



# UPDATE #74

June 4, 2023

## PICKERING NO LONGER A WILLING HOST FOR AIRPORT!

**April 24** – It took three meetings and many delegations but our newly elected councillors made good on their election promises, delivering a 6-1 vote affirming that the City is no longer a willing host for a potential airport. Money and staff time will no longer be used to lobby the federal government for an airport but will go instead to pressing for a high-frequency rail stop on the line through north Pickering.

The mayor, as predicted, was the lone dissenter. Having previously engineered a deferral of the vote and done all he could to change the expected outcome, he unleashed attacks on our executive and even called on senior staff to provide “proof” that the prime farmland of north Pickering really is special. The response? Class A [sic] soil could be found “anywhere.”

There were gasps and shouts from the audience in Chambers. The mayor gavelled the crowd into silence (“Order, order! If you don’t like the answer –”) It was just one of several outbursts on that unbelievable evening. Nevertheless, the motion by Cllrs Nagy and Cook passed, and kudos soon followed from David Crombie, the National Farmers Union – Ontario, and others, praising the decision but also correcting the facts re Class 1 soils, the best and rarest there are.

Among those applauding were the Mississaugas of Scugog Island First Nation. But in their press release they pointed out that at no time in the past 50 years has any government made an effort to hear their grave concerns about an airport on the Class 1 soil of this Williams Treaties First Nations’ territory.

## ANOTHER STUDY TO END AIRPORT DEBATE FOR GOOD?

On **April 18**, just days before the historic vote at Pickering council, Transport Canada announced a new aviation-capacity study in southern Ontario. In the media release the Minister said: “*We have no intention to proceed with building an airport on the Pickering Lands in the near term and the conclusions of the study could lead, for example, to a determination that an airport on the Pickering Lands is not required in the long term.*”

Our MP, Jennifer O’Connell, stated that she was “*pleased for this study... which will allow once and for all the release of these Lands from a constant threat of an airport.*”

Our Chair, Mary Delaney, celebrated the news: “*For the first time, Transport Canada has suggested there may not be a need EVER for an airport on the Pickering Lands. Until now, every statement has indicated they would hang onto the Lands forever, if necessary. We interpret this study and the announcement as a critical first step towards the permanent protection of these precious farmlands, hopefully within the Rouge National Urban Park.*”

Meanwhile, Pickering’s mayor and the Regional Chair grasped at straws, trumpeting the announcement as if it were a first step towards an airport. They issued a joint statement that ignored the Minister’s words and MP O’Connell’s comments, wrongly referred to the “Pickering Airport Lands,” and stubbornly repeated their stock assertion that an airport would create thousands of jobs. (Not if it’s not built. *How many times...?!*)

## LAND OVER LANDINGS BOYCOTTS CIVIC AWARDS

At the 11th hour, after consultation with our team and the supporters who had nominated us, we decided to boycott the **May 15** event at which we were to receive Pickering’s Civic Award for the Environment.

We had asked the mayor to take back his defamatory remarks about our executive and to correct the “alternative facts” conveyed by senior staff (see above). Despite numerous requests and opportunities, he

neither apologized nor corrected. So we called it as we saw it: his statements as *gaslighting* and the award as little more than *greenwashing*.

Turns out we were right to avoid the event. In announcing Land Over Landings as recipients he thanked us for our dedication to preserving the “ecosystems of north Pickering.” Not a word about farmland, soil, agriculture, or an airport.

## THE IMPACT ASSESSMENT AGENCY'S STUDY ON POTENTIAL HARM TO RNUP

On **May 2** we took part in a public discussion conducted by staff of RNUP and the AIIC, the first step in the plan to study the potential impacts on the Park of development on the adjacent Duffins Rouge Agricultural Preserve (DRAP). We argued that the consequences of residential development on the Preserve would be minor compared with the harm done by an adjacent airport on the Federal Lands to its north. When the IAAC released a "What We Heard" booklet near the end of May, references to "federal lands" and "airport" had been included.

The contents of "What We Heard" informed the study's draft Terms of Reference, released on **May 31**. The Terms are solid and comprehensive. The study's focus has been broadened to include "the federal lands adjacent to the Park ... if these have the potential for effects in areas of federal jurisdiction within the Park." *Indeed they do.*

Following a brief public consultation, the Terms of Reference will be finalized, the 3-member committee appointed, and the study launched. This is an extraordinary opportunity, and our submission will describe in detail the many ways in which an airport on the Pickering Lands would destroy the Park's ecological integrity and could put its very existence at risk.

### FACT OR FICTION?

Our latest research paper, "Southern Ontario's Main Airports Are at Capacity: Fact or Fiction?" responds to claims at Pickering Council meetings that our airports are struggling with capacity issues. The latest available stats show otherwise: average passenger demand in 2022 was only 73.7% of 2019 numbers; at Pearson it was even lower. The mayor insists that Pearson's problem (long lines and waits in terminals; delays, cancellations) is evidence of a capacity crisis. His claims aren't supported by the facts. Post pandemic, all airports have been facing staffing shortages (airline pilots and crews, baggage handling, security, customs, gate agents...). The media have been covering the issue extensively. It has nothing to do with airport capacity, Mr Mayor. In fact, an additional airport would only exacerbate the staffing problem.

## DURHAM REGIONAL COUNCIL APPROVES FLAWED OFFICIAL PLAN

The vote on **May 17** was 20-6 (Pickering councillors Brenner and Cook voted against) and "Envision Durham" is now our guide to the future. Except that it fails the credibility test by weaving into the plans the presumption of a future Pickering airport despite all rational reasoning. Council now supports asking Ottawa not for a yes/no decision but for "a firm commitment to the construction of an airport on the federal lands in Pickering." The Plan even designates its type: international, passenger/cargo. Prior to the pandemic, KPMG found no justification for such an airport. Post-pandemic, there is even less.

Councillors ignored the incompatible requirements of an airport and a national wildlife refuge; they ignored the Transport Minister's recent statement during his announcement of the new needs analysis study (see his quote on p. 1); they ignored the fact that Transport Canada's ground lease terms prevent construction of such an airport so close to Pearson; they ignored the fact that land clearance, levelling, and construction (including road widening and many other related services) would nullify the emissions-mitigation targets they had approved in Section 3.2: Climate Change and Sustainability. They praised agriculture and supported protecting prime agricultural land in Section 6.2: Prime Agricultural Areas, yet they endorsed and promoted an airport that would wipe out thousands of acres of prime farmland. This is either cognitive impairment or willful denial of the consequences for the climate and for food security. Whichever, it constitutes a staggering breach of trust.

### SAVE THE DATE FOR OUR AGM!

Wednesday, June 28 • 7:30 pm  
Claremont United Church  
5052 Old Brock Road, Claremont L1Y 2B3

*Special guest speakers:*  
Members of the Common Ground Garden  
"Showcasing the potential of the  
Pickering Federal Lands"