

Timeline: 2018-

The Vision and the Future

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- **Jan. 18** – French President Emmanuel Macron puts an end to over 50 years of strong and persistent opposition to the construction of an airport on the farmland outside Notre-Dame-des-Landes, Brittany. The land will remain in agriculture, and the existing Nantes airport will be expanded. A mighty precedent! It was the only airport-vs-farmland battle longer than ours.
- The Pickering *News Advertiser* publishes an op-ed piece by our chair: “Time to stop misleading Pickering residents about airport jobs.” There are no such jobs on the horizon, as Pearson’s latest Master Plan makes perfectly clear.
- **Mar. 2** – It has been 46 years since the airport announcement. We mark the day with a special edition of our UPDATE newsletter, remembering lost heroes of this interminable fight.
- **Mar. 22** – A 19th-century heritage house in Brougham, the charming former home of Dennis and Mary Jean Mann, is bulldozed today. Just another in the latest spate of demolitions, fulfilling a contract from last year involving 15 properties, all to be gone by March 31.
- **Mar. 27** – We lose another dear friend, neighbour, and hero of People or Planes, Tommy Thompson, of Whitevale, husband of the doughty Isobel, who was head of POP communications during the 1970s resistance. (Isobel passed away in March 2011.)
- **Apr. 3** – We formally release the report of our Ag Study, “A Future for the Lands.” Our consultants present their findings to a packed Brougham Hall, an invitation-only crowd of MPs; municipal stakeholders from across the area; leading food, farming, and environmental NGOs; farmers; educators; and local business owners. It is an august gathering, hosted by the Hon. David Crombie, who ends his opening comments with: “I have a thought today – *that we’re about to win.*” Pickering’s mayor and local councillors do not attend.
- **Apr. 5** – The Brougham Hall is packed again, but this time with supporters and Study donors, so that they can hear the findings first-hand from the consultants. The day has been punctuated by messages of thanks, support, and praise from those who attended the first session.
- **May** – The City has hired Proof Inc. to do a public telephone survey on the topic of the 407 corridor. The calls, analysis, and “insights work” will cost about \$80,000. Over a 2-week period, 550 Pickering residents are surveyed. We obtain a copy of the survey and find that it never refers to the corridor but is all about an airport. One survey call that we know of is terminated when the resident is found to be living on the Lands. One question implies that Land Over Landings (yes, we are mentioned by name) might not be as trustworthy as Pickering’s mayor.
- **Jun. 20** – Our Chair delivers the keynote address at the Ontario Farmland Trust’s AGM, in Guelph, where she recounts the history of the Lands and gives an overview of our study report. The leader of the Green Party of Ontario, Mike Schreiner, is in attendance and says he strongly supports our cause.

- We hold our own AGM later that same day. Our new executive is voted in, and students from l'École Secondaire Ronald-Marion, in Pickering, unveil a GIS (Geographical Information System) map of the Lands that thrillingly brings to life our illustrated map of North Pickering Farms, using photos and detailed business plans for the (virtual) businesses that could be thriving there.
- **Aug. 8** – We submit a brief to the federal Standing Committee on Finance, calling for an end to the Pickering airport project and the transfer of the Lands to a public custodian who would oversee the creation of a food hub and agri-tourism destination. We learn that we will be invited to present at a hearing.
- **Sept. 27** – Don Gibson, a steadfast supporter, dies at 90 years of age. He was the last owner of Brougham's Bentley House before its expropriation, and the creator of Ontario's hugely successful and still running Foodland Ontario marketing campaign, with its memorable slogan, "Good things grow in Ontario."
- **Oct. 4** – Two members of our executive deliver a presentation to the federal Standing Committee on Finance at a pre-budget hearing in Oshawa. Our submission is well received.
- **Dec. 10-11** – Four members of our executive travel to Ottawa for a series of meetings arranged by our MP, Jennifer O'Connell. The first is with Transport Canada (9 representatives, including the Minister's special assistant). The meeting goes well, although it's a discussion and fact-finding meeting, not a decision-making one. Next up is a meeting with MP Wayne Easter, chair of the Finance Standing Committee (he had been in Oshawa in October), who gives us solid support and advice. Then comes Lawrence MacAulay, Minister of Agriculture and Agri-food, who also gives us solid support, and offers to speak to the Transport Minister about our cause.
- **Dec. 12** – We release *Then/Now/Next: 21st-Century Reasons to Cancel Pickering Airport*, explaining 12 powerful reasons for the cancellation. We had used the document as the basis for our meetings in Ottawa.

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- **Jan.** – We join Stay Grounded, a global network of 100+ organizations acting to counter damaging aviation growth in a time of climate change, and advocating for a more just transportation system worldwide.
- **Jan. 10** – While we await word on the federal government's plans to restore/repair the façade of the Bentley House (the decorative balustrade over the porch has rotted and been removed), there is good news on the Bentley-Carruthers House, the site of the Last Stand in 1975. Now within the RNUP's borders it has undergone a condition assessment, and a conservation strategy has been drawn up. (Both Bentley houses have Federal Heritage Building designation.)
- **Jan. 11** – Letters go out to the Minister of Finance and the Minister of Food and Agri-food (the latter at his specific request), making the case for creating a long-term interim agricultural plan for the Federal Lands – at the very least – if the much-delayed KPMG study results in a recommendation to continue holding the land for a potential airport.

- **Jan. 20** – We submit comments on Ontario’s Bill 66; specifically, on the draconian proposals in Schedule 10 that would put the Greenbelt and Moraine at risk. The Federal Lands, as they currently stand, are exempted, but parcels of land around them could be opened up to urban development under Schedule 10 with serious ramifications for the area’s farming in general and for our vision for the Lands specifically. Creating agricultural islands kills rural/agricultural communities.
- **Mar. 29** – We introduce our new Youth Wing members, led by Sari Sargeddeine. Ten in all, so far. These young people are full of fresh ideas, high principles, intelligence, determination, energy, and hope – a welcome breath of fresh air in this ongoing battle.
- **Apr. 9** – The Toronto Region Board of Trade hosts a lunch-time event called “The GTA’s New Economic Engine.” The claims of needing a Buttonville replacement or a Pearson reliever are superceded by a far larger vision: an aerotropolis, commandeering every inch of the Pickering Lands for runways, terminals, offices, hotels, entertainment and exhibition complexes, transportation corridors, and much more. The speakers? Dr John Kasarda, the man behind the aerotropolis concept, and Dr Richard Florida, an urban theorist, both Americans who clearly know very little about the Lands. We attend, and with us are an entire table of guests representing political, environmental, and agricultural spheres. To our amazement, Land Over Landings is a prominent part of Kasarda’s presentation. He calls us articulate and impressively effective, then spends time trying to discredit our Ag Study (because it didn’t include an airport-agriculture comparison!) and refuting our concerns about aviation emissions (his aerotropolis will add an “infinitesimal” amount) and the loss of farmland (“cropland is going up dramatically in Canada!”). His first claim is a tacit admission of climate-change denial; the second is missing the context that would show it to be false. We post our reports on our website and on social media and the response is massive (and angry).
- **Apr. 23** – The Toronto *Star* features the Pickering airport story in its “Big Debate” section. Kasarda makes the YES case, further raising our profile by praising us as “an articulate, well-organized, and vocal anti-aviation group” and “strong opposition.” He repeats the two misleading and erroneous claims about emissions and cropland. The NO side, by Paris Marx (a student at McGill U.) makes real points: “In the face of a warming world and the disruptions to food production that will accompany it, we should preserve the farms that surround our cities, not tear them up for speculative megaprojects that won’t yield the returns promised in over-optimistic reports and seductive slide shows.”
- There’s an online poll attached (Pickering airport: YES or NO). The NO side goes from neck-and-neck to trailing.
- The wonderful Lois James, mother of the successful “Save the Rouge” campaign, passes away at 95. In 2003, she became a Member of the Order of Canada for her lifelong effort to save the Rouge. How great it is that she saw it saved, within Rouge National Urban Park.
- **Apr. 24** – At Durham Regional Council, a pro-airport “emergency” motion of Mayor Ryan’s is distributed at the start of the meeting. There has been no advance notice, it is not on the agenda, and is only there, there is no opportunity for public input. The mayor of Whitby and a small number of councillors raise objections but are overruled. Pickering’s mayor says there is “one voice of opposition” (us) but that the silent majority is ready. He rejects any move to delay: “The people have had their say!” Not true, of course. The vote passes 21-6. We are alerted to the motion by a supporter in the audience, we follow the live-streamed proceedings, and get the word out immediately via social media.

- **Apr. 25** – Pickering’s mayor, in a *News Advertiser* op-ed, waxes eloquent on the wonders of the Federal Lands: “Pickering is sitting on an economic treasure of immense potential. It’s not oil or gold or even a highly-educated workforce, though we do have that. No, it’s land.” No, he hasn’t had an epiphany. “It’s land that can be connected with the nation’s largest airport as it nears capacity to create an economic development zone that would enhance a vast area of the GTA. Unlocking the growth potential of the Airport Lands and surrounding area will provide our city with the gift of choice.” Bizarrely, although he mentions Kasarda’s presentation, he never actually comes clean about what he’s referring to – namely, a big airport on the “Airport Lands.” He hides behind weasel words: “economic opportunities” and “economic potential.” Why is he afraid to tell the truth?
- **Apr. 27** – The *Star*’s Big Debate prompts many letters to the editor. One or two NO letters are published during the week. On Saturday, five letters, all NO, ours among them, take up the bulk of the Letters page, surrounded by climate-change discussion. A few days later, the online poll will show the NO side pulling ahead and bypassing YES by a considerable margin. YES has barely budged after the first few days. Perhaps the arguments made by the letter-writers were instrumental – facts trumping fiction?
- **Apr. 29** – We get our hands on a copy of Durham’s Special Regional Committee minutes for March 21, 2019. The minutes explode all claims that the airport matter was an emergency needing a vote on April 24. The airport isn’t mentioned in the minutes. What priorities are? “Recogniz[ing] community concerns.” “Greater focus on agriculture.” “Keeping greenspaces green.”
- **May 1** – Peter Bethlenfalvy, MPP for Pickering–Uxbridge, writes to Transport Minister Marc Garneau regarding the Federal Lands. His letter is touted by Mayor Ryan but, in fact, it treads a fine line and doesn’t come out in support of an airport. Bethlenfalvy asks, instead, for certainty in the near term, the release of the KPMG study, and, if no airport is found to be needed, the return of the lands “to the people of Pickering–Uxbridge so that the people can truly benefit from them.” We write to tell him we agree with him, except for the matter of returning the lands, and explain why such a move would chiefly benefit developers.