all.

- Mary: While Land Over Landings is, clearly, opposed to an airport, we don’t feel there will be one for a very long time – if ever. Our prime concern is the same as GDA and FRW: that is, the preservation in perpetuity of the ‘surplus lands,’ and the wise agricultural use of the airport site until such time as an airport is needed, IF that day ever comes.
- Brian: Since 1972 we have opposed the airport because there has never been any justification for building it. We oppose it for the same reasons today and feel that that it will continue to be the case for years to come. However, if at some point in the future a compelling case could be made for an airport’s being needed, we have to re-evaluate the situation then . Currently though, our focus is on the middle lands.
- Roy Megarry: Would go further and say that there should be no airport anywhere on Class 1 farmland and if another airport ever became absolutely necessary, it must never be built on Pickering’s prime farmland.
- Gloria Rezler: Protecting the area’s watersheds should be the driving factor; it was that important.
- PV: No new airport should be considered unless there were *absolute proof* (unlike in the past) that it was needed, and then, it should not be put on Class 1 farmland. Also, no new airport should ever be considered before existing airports are expanded or modified to handle the traffic, and public transit to existing airports needs to be improved.
- Erin O’Toole: “My response is similar to what Pat just said; we need to maximize the aerodromes that now exist.” He agreed that no new airports should be built until absolutely needed. He highlighted the economic benefits of moving beyond the farm gate and encouraging more food processing, that food processing had to be considered a major factor in the equation. This gave Brian the chance to comment on the importance of analysing how the Federal Lands could support this broader food and farming sector.

Mary then said that we knew Raitt was about to be taken on a tour of the Lands, but that Land Over Landings would also like to take her on a tour one day soon, so would she come? She said: “Yes, invite me and I’ll come, and you can lobby me the whole time!” She added: “But no media.” We assured her that we would respect her wishes. Jim M. said that now was absolutely the best time to see the Lands, not in winter. In conversation after the meeting Raitt said she would definitely come, maybe even next week, and bring her 10-year-old, and she asked Mary to set it up with Nicholas. [Mary has already sent him a request, and we’re awaiting confirmation of the day – during this last week of August.]

After that, people milled around and got into various discussions. Corneliu Chisu, who hadn’t looked very happy during the meeting, didn’t talk to LOL. Carrie and O’Toole did. However, Chisu did talk to Brian. Our reports:

Brian:

Chisu told me that he liked my presentation, and started to get into the need for us to make a more complete economic case for pursuing the objectives we were promoting. I started to get into the responsibility the Government has to help evaluate the opportunities here. He, however, seemed to feel it was our job. At that point, Patricia (Short-Gallé) intervened to tell me that Ludovic D’Souza from Transport Canada was leaving and if I wanted to follow up on the acreage question we needed to nab him.

Therefore I couldn't finish my conversation with Chisu. I told him I would give him a call. His attitude bugs me. He seems opposed to one of our "asks," which is: not only committing to permanently protect this middle ground but also working to develop a land use /management plan for these lands that would, among other things, evaluate the agricultural and other opportunities the Federal Lands could provide.

Re my discussion with Ludovik: About a year ago he provided some figures of Federal acreages (that I indirectly got hold of) that suggested there was considerably more acreage expropriated than the published 18,600 acres. Ludovik told me that the 18,600 was still the best figure, that they were still working out more exact acreages, and that it was complex trying to take onto account roads, etc., to come up with an accurate figure – a figure he now said wouldn't necessarily end up higher; it could also be lower. I didn't follow it all and will pursue the matter with a couple of others.

I also talked briefly with Erin. A number of us are going to meet with him soon. He suggested I drop a copy of the video off to Lisa Raitt. I did that and told her it had some really good ultralight shots of the Federal Lands.

I also touched base with Chris. He seems to appreciate our strategy of simplifying the way forward by not requiring any change in airport site boundaries and initially just focussing on a commitment to permanently protect, then follow up by consultation and development of a land use/management plan. I asked him what we could do to make this a reality. He felt the meeting was a good start in that direction.

Jim:

CA started me talking to Mr O'Toole by saying that Erin is really into history (I gather there's a common connection between Mssrs Alexander, Chisu, and O'Toole; all serve in the same military reserve regiment?), tell him about the story of Thistle Ha'. I did. Then Mr O'Toole said that he was a strong supporter of agriculture (largest business in his riding), and private property rights (most right wingers are). I noted that he'd mentioned the Knox family of Hampton (in his riding, and among his closest friends) and his comments about the family's having been expropriated a second time: Pickering and now 407 – they can't seem to find a farm far enough away to avoid expropriation. I've known the Knoxes my entire life, being cousins of my cousins, so I asked him to talk to them about the (ongoing) pain experienced by their two great-uncles and their entire families who had their farms, businesses, and homes seized from them in Pickering for no reason. His thinking about what the tragedy of Pickering really represents seems to have evolved in the past year, and I hope we've managed to nudge it along in our direction a little.

Pat:

Got into conversation with Colin Carrie, who said that as a chiropractor, he was right behind the fresh food and fresh water drive, and agreed with us on this. BUT that there was need for a little airport to replace Buttonville. The exchange went something like this:

PV: But we've heard that most of Buttonville's traffic will be going to Oshawa.

CC: Not so. Another 1000 feet of runway are needed.

PV: But Buttonville's and Oshawa's runways are virtually identical in length.

CC: Oshawa's isn't long enough for jets.

PV: But do these jets fly into Buttonville now?

CC: There are lots of jets that, in bad weather, have to fly into Hamilton [aircraft "safe operation margin", i.e., landing distances increase for wet/icy runways – JM], and General Motors should be having parts flown into Oshawa but as things stand, they can't do this because of the too-short runway. There's enough land to expand the runway but a small bunch of people who live near the airport, and who are misinformed, have stopped the expansion and have put an end to all the subsidiary business the jet traffic would bring in. They don't want the noise.

PV: Hate to mention the word but, as has been done in at least one American city, can the City of Oshawa not expropriate some of the properties closest to the airport, paying full market value, and soundproof the houses of those people who don't want to move, so as to be able to expand the airport? It's worked in the

States. It would cost a lot less than building a new airport somewhere else.
CC: No, Oshawa's residents have spoken on this matter.

Talking afterwards, we (LOL reps) all felt that there's a leaning, for whatever reason, towards the idea of a 400-acre Buttonville replacement. We got the sense that we might be able to save the middle lands right now, and the airport zone boundary *might* be shiftable at some point to include the Havelock rail line and the West Duffins in the preserved area, but that the south-east corner will continue to be dedicated to a future (small) airport. There are many excellent arguments that we can raise against such a plan.

Jim's feeling on the prospect of a Buttonville replacement:

A "small 400-acre Buttonville replacement" is the thin edge of the wedge, leading to a potentially much bigger airport. The suggested "small 400-acre Buttonville replacement" is pure spin. Buttonville is 170 acres, with runways about 4,000 feet long. The "small replacement" airport would be more than twice the size of Buttonville, with a longer (5,000 foot) runway. It's not just Oshawa Airport that's being thwarted; Markham Airport has submitted plans for a 6,000 foot runway but apparently can't get local approval either. Yet MP O'Toole agreed with PV that "we need to maximize the aerodromes that now exist." If a "small Buttonville replacement" is actually successful, things won't stop there. The aviation industry never stops campaigning for expansion of "small" airports (see Billy Bishop).

Jim is going to feel out Mr Wilcox of Oshawa Airport to see how accurate Colin Carrie's info is.

Overall, though, we felt it a useful and, in many ways reassuring, meeting. We made a connection with the Minister and other MPs, and the mood was relaxed and respectful throughout – on both sides. There was no sense that the government was dutifully hearing us out while uninterested in what we had to say. Mary arrived home to tweets from Erin O'Toole and Chris Alexander, and an email from Mayor Parish. Later, she had a very nice e-mail exchange with CA. Do we risk actually feeling hopeful? Yes!!

P.S. For what it's worth, Jim M. noted that of the seven women in the room (not counting Minister Raitt), Chris Alexander kissed (on both cheeks, European-style) only two: Mary and Pat. We're not entirely sure of the significance of this – but we'd like to think he was demonstrating support for LOL. And let's hope the gesture gave the Transport Canada staff who were lining the walls a little something to think about. ☺

Notes taken by PV and supplemented by contributions from MD, JM, and BB.