

Pickering Airport plans still grounded

by Lisha Cassibo

Plans for building an international airport in Pickering have long been a contentious issue for residents of Durham Region, especially those in the southern part of the region. It was first announced in 1972 that an airport was going to be erected in north Pickering, yet not a single piece of sod has been turned to make way for the planes - 37 years later.

No doubt the entire issue is beginning to slip from some people's minds. But for the residents, both past and present, of the lands that were unceremoniously expropriated from them back in the early 70s, the airport and its perceived threat is anything but dead.

A long, heart-breaking history of the events that have led to today's inaction has filled numerous books and pamphlets over the years. What follows here is only a very brief overview of the events that lead up to today.

In 1972, the federal government announced that it was taking over 18,600 acres of land in the Pickering area for the purpose of building an international airport. Odd thing was, Pickering was never on the original list of 59 proposed sites, nor was it on the short list of five sites that would be prime airport land opportunity.

At the same time, 25,000 more acres was expropriated by the provincial government, in order to be used as the support environment for the federal airport. Bewildered residents left their homes, and as houses were boarded up and destroyed, or left to fall into such disrepair that demolition was the only option, whole communities began to die. Several brave women caught national attention by lying down in front of bulldozers, and three women occupied a heritage home that was slated for demolition. National attention was attracted by this, and the project was put on hold indefinitely.

Skip forward to 1994; the Greater Toronto Airport Authority (GTAA) releases a draft plan predicting the need for a regional airport, paving the way for an environmental assessment. This assessment came to one conclusion - that expansion at Pearson International Airport was the best solution. More studies were conducted, reports submitted, saying that, once Pearson reached capacity, then the overflow could possibly be taken up by the existing international airport in Hamilton (which is privately owned) or by a new airport in Pickering. In 2002, the GTAA prepared a Financial

Assessment analysis, which contained a business case for the airport, and made reference to this assessment in 2004, when it produced its Pickering Airport Draft Plan Report, also submitting it to Transport Canada. Most recently, however, in 2007, Transport Canada asked the GTAA to perform a needs analysis study of Pickering. This has reportedly been submitted to Transport Canada, and it is doing a "due diligence review". The results may be announced in the spring of this year.

No individual study can be found to disclose what effect either an international or regional/cargo airport would have on the nuclear power plant that is located less than 20 kilometres from the proposed airport site.

While all these reports and studies were flying not-so-fast and furious between the governments and NGOs involved, the people whose lives had essentially been destroyed



A boarded-up house in Altona

were not taking the news lying down. After the initial announcement in 1972, a group called People or Planes was immediately created, starting a media war with the government calling for a halt to the planned airport. Later, in 1994, another group called VOCAL (Voters Organized to Cancel the Airport Lands) was set up to take a more political stance against the then-proposed regional/reliever airport. Most recently, several groups are working together to present a unified front against the governments' proceedings. One group, Land Over Landings, is dedicated to "stopping further evictions and demolitions of homes and farms on over 18,000 acres of federal land in north Pickering; and to establish long-term, green alternatives in opposition to the GTAA's airport proposal."

The Durham Conservation Association, which had been involved in promoting public and private land stewardship, land acquisition and trails, and fund raising to support these efforts, and the Green Door Alliance (GDA), a more policy and research focused group heavily involved with the federal and provincial land holdings

and Pickering airport issues, recently merged together. Made up of many former members of POP and VOCAL, the new group focuses on lobbying, preparing briefs and researching policy regarding proposed land ideas.

Those are just some of the players involved, but where does this all leave the airport, and the lands that have sat overgrown and unused for so long?

Brian Buckles, of the Green Door Alliance, was one of the people whose family was evicted from their home in 1972. He moved to the Uxbridge area, but has remained staunchly involved in the activities surrounding the airport lands.

"We need to get on with effectively managing the land," he says. "We need some entity to oversee the future possibilities of this site."

He points out on a map issued by the GTAA the full extent of the expropriated lands: a jagged outline whose outer boundaries include

Highway 7 to the south, halfway between the 9th concession and Highway 48 to the west, well past the Uxbridge-Pickering town line to the north, and past Sideline 16 to the east. 18,600 acres. He says that all parties involved can agree that 13,000-14,000 acres within the provincial Greenbelt and the federal lands will never be needed for an airport (the proposed site for the airport

occupies some 5,000 acres of "whitebelt" in the southeast corner of the federal holdings). 7,200 acres of the land to the north was designated federal Green Space in 2001, and cannot be touched. GDA wants the federal government to extend this Green Space to include all federal lands in the provincial greenbelt. It also wants an advisory group to be appointed, with the mandate of developing a Management Plan for all the federal lands, including the "whitebelt" area. This plan would have to include an evaluation of private stewardship options.

"Don't keep it all public - make some of it privatized easements, give the public something back," Buckles argues.

A national park has also been talked of for the area. The federal lands, along with the provincial and Rouge Park lands to the south, fall at the centre of the provincial green belt, and are the only place where the green belt connects to Toronto, making it Toronto's "green door" - linking Lake Ontario to the Oak Ridges Moraine.

Land Over Landings (LOL) is also working at having the land used in a more sustainable, ecologically sound manner.

Mary Delaney, an active member of LOL, lives in a house she and her husband rent, right on the edge of the federal lands. Her official landlord is the Queen of England. She says that the federal government has justifiably been called the worst landlord in Canada, due to what she calls "malignant neglect."

"We have a responsibility to protect these lands for the future," she says, pointing out that it is the last best farmland in Canada.

According to LOL's statistics, over 64% of the land is Class One farm land. Of the remaining 36%, 20 is Class Two and Three farmland, and the rest is forest and wetlands. Once this valuable land is paved over, it is gone forever.

"All that's growing there right now is despair. We are trying to plant seeds of hope," says Mary.

LOL sees the lands in much the same way as the GDA - a park involved, somehow, and the rebuilding of farms, organic greenhouses. The Durham Culinary Association has already picked out what areas it might like to use to grow produce that can be used in restaurants throughout Durham Region.

"The loss of farmland is not a regional issue, it's a global issue," she points out.

Mary says LOL sees the government as trying to depopulate the lands.

"There are very few original owners now, or long-term tenants. The government is hoping that eventually we will all die off and no one will come to take our spots. It's like a ghost town. And once we're all gone, they can do what they like," she sighs.

Many heritage buildings have already been destroyed in towns like Brougham. The Bentley House, which stands on the corner of Brock Road and Highway 7, was saved and leased by the GTAA, and renovated "as means to have a presence in the area for meetings and for public information requests", according to Scott Armstrong, a spokesperson for the GTAA.

Last fall, Bentley House was suddenly empty, with not so much as a note on the door to explain why.

"We left the office in October as the Pickering project could no longer justify staffing the building. Support work as needed will be done from our administration building at Pearson," says Armstrong.

The various levels of government do not seem to be eager to come forward and state what their current positions on the airport and surrounding lands are.

The only thing the office of Pickering Mayor Dave Ryan would say when asked about the airport portfolio is that it "accepts the business plan..."

continued page 9

TAYLOR, Willis Sands

March 12, 1921 – March 3, 1993

In loving memory of a dear father
and special father-in-law

Forever remembered,
Forever missed.

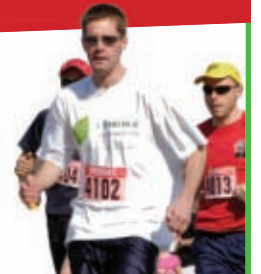
Walter and Penny Taylor

Mark Your Calendars for the 3rd annual



**UXBRIDGE
HALF MARATHON
ELGIN PARK**

Sunday, April 25th, 2010



Run for the Diamond
In Support of the Uxbridge Cottage Hospital Auxiliary

**\$5,000 Diamond
Draw and Diamond
Pins to be Won!**

**21.1K Half Marathon - NEW ROUTE!
10K Run, 5K Family Run/Walk, Kids Dash
Prizes, Medals, Food & Refreshments**

Register today and learn more at
www.uxbridgehalfmarathon.com

Prime farmland lies unused for decades from page 6

...Economically it is good for the region, but we have an incomplete picture. We're simply asking for the government to make a decision on yes or no." It is worth noting that the rest of council has stated its opposition to the airport - the mayor stands alone in support of it.

MP Bev Oda's office confirmed that no decision had been made on whether to develop the lands. An email from Meg Goard, Constituent Assistant in Ms Oda's office, says the following:

- the protection of the Pickering Lands Site for a potential future airport is consistent with prudent long-term planning.

- Transport Canada takes its responsibilities as landlord very seriously and manages the Pickering Lands Site to ensure the safety and health of its tenants on the site while maintaining due regard for fiscal responsibility. As with all matters having financial implications, Transport Canada must manage public funds in a fiscally responsible manner on behalf of Canadian taxpayers.

- Transport Canada remains committed to working with tenants and other stakeholders concerning matters pertaining to the Pickering Lands Site.

- The Government of Canada is committed to protecting and preserving ecologically sensitive land. The Pickering Lands Green Space creates a natural buffer to a possible future airport and demonstrates the Government's commitment to environmental stewardship and sustainability.

Transport Canada itself declined a personal interview, also forwarding an email stating its current position on the issue. In the email, it confirmed that it is coor-

inating a Needs Assessment Study, "which is examining the capacities and traffic volumes in the Southern Ontario system of airports in order to determine whether these airports can reasonably accommodate future traffic volumes over the next 25 years."

It also makes reference to the due diligence review, saying that it is "another stage in the overall process that will allow the Government to make informed decisions regarding aviation needs in the Greater Golden Horseshoe, including the need for a potential Pickering airport and the timing of its development if required. The Review is rigorously checking and verifying assumptions and findings in all relevant planning studies to ensure completeness and adequacy."

It goes on to note that a final date for the completion of both the study and review is difficult to predict and cannot be determined. Finally, it states that the federal government will "decide whether to proceed with a federal

Environmental Assessment based on the findings of the Needs Assessment Study and Due Diligence Review."

It says that it is important to note that "no final decision on the development of an airport at Pickering can be made until a federal Environmental Assessment process has been completed."

Perhaps the spring will reveal what the next step in the entire fiasco will be. Will Transport Canada decide to go ahead with an environmental assessment? Will the voices of the public, the very people whose land was taken

from them so many years ago, be heard, and a more green alternative be found? Or will both sides be able to compromise, with an airport being built using minimum space, and the area surrounding it being returned to its former natural glory? (which, in turn, begs the question, if that much land was never necessary for the airport, why was that much land expropriated?)

We've only been waiting 37 years to find out. What's a few more?

Helping you be ready for life!

Best 5 year GIC rate
3.38 %
(Subject to minimums)
Effective March 1, 2010

TAX FREE SAVINGS
Give your financial plan a **BOOST!**
We can help!

EVANS FINANCIAL SERVICES
38 TORONTO STREET NORTH, UNIT #2,
(905) 852-3184 www.investsmart.ca

Twice Around Tack

- Blanket cleaning and repairs
- Used blankets for sale
- New and used tack and apparel for sale
- Consignment items always welcome

Spring sale on now!
Up to 50% off!

76 Albert St, Uxbridge
(905)852-1866

FOR SALE

- Large wood stove - \$600
- 100-gal. galvanized water tank with pump - \$200
- Honda high speed buffer and floor waxer - \$300
- Traffic light - \$100
- Wooden table & 6 chairs, \$200
- 4 chrome chairs, \$40
- 5 toilet bases, \$10 each

Call 905-852-4720 after 5 p.m.

UXBRIDGE MEMORIAL COMPANY

108 Brock Street West, Uxbridge L9P 1P4

Dave & Lori Tomkinson

Tel: 905-852.3472 • 1-888-672-4364 • Fax: 905-852-0085
uxmemco@interhop.net

COTTAGE PROPERTY

4.6 Acre beautiful hardwood forested lot For Sale in Haliburton Cottage Country on municipally maintained road.

- 2-minute walk to Eagle Lake public beach, boat launch and park.
- 2-minute drive to Sir Sam's Ski Hill.
- 2-minute drive to Sir Sam's Inn & Spa.
- 5-minute drive to downtown Haliburton.
- Hydro on property and nearly 600 feet of road frontage.

Beautiful, peaceful & affordable spot near all amenities to build or camp & a great investment. For quick sale at \$49,900.

905-852-7442 or cottagelot@hotmail.com

SMALL TO PLUS SIZES AVAILABLE

Avant Garde BOUTIQUE

Cartise
Kensie

David Kahn Jeans
Simon Chang Denim
Kathy Purses

8 BROCK ST. W UXBRIDGE
905.862.2900

CHICKEN NUGGET SPECIAL

FRIDAY March 5	SATURDAY March 6	SUNDAY March 7	33-40 PIECES 907 g/2 lb Regular Retail Value \$7.99
FRIDAY March 12	SATURDAY March 13	SUNDAY March 14	WHILE QUANTITIES LAST!

4.99 SAVE \$3

M&M UXBRIDGE 304 Toronto St. S. 905-862-0351

MEAT SHOPS

Chicken Strips 27-33 PIECES 1.36 kg/3 lb

MAX special 14.99 MADE FROM SOLID ALL-WHITE CHICKEN BREAST MEAT!

FREE! Buy a box of Chicken Strips and get a **Honey Mustard Dipping Sauce**

French's® Honey Mustard Dipping Sauce 325 mL
Limit one FREE French's® Honey Mustard Dipping sauce per family purchase, per visit. Offer available while quantities last. Offer valid March 5-18, 2010 only.

ALL PRICES IN EFFECT UNTIL THURSDAY, MARCH 18, 2010 UNLESS OTHERWISE STATED.