



Photo: Alexis Whalen

As we approach the solstice and dark days of winter, we wish you a safe and happy holiday and the dawn of a brighter new year.

ONTARIO: YOURS TO ~~DISCOVER~~ PROTECT!

We wanted to make this a non-Covid-19 message but couldn't. The pandemic has crystalized so many things in our lives. Never have we been more aware of the need to emphasize sustainability, and the need to support local businesses and initiatives – not least local food production, which, as you know, has always been the driving force behind our vision for North Pickering Farms.

Yet our local municipal government has missed no opportunity, even in the guise of a Covid-19 response, to agitate for an airport, apparently only too happy to join up with the Province to support developers and undermine environmental protections, with insidious assaults on watersheds, wetlands, farmland, and habitat in our immediate area and across the GTA. Predictably, the politicians who support an airport

tend to be the ones who also support development on farmland, wetlands, and other environmentally sensitive areas.

Land Over Landings' mandate is to advocate for the protection of those Federal Lands still earmarked for an airport. But as has been said so often this year, we are all in this together, which means that we can't ignore the broader issues. The Federal Lands are not an island. Water and air don't know political boundaries. And a farm or a farming community, like the flora and fauna of Rouge National Urban Park right next door, can't survive in isolation.

So, for now, we are stepping outside our mandate and joining other environmental and farming/farmland protection NGOs to say, with one voice, that **Ontario Is Ours to Protect!**

2020 REVIEW: UNDER COVER OF COVID-19

Jan./Feb./Mar.

- The new year finds us on tenterhooks as we await release of the KPMG study of southern Ontario's aviation needs over the next 16 years. A flurry of articles and op-eds by local politicians proclaim that 2020 will see Pickering airport get the go-ahead.
- Reps from Fridays For Future and from our Youth Wing urge Durham Regional councillors to pass a Climate Emergency motion. They do – but continue to push for a Pickering airport.
- The KPMG Report is released. It states repeatedly that no additional airport will be needed to meet the 2036 demand forecast in southern Ontario. Modest expansions of some airports will not just meet the demand but exceed it by a wide margin. Most local pols inexplicably see this as a green light for Pickering...
- In reply to an e-mail from Durham Region's Chair, Transport Minister Marc Garneau writes: "no decision has been made to develop an airport on the Pickering Lands"; there has to be a "sound business case"; and the latest aviation sector analysis suggests there will be "no need for additional airport capacity" in the GTA before 2038. And this study was *before* Covid-19.
- The coronavirus begins to dominate our lives. Canadians are instructed to stay home and the feds close international borders, halting all but emergency flights. Vegetable seeds become hard to obtain as Canadians start vegetable plants indoors.

Apr./May/June.

- Like everyone else, we postpone or cancel all events and meetings, including our own AGM. The majority of Pickering councillors, in a virtual meeting (the new normal), reaffirm their belief that an airport will be built. We also learn that the City was expected to help cover the fees of an Ottawa lobbyist hired by Durham Region to help push for an airport at Pickering.
- An Invest Durham survey reveals that, post-Covid-19, the business community's preferred strategies for job-creation/recovery include incorporating agri-business into downtown areas. Building a Pickering airport had also been on offer. There was little interest.
- Pickering Council backs a provincial Ministerial Zoning Order that would help kick-start development of a huge subdivision ("Veraine") on prime farmland near the Federal Lands. The developer's promotional video

touts Veraine's strategic location "adjacent to the proposed future federal airport."

- Global aviation has nearly ground to a halt. Canadians are stockpiling food and starting gardens. Flour and yeast are suddenly hard to find on store shelves.

Jul./Aug./Sep.

- Pickering launches a Local Food Strategy study *but* the Federal Lands – over 9,000 acres of prime farmland – are excluded because zoned for an airport, not agriculture, and the City has no jurisdiction over them. *Note:* "No jurisdiction" has never kept the City from pushing for an airport and indoor farming operations there!
- Daily headlines document the pandemic's toll on the aviation sector: near-empty airports, planes parked, crews furloughed, billions in financial losses, bankruptcies, a public fearful of flying... Our gardens grow. Mason jars and canning rings are in short supply.

Oct./Nov./Dec.

- Pickering's mayor continues his airport advocacy during a virtual Realtor and Developer Symposium. His rosy airport vision is jarring in the context of the real world of Covid-19 and climate crisis.
- One of our supporters launches a federal petition to save the Lands as farmland. Sign now via our home page!
- We release "Indoor Farming and North Pickering" to show how an airport complex incorporating indoor farming is misguided and irresponsible.
- As Covid-19 numbers climb and large indoor gatherings are banned, people rediscover nature. Trails, parks, and conservation areas draw crowds. The Province, though, decides to sell a 37-acre natural area next to the Seaton Trail, part of the land it had expropriated in 1972 to support an airport that was never built. Whitevale residents rise up to fight the threat. Meanwhile, citizens, NGOs, mayors, and municipalities across Ontario unite to take a stand against the Province's plan to gut Conservation Authorities. But not Pickering's mayor and regional councillors, all of whom vote at the regional level in support of the drastic and destructive changes.
- Bicycles and all manner of outdoor equipment are in high demand. As winter settles in, some of us pore over seed catalogues instead of travel brochures. The holiday season will be a muted affair as we all work out how to do things differently and safely. Now, more than ever, is the time to help each other by shopping locally. May the coming year be a far better one.

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Because food is a
GROWING concern!

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