

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 Sardeddeine. 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 superseded by a far larger vision: an aerotropolis, commandeering every inch of the Pickering Lands for runways, terminuses, 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 to the global total) and the loss of farmland (the amount of cropland “is going up dramatically in Canada!”). His first claim is a tacit admission of climate-change denial; the second avoids 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 as “strong opposition.” He repeats his misleading and erroneous claims about emissions and cropland. The NO side, written by Paris Marx (a student at McGill U.) makes strong 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

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." Regretfully, 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 of straight talk?
- **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 airport letters, ours among them, and all of them NO, 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 eventually 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."
- The GTAA's 2018 Annual Report on Pearson, "Count on Us," is posted. They remain confident that no new airport will be needed in the foreseeable future to handle Toronto's forecasted air traffic growth. Pickering isn't mentioned, and hasn't been mentioned since the annual report for 2006. Interestingly, among the risk-factors in the "caution regarding forward-looking information," they list "the use of telecommunications and ground transportation as alternatives to air travel; [...] the availability and cost of jet fuel; [...] carbon emission costs and restrictions; adverse regulatory developments or proceedings; environmental issues[...]" In other words, they aren't blind to present-day risks, although reference to them remains in the fine print.
- **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 him to say we agree with him except for the matter of returning the lands, and explain why such a move would chiefly benefit developers.
- **May 22** – Pickering's mayor has been crediting insider information as the reason for his confidence that an airport will be approved. The *News Advertiser* claims that "a groundswell of support for an airport in Pickering is gaining momentum, ahead of any release of a federal aviation study, and ahead of this year's federal election." Pickering-Uxbridge MP Jennifer O'Connell corrects the record

regarding the study's report: "It was never designed to be before or after an election." She clarifies that the KPMG aviation sector analysis study is not yet complete. "It was designed to gather information for the minister. There's other politics at play."

- **May 25** – Pickering's Final Property Tax Bill for 2019 is arriving in mailboxes, accompanied by a flyer whose entire back panel extolls the benefits to be had from a Pickering airport, although the airport itself is never mentioned (just suggested by the photo of travellers wheeling luggage against a background of clear skies). The text is all about "the development of the airport lands" – not exactly the same thing. Why is the City so afraid of straight talk?
- **June 2** – Former Ajax Mayor Steve Parish and former Environmental Commissioner for Ontario, Dr Dianne Saxe, are our AGM's guest speakers. The Claremont community centre is packed for the event. Dr Saxe raises awareness of the climate crisis we face, and Steve Parish is scathing in his criticism of the aerotropolis idea (he calls it a failed tactic to ramp up enthusiasm and get the powers-that-be onside), and decries Durham Region's recent pro-airport push, stating that the people have *not* had their say in this matter. Our Chair delivers a blistering call to action, the most important action being to write to the Transport Minister to refute local politicians' claims about need and support for the airport.
- **June 17** – Transport Minister Marc Garneau recently tweeted that "climate change is real." Today, the House of Commons passes a motion by Catherine McKenna, Minister for the Environment and Climate Change, declaring a national climate emergency.
- **June 25** – Whitby's Town Council unanimously passes a climate-change-emergency motion, joining an ever-growing number of other cities that have done the same thing. The only bizarre part is that, on May 27, the same council had passed a pro-airport motion (only one "no" vote), despite an impassioned climate-change-related protest by well-versed Mayor Don Mitchell, who then voted for the motion regardless.
- **June 26** – Pickering residents start receiving copies of a glossy magazine called "Pickering's Your City Magazine." The mayor is given star treatment on the cover and centre spread, preceding two pages dedicated to the aerotropolis event and a further article: "An airport in Pickering: a resident's perspective." The aerotropolis article mischaracterizes (among other things) the findings of our economics study. The perspective mischaracterizes airport opponents' arguments and otherwise rehashes airport proponents' usual talking points. It is pure propaganda (edited, incidentally, by a pro-airport official in the mayor's office).
- **June 27** – While Pickering's mayor, in yet another op-ed piece, continues to claim that we want an airport, local sleuths are uncovering how property developers have found ways to continue funding the election/re-election campaigns of favourite municipal candidates despite changes in funding legislation. Important to keep in mind: The two presenters at the April 9 aerotropolis event in Toronto were sponsored by seven big-name property developers.
- **July 2** – Regional Chair John Henry envisions "an airport 10 to 15 years away, which will give technology time to allow for tractors run by batteries to be remotely operated by farmers sitting in their offices." This is the same Regional Chair who uttered the following immortal words about his Pickering airport vision: "Imagine stepping off an airplane and into nature."
- **July 4** – We launch a new feature on our website to correct the myriad exaggerations and untruths being promulgated by some pro-airport fanatics.

- **July 5** – We celebrate the launch of Common Ground Garden on a piece of Mike Robertson’s High Perspective hang-glider field. The best and highest use for this rich soil!
- **July 11** – The mayor of Stouffville writes to his constituents: “I can assure you though that I am listening to residents on social media and in many other settings. The general consensus I am hearing is opposition to an airport in Pickering.”
- **July 15** – Jane Philpott, former Liberal and now Independent MP for Markham-Stouffville, states that new feasibility studies on high-frequency VIA Rail service in Ontario and Quebec, to be funded by Ottawa, are moves in the right direction and consistent with Canada’s need to shift to a low-carbon economy. She confirms her opposition to the building of an airport on the Pickering Federal Lands “because of the need to protect our environment and some of the finest agricultural land in the country.”
- **July 23** – Durham Region furthers a coordinated effort by local councils to convince Ottawa and Durham residents that a Pickering aerotropolis is needed and it’s time to get on with it. The Region has just published its “Priorities for Federal Investment, 2019,” and the aerotropolis heads the list. The facility they envision would accommodate “indoor, year-round agriculture.”
- **July 25** – Pickering’s mayor, Dave Ryan, in a local op-ed, claims: “As mayor, I truly believe in the importance of community engagement. Government should not operate in silos or in isolation. Rather, I believe we should implement a more collaborative approach where residents, businesses, community groups, and associations have a valued opinion and an active say in how we operate as a municipality.”
- The Town of Whitby is still misleading the public with a continued reference on its website (we first noticed it in 2004) to an obsolete Pickering airport announcement made by Ottawa in 2013! The text, on the Air Services page, reads: “Future Pickering Airport – Transport Canada is planning an airport in Pickering, with construction slated to begin in 2027. The airport will drive development, attract jobs and industry to the Durham Region.”
- **July 26** – Transport Canada starts replying to no-Pickering-airport letters sent by supporters after our AGM. One paragraph reads: “The timing of any decision concerning the development of a potential airport on the Pickering Lands will be influenced by many market and non-market factors beyond the exclusive consideration of passenger capacities at other airports within the Southern Ontario airports system. Such factors may include, but are not limited to: shifting airline business models, regional population growth and evolving demographics, infrastructure needs and investments, as well as the interests and needs of regional stakeholders.” Climate change considerations are not mentioned.
- **Aug. 5** – We submit our comments on Durham Region’s “Climate Change and Sustainability Discussion Paper,” outlining how the Lands could help to meet the Region’s emissions-reduction targets, and pointing out how the Regional Council’s recent vote to support a Pickering airport was in direct conflict with (and would negate) the Region’s attempts to mitigate the effects of climate change.
- **Aug. 6** – Erin O’Toole, MP for Parliament-Durham, tells the Durham Post that “[t]he airport itself would likely be in the early 2030s... [...] But, in the 2020s, the planning the staging and construction would need to take place or at least the investments towards that. But the economic lands adjacent, could start moving forward in the next few years.[...] And there really was no need for all those decades for a second airport. But now as Pearson is getting close to its max out, and with the GTA growing in a major way in the last two decades, there is a need for a secondary, a smaller

airport. But it could be a very focused airport in terms of specific destination travel or even some cargo capacity." Guess he hasn't heard about the aerotropolis. Oh wait, he was at the April 9 event!

- **Aug. 8** – We post a new map on our website: "Where's My House? Runway Approaches of Proposed Pickering Airport." It's a zoom-in map that allows viewers to see the names of facilities and businesses, and, in satellite view, identify their own properties and other places they know.
- **Aug. 9** – The latest report of the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) underlines what we've been saying. "Indoor agriculture" on the Lands, constantly touted by local politicians, isn't financially competitive with similar facilities in warmer climes [e.g., Leamington and Niagara].
- **Aug. 15** – Durham Region's Chair, John Henry, weighs in on Durham's "once-in-a-lifetime chance" to have an aerotropolis. He writes: "Any [airport] development should include a strong focus on sustainability, accessibility and resilience, including clean technology, renewable energy, integrated public transit and environmental best practices." He actually seems to believe that this project, with "A modern airport would also allow us to showcase one of our biggest economic drivers: agriculture. Imagine on-site farming that highlights state-of-the-art, year-round growing practices and innovation? What about a food hub highlighting greenhouses and vertical farming?" And, for good measure, adds: "why not include an on-site climate change centre of excellence? With the site surrounded by protected natural spaces, such as the Rouge National Urban Park, Durham has an opportunity to set the standard for noise management, stormwater retention, carbon neutrality and protection of the environment. This is not business as usual." It's clear that he's been reading our arguments, but his distorted take-away is shocking.
- **Aug. 22** – Ajax's new mayor, Shaun Collier, is next to weigh in with why he supports an aerotropolis in Pickering. This is the mayor who said he didn't want an airport in Ajax; just the benefits. (Our new map shows how much of Ajax (a lot) would be under a Pickering airport's two main runway approaches.) He too addresses our concern over loss of farmland: "Innovative solutions could see retention of agricultural uses on hundreds of acres of land, reimagined (e.g. as stacked greenhouses) to produce year-round indoor farming opportunities..." Concerns about the energy needed to light and heat these facilities? None. Concerns about climate change? None apparent.
- **Aug. 27** – The prestigious *National Observer* does a great article on the situation here: "East of Toronto, a land dispute tests Trudeau's commitment to sustainability." Sandra Campbell and our Chair are quoted, as are MPs Jennifer O'Connell and Jane Philpott. Our position is well presented, and our North Pickering Farms photo collage and illustrated map are prominent.
- DurhamRegion.com publishes "Analysis: Durham lays out its priorities to the feds." The Regional Chair repeats his aspirational claims of Aug. 15. MP Jennifer O'Connell takes a more practical position: there needs to be a business case for an airport. "It's the government's position as well. They are going to make a decision based on strong evidence and a business case." Regarding the Region's priorities, she adds: "Dealing with climate change is incredibly important. Frankly, if we're not dealing with that, then none of the other items matter. If climate change isn't addressed, then the economic opportunities for Durham and the country are going to be limited. That's the overarching theme and issue we should be working on. It's critically important."
- Whitchurch-Stouffville's Council unanimously passes a motion requesting Transport Canada to reconsider the airport project if there is no clear business case for it. MP Jane Philpott is presenter of the motion. The final WHEREAS reads: "... one of the most important duties of Council is to protect the quality of life in our community."

- **Aug. 28** – As a member of Stay Grounded, Land Over Landings signs on to a joint statement urging the UN’s International Civil Aviation Organization (ICAO) to take climate action.
- **Aug. 30** – We release our latest research paper: “Airports and Pollution: Environmental Consequences of an Airport on the Pickering Federal Lands.” It covers the types of pollution, aviation’s challenges in the coming decades, how a Pickering airport would harm the area, not least the national park, and how the concept of a green airport is an oxymoron. Everything, from the creation of its construction materials to its day-to-day operations, would contribute more to the world’s emissions tally.
- **Sept. 3** – SKIES magazine reports that Ottawa will invest \$50 million to improve air freight and logistics at Mirabel. This does make some sense: improving existing infrastructure, not creating new.
- Ajax mayor Shaun Collier announces in his public schedule that he will be attending a “GTAA Info Session: Pickering Airport” in Markham on Sept. 5. On Sept. 4 we learn that It’s a private meeting with Mayor Scarpitti, the GTAA, and area mayors. Even Markham councillors haven’t been advised in advance.
- **Sept. 5** – Our Chair records a radio ad for Durham Radio News to counter one by the other side that repeats all the usual pro-airport bromides.