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Airport Announcement's 50th Anniversary, New Pickering Council

2022

- **January** – Curiously date-free, the second issue of Pickering's "Your City" magazine arrives in boxes, claiming to be educational and informational but is in fact a transparently obvious self-promotion organ for the City and a glossy advertising opportunity for property developers. No airport articles this time but egregious airport references. Fiaz Jadoon, Director of Economic Development & Strategic Projects, delivers this spin (implying to the uninformed that the project already has the green light): "The federally proposed Pickering Airport site is expected to spur significant economic development and job creation in the city and across Durham Region. This significant infrastructure project will be the single largest economic catalyst and could generate hundreds of millions of dollars in new investment for aeronautic, transportation/logistics, high-tech, and other innovative sectors." Readers are told that "the City continues to listen to all stakeholders as those plans come together. [...] Fiaz and his team would love to tell you more about what makes the City of Pickering unique and to provide factual information." What airport plans would those be? What does "factual information" mean to Mr Jadoon?
- **Jan. 11** – We send out a big media package covering the upcoming 50th anniversary of the airport announcement. Still under Covid restrictions, and with uncertainty reigning as to the situation in the coming months, we decide against in-person gatherings on March 2, and will bring this milestone date to public and political attention in other ways.
- We partner with Wildlands League to plan a program around March 2, involving an op-ed, an open letter, a mail-in campaign, and more.
- **Feb. 17** – David Crombie and Pauline Browse fire the first salvo at Ottawa: Waterfront Regeneration Trust sends a letter to the Prime Minister, signed by Browse, Crombie, and the other board members, advocating for the protection of the remaining Federal Lands by transferring them to Rouge National Urban Park. Parks Canada is copied in.
- **Feb. 26** – RNUP tweet: "Do you love farming and national parks? Are you interested in helping to preserve some of the last remaining farms in the Greater Toronto Area and promoting a vibrant farming community in the context of a national park? Parks Canada is looking to fill the position of Agricultural Specialist in Rouge National Urban Park, and this could be the perfect job for you..." We had nothing to do with this, but its appearance at this time seems appropriate.
- **Mar. 1** – The weeks of anniversary planning and hard work bear fruit. The *Globe and Mail* carries our op-ed, "It's time to ground the Pickering airport for good," signed by Krista Long, Executive Director, National Farmers Union–Ontario; Carrie Gregory, President, Ontario Nature; and Dr Yannick Beaudoin, Director General, Ontario and Northern Canada with the David Suzuki Foundation.

- **Mar. 2 – 50th anniversary of the airport announcement.** The *Toronto Star* and the *Ottawa Citizen* carry our large, full-colour ads of the text of the open letter to Prime Minister Trudeau, which asks him, under the heading “Expand the Rouge,” to cancel the airport and transfer the remaining Lands to RNUP. The ads include a partial list of the letter’s 58 signatories – leaders and organizations from across the agricultural, environmental, and political spectrum.
- The ads urge readers to access ExpandTheRouge.org and sign the letter in support of the land transfer to the Park. Addressees: the Prime Minister and his ministers of Transport and Environment & Climate Change.
- We issue UPDATE #67, with the details of the 50th anniversary roll-out and an article on the memories and hopes of eight local-area residents who have lived through the 1972 expropriation and its aftermath.
- There is also local coverage by the *Pickering News Advertiser*, the *Uxbridge Cosmos*, Durham News Radio, and the new farming magazine *Farmtario*.
- **Mar. 9** – Minister of Transport Omar Alghabra announces that “Canada has launched a Request for Expressions of Interest seeking advice and views ... on the High Frequency Rail project through Buyandsell.gc.ca.” The new “dedicated Corridor” line will be electrified.
- **Mar. 14** – Minister Alghabra announces \$142 million for Toronto Pearson to help fund critical infrastructure work, from airfield pavement rehabilitation to studies for a potential connection with Toronto’s Eglinton Crosstown LRT.
- **Mar. 22** – Stay Grounded, now representing 180 organizations worldwide, sends its own version of the March 2 “Expand The Rouge” open letter to Prime Minister Trudeau.
- **Mar. 30** – *Novae Res Urbis* publishes a sizeable article, “Charting a New Path,” which gives prominent coverage to the Expand The Rouge initiative, features interviews with our Chair as well as David Crombie and Environmental Defence’s Tim Gray, and highlights our vision map of North Pickering Farms.
- **Apr. 25** – Dave Ryan announces that he will not be seeking another term as Pickering’s mayor. (The next municipal elections are on October 24.)
- A *Cision* report: The Minister of Transport joins the GTAA’s President and CEO, Deborah Flint, for a ground-breaking ceremony at Toronto Pearson, launching “one of the largest runway rehabilitation projects in the airport’s history.” The second-busiest runway will be closed “to late fall,” allowing a “more sustainable approach.” That the GTAA is closing this major runway for 7-8 months is a pretty clear sign of the degree of reduced activity at Pearson and the anticipated slow recovery.
- *Airside Magazine* reports that there will be “no quick fix” for a shortage of pilots that could likely constrain the airline sector in the U.S. for five years.
- **Apr. 26** – Three members of our exec, as well as Krista Long of NFU, meet on Zoom with Patrick Mangan, Ontario Regional Advisor and Parliamentary Secretary Assistant, Agriculture and Agri-Food Canada, to brief him on the Pickering Lands issue and to make the case for protecting this prime farmland. Patrick undertakes to, among other things, help prepare a presentation for the minister.
- In a *National Post* article, entrepreneur and politician Frank Stronach writes: “To begin with, agriculture should be considered an essential industry and a strategic priority on the same scale as national defence, water and energy.”

- **Apr. 30** – As part of Durham Region’s Municipal Comprehensive Review, we submit to Envision Durham our comments and recommendations on the necessity of approving the only land-use scenario that does not cause urban boundary expansion onto farmland.
- **May 10** – From the *Guardian*: “A report commissioned by the climate charity Possible assessed every target set by the [international aviation] industry since 2000 and found that nearly all had been missed, revised or quietly ignored.” Proof positive that airlines cannot be left to self-regulate their emissions reduction.
- **May 12** – Transport Canada agrees to transfer federal land from the Windsor Park Authority to Parks Canada, a step towards creating Ojibway National Urban Park. If they’re transferring federal land in Windsor in 2022, why not here?
- **May 16** – The *Ecologist* picks apart and analyzes the aviation industry’s emission-reduction schemes for the coming decades – and pronounces them a “greenwash climate plan.”
- **May 25** – A majority on Durham Regional Council vote to open over 9,000 acres of farmland to development, over the advice and objections of specialist staff, advisory committees, NGOs, and residents. The farmland in question is a short distance east of the Pickering Lands, which, ironically, would also be a victim of this seriously wrong-headed decision if they hadn’t been protected by their airport zoning.
- **May 27** – A *Globe and Mail* article quotes 2021 census data showing that, between 2016 and 2021 (only five years), Ontario lost 4.7% of its productive farmland; that’s roughly 319 acres every day.
- **Jun. 20** – In a *Durham Post* interview, Mayor Ryan says he “very strongly believes” another airport is needed in the GTA. He states, without context, that delays have been plaguing Pearson. He explains that “we need the airport in Pickering specifically because the lands are already set aside for an airport,” and that “I would like to have an airport here rather than go across the city to pick up my wife every time she travels to see to her mother.” Yes, he said that.
- **Jun. 22** – We hold our first AGM in three years – not yet in person but via Zoom. No guest speakers this time but a detailed review by our Chair of all that has happened since June 2019 (a surprising amount despite pandemic constraints). A revised Mission Statement is approved, allowing us to lend support to like-minded groups working to protect farmland and the environment. And we welcome three strong new members to our executive.
- **Jun. 30** – *Farmtario* reports on the fact that the province, losing those shocking 319 acres of farmland per day, is almost doubling the 2016 rate of loss. “The OFA is concerned that the accelerated loss of agricultural land could be catastrophic for Ontario’s food sovereignty unless there is comprehensive and enforceable protection.”
- **Jul. 18** – In a *Durham Post* interview, Regional Chair John Henry urges Ottawa to make a decision on the airport and then get on with it. He sees the facility as focussed on the aerospace industry and (as always) on vertical farming. He clearly hasn’t bothered to read our research report on vertical farms and their severe limitations; he seems to think that year-round salad greens will “make sure that our residents have that food security.”
- **Jul. 20** – The *Toronto Star* points out that the amount of change needed before the critical climate deadline of 2050 creates “big issues” for the aviation industry. Says Jim Harris of aerospace consultancy Bain & Co.: There is no obvious solution, there is no one technology, there is no one set of

actions to get the industry there.” Jet fuel use by the four biggest U.S. airlines *increased by 15 per cent* in the five years leading up to 2019, just before the pandemic, despite aircraft efficiencies.

- **Jul. 24** – Dr Charles Godfrey, renowned physician, POP’s invincible leader, and LOL’s inspiration and hero, dies at the age of 104. He fought the airport (“it was baloney then and it’s baloney now”) right to the end.
- **Jul. 22** – In the *Guardian*: “Just hot air? For all the Farnborough talk, zero-carbon flying remains years away. Record heat reaffirms urgency to decarbonise, but technical challenge is far greater for aviation than for most other parts of economy.”
- **Aug. 16** – In the *Toronto Star*: “U.S. drought creates opportunity for Canadian farmers. As it becomes more expensive to grow crops in California, for instance, and ship them, U.S. companies look to Canada as a place to grow.”
- **Aug. 17** – In *Novae Res Urbis*: Pickering’s “Employment Corridor Taking Flight.” A 23-hectare food processing facility will join the Kubota tractor factory on Hwy 7, just south of the Lands. Have these food-related companies been reading our website or is it just serendipity?
- **Sep. 24** – From CBC News: “Another discount airline takes off — but they may not all survive.” Says a former airline executive: “They’re all chasing a dream, but it’s not going to end well.”
- **Oct. 12** – Radio-Canada publishes an excellent feature article on the Pickering story, by senior parliamentary correspondent Marc Godbout, called: “The Other Mirabel: The ‘Absurdity and Tragedy’ of Ottawa Indecision.”
- **Oct. 13** – From CBC News: “This former pilot [Todd Smith, co-founder of Safe Landing] says people need to fly less for the sake of the environment.” He explains: “...we could be hitting two degrees [warming] – that’s 99 per cent of coral reefs dead, rainforests turned into savannah, up to 700 million Africans displaced. If we’re going to continue to travel in the future, without taking proportionate action now, then we’re going to witness the decimation of the natural world. I don’t think that’s a future that most people would want to subscribe to. ... We need to recast the relationship between us and the planet, which is a living organism, the life support systems that actually nourish us and provide us with the air that we’re breathing – in the same way that the air in the cabin of aircraft does. This is a system failure – we need to divert and change course immediately to ensure survival.”
- **Oct. 24** – Municipal election day. Mayor Ryan is replaced by Mayor Kevin Ashe (pro-airport). Ward 3 (home of the Pickering Lands) sees no change in its city and regional councillors (both are pro-airport, although purporting to be otherwise). But the overall results translate into four progressive no-airport councillors against two pro-airport/pro-development councillors. In short, the balance of power has shifted.
- **Oct. 31** – Transport Canada confirms that a new state entity, a subsidiary of VIA Rail Canada but reporting directly to Transport Canada, will construct and operate an electrified “High Frequency Rail” (HFR) service along the corridor linking Quebec City, Montreal, Ottawa, and Toronto – and crossing the Pickering Lands.
- **Nov. 29** – A unilateral move by the Ford government to remove land from the Greenbelt and make it available for residential development has created such a province-wide uproar that everything else seems to be taking a back seat. One of the tracts in play is the Duffins-Rouge Agricultural Preserve (DRAP), adjacent to RNUP. RNUP has formally requested a meeting with the Ford govern-

ment to discuss the fact that this unilateral decision breaks with a Memorandum of Agreement with Ottawa. We knew nothing about this Agreement, in which some of the Preserve appears to be earmarked for incorporation into RNUP. Our question: why is RNUP happy to accept non-federal DRAP land but apparently unwilling to consider actual federal land immediately north of DRAP?

- **Dec. 9** – Yet another ultra-low-cost carrier – Canada Jetlines – takes to the skies, making its inaugural flight from Vancouver to Pearson.

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- **Jan. 10** – The *New Scientist* reports on the results of a recent study: children living near a small airport in California were found to have increased lead levels in their blood, the direct consequence of the continued use of leaded fuels by small aircraft. Legislating the use of alternative, unleaded fuels, however, would cause a different (if predictable) problem: such fuels are in short supply, and the path to achieving sufficient, sustainable supplies has not been figured out.
- **Jan. 15** – A team of University of Illinois researchers has learned just how difficult it is to harass Canada Geese and get them to move on. The Canada Goose poses the highest risk to aviation safety. On the Pickering Lands, a place of relative dormancy for 50 years and counting, the geese have become well-established and stay year-round. Tens of thousands of them feast on the Lands' crop residues each winter...
- **Jan. 18** – *The Guardian* reports that more than 90% of rainforest carbon offsets by the biggest provider of these offsets do not represent genuine carbon reductions. They are “phantom credits,” and could well worsen global heating. Example: airline companies are telling people they can fly without making the climate crisis worse if they buy offsets. This turns out to be untrue. The program the world's airlines are supposed to be adhering to as they aim for net zero, the Carbon Offsetting and Reduction Scheme for International Aviation (CORSIA), is once again shown to be largely greenwash.
- **Feb. 1** – France's Alstom SA, which bought Bombardier's rail division in 2021, is now pushing Ottawa to go full-on high-speed rail, like the French TGV (*Train à Grande Vitesse*), rather than settle for the in-between, high-frequency service planned for the Toronto-Ottawa-Quebec City corridor to reduce car traffic and carbon emissions. (One downside here is that a high-speed train would be even less likely to stop at Pickering...)
- **Feb. 27** – Despite a snowstorm, we and our supporters show up in force in Pickering's Council Chamber as a dozen delegates argue for or against the Nagy-Cook motion to rescind the October 10, 2017, resolution supporting a Pickering airport. (A potential Pickering airport became a sweetener, as part of a failed bid for the Amazon HQ2 contract.) An illuminating evening. On the one side, proponents concerned about climate change, food security, lack of an airport business case, and the terms of Pearson's Ground Lease, which prevents an airport here anyway. On the other side, opponents focussed on fear-mongering (must build now! investment will go elsewhere!), alternative jet fuels, an airport as part of an Advanced Enterprise Zone delivering tens or even hundreds of thousands of jobs and billions in revenue... Two different worlds. Time eventually runs out. The vote is postponed to March 8 – a public meeting but no more delegations allowed.

- **Feb. 28** – In the *Guardian*: A report published today – “Net zero aviation fuels: resource requirements and environmental impacts” – by the Royal Society (the UK’s national academy of sciences) affirms other researchers’ findings: there is no single, clear, sustainable alternative to kerosene-based jet fuel that could support the current level of flying. The scientists studied green hydrogen (made from water, but green only if renewable energy is used to produce it), biofuels (from energy crops, waste), ammonia, and synthetic fuels (e-fuels)), in all cases finding that production volume and its sustainability pose massive challenges.
- **Mar. 8** – Before tonight’s Council meeting on the airport motion, Mayor Ashe tweets: “I will not be supporting this motion.” In Chambers his words and actions make his bias clear. He cuts off comments after the first three of six councillors have confirmed their support for the motion, and he lets loose a jumble of concerns and innuendo. No surprise there. What is a surprise is Cllr Robinson’s motion to defer the vote, which Cllr Pickles, with some prompting, seconds. (Voting will now take place on April 24). Her position during last October’s election campaign had been anti-airport. The excuse for the deferral? They need more information... Ashe: “I think there’s far too many unanswered questions as regards to this.”
- From the *Globe and Mail*, on food security threats: “...one obvious truth: You have to eat. ... [F]ood is one of the few things humans absolutely require to live ... Required are sensible paths forward to increase domestic food production. While it may seem counterintuitive, some of that sensible path forward might lead toward smaller, more environmentally sustainable and more local food production.” Like North Pickering Farms!
- **Mar. 15** – Discount airline Flair has four of its Boeing 737s seized after regularly defaulting on millions of dollars in payments over the past five months. A good reminder that KPMG, in their 2016 Supply and Demand report to TC, stated (p. 66): “The new low-cost entrants are inherently risky and suffer high rates of business failure”; and in their 2018 Type and Role report stated (p. 7): “LCC and ULCC operators [low-cost carriers and ultra-low-cost carriers] in Canada have had a volatile past, with many new entrants beginning operations, experiencing rapid growth, and ultimately failing shortly after.” KPMG cautioned that anyone thinking that a Pickering airport could offer such services should take past history into account.
- We receive notice today that Land Over Landings has been selected to receive the City of Pickering’s Environment Award for 2022. Terrific! Also: irony is alive and well!
- **Mar. 18** – After being locked tight since March 2020, when the first Covid shutdown went into effect, Brougham Hall, our usual meeting place, has been found to have mould in the basement. The Hall will remain shut until remediation is carried out.
- **Mar. 20** – One of our monitors of online postings comes across this from pickeringairport.org, headed: “I wonder who benefits from North Pickering Farms?” (They think that NPF exists?!) This is one angry screed, first listing leaseholders on the Lands, then descending into distortion, insinuation, and accusation. Someone sounds very scared of our organization.
- **Mar. 21** – Steven Guilbeault, Minister of the Environment and Climate Change (ECC), announces the launch of a study “on the potential effects of development projects adjacent to the Park [RNUP].” The study’s objectives: “to understand the potential effects, including cumulative effects, of past, ongoing, and potential future development on the integrity of the Park and on the Park’s management objectives. This includes protecting biodiversity, natural resources, and natural processes;

ecological connectivity throughout the Park and with adjacent natural areas...” and more, including the Park’s farming community. Three months have been allocated to develop the study’s scope. Its trigger? The Ford Government’s decision to remove from the Greenbelt the Duffins Rouge Agricultural Preserve (farmland the Province expropriated in 1972 for a new, airport-adjacent City of Cedarwood) and then develop it all. The Preserve (DRAP) abuts RNUP, and the Province apparently promised, at some point, to give DRAP to the Park. This new study will have larger implications. What applies to DRAP can also apply to the Pickering Lands, where an adjacent airport would unquestionably be more damaging to the Park than would a residential development... The study will be carried out by ECC and the Impact Assessment Agency of Canada. So... things are getting interesting.

- **Mar. 23** – Toronto Pearson announces a “staggering” 180.8% increase in air passenger growth over 2021 levels, but still had 14 million fewer air passengers in 2022 than in 2019. The 180.8% increase is at least partly due to what has been labelled “revenge travel,” as passengers make up for the trips “lost” during the pandemic years. It’s also still thought, not least by Pearson’s CEO, that the business cohort, having seen the benefits of virtual meetings and the greatly reduced travel costs, will be slow to go back to old travel habits – if it ever does. Yet business travellers are the life-blood of the main airlines.
- **Mar. 26** – We issue a media release after the ECC Minister’s March 21 announcement. It’s title: “If you think housing adjacent to RNUP might be a problem, what about an airport?”
- **Mar. 27** – Transport Canada has posted a seriously garbled Call for Tenders on the canadabuy website. They seem to be commissioning yet another supply-and-demand report on the southern Ontario airports system while the ink is barely dry on the KPMG study, and they are doing this years before the data-refreshing cycle comes full circle. The Call for Tenders’ status bizarrely indicates “Cancelled.”
- **Mar. 28** – Pickering’s mayor posts an official statement on the City’s website applauding TC “for recognizing the critical need to undertake a comprehensive review and update of Southern Ontario and the GTA’s aviation capacity, as well as supply and demand forecasts.” He says that, six years on, none of KPMG’s suggestions re expansion of existing airports to meet 2036 demand has happened, and claims “one might argue that the 2036 date is no longer accurate, and that we may have already reached our aviation capacity limit, considering that Canada has been leading the G7 in population growth during this span.” This is breathtaking reasoning, considering airports’ (and aviation’s) struggles over the past three years: he has ignored the pandemic’s unprecedented (and continuing) impact on airports. He ignores how climate change will impose its own constraints on the sector (and probably everything else). He ends, predictably, by calling the Nagy-Cook motion “premature.” He seems to think that voting to stop spending taxpayers’ money on airport promotion will somehow affect the outcome of a new needs assessment study. He seems unaware of how airports plan for the future or how needs studies work.
- **Mar. 29** – The Call for Tenders vanishes from the canadabuy website. A Durhamregion.com reporter contacts TC for an explanation and is told: “The posting of the RFP was done prematurely. The department has not yet finalized its plans.”
- **Mar. 30** – The mayor’s post vanishes from the City of Pickering’s website.
- **Apr. 4** – Local news outlets report that the new needs study appears to have been shelved.

- **Apr. 9** – The Impact Assessment Agency advises that it will be “working with Indigenous groups and interested parties to develop the approach and scope for the [Impact on RNUP] Study throughout the spring of 2023” and advises that “interested people will have the opportunity to contribute to the development of the draft Terms of Reference ..., provide comments on the draft ..., and participate in other engagement activities.”
- **Apr. 18** – A Transport Canada news release announces the southern Ontario aviation needs study whose Call for Tenders had accidentally been posted on March 27 and then cancelled. The new Call seeks Aviation Professional Services, and states that the study’s requirements will be determined by the winning contractor and TC. The study itself will be undertaken by a different contractor, following another Request for Proposals. According to the release: “This analysis ... is a first step towards making a final decision to address future airport capacity constraints in the region, and on the future of the Pickering Lands. 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.” The Minister of Transport adds: “Today is the beginning of a process to analyze the future of the Southern Ontario airport system. This work will also bring us closer to making a final decision on the Pickering Lands.” Tender closing date: May 29, 2023.
- MP Jennifer O’Connell’s statement: “Study after study has demonstrated there isn’t a case for an airport in Pickering. I’m pleased for this study to determine aviation capacity in the GTA which will allow once and for all the release of these lands from a constant threat of an airport!”
- Land Over Landings’ statement, on Twitter: “For the first time ever, Transport Canada is suggesting 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 regard this as a critical first step towards the permanent protection of these precious farmlands, hopefully within the Rouge National Urban Park.”
- **Apr. 19** – Chris Alexander, our former MP and advocate for preserving the Lands, retweets part of our statement and writes to us: “Congrats on all your recent achievements! Things seem to be moving in the right directions.”
- We release our latest research paper to refute a surge of disinformation. “Southern Ontario’s Main Airports Are at Capacity: Fact or Fiction?” confirms that the area’s airports are *not* dealing with capacity issues, and that they *did*, in the past few years, undertake expansions despite others’ claims to the contrary.
- **Apr. 24** – The Regional Chair and Pickering’s mayor applaud the new needs study in a joint statement: “The potential for an airport is a rare opportunity to build a strong economic future for the region. If the analysis identifies the need for an airport in Pickering, it will attract investment in aviation and aerospace; provide a hub for international businesses; strengthen Canada’s advanced manufacturing and aviation sectors; and create thousands of jobs, close to home in Durham. We do not have to choose between an airport and a booming agricultural sector. Food production is one of Durham’s largest economic drivers. This site can help showcase vertical and innovative agriculture production; demonstrate existing partnerships that enhance farming practices; and show how research and innovation are finding new ways to help ensure food security.” They haven’t been listening. They don’t see the contradictions in what they’re claiming. And they are apparently willing to destroy Rouge National Urban Park into the bargain.

- A long Council meeting focusses chiefly on the twice-deferred motion on the City's airport stance. Nine delegates support rescinding Council's 2017 decision to name Pickering a willing airport host. One delegate speaks against. In the end, **votes in support are 6-1**, the mayor being the hold-out. (He limits his support to backing advocacy for high-frequency rail with a station in Pickering.) So. An important victory, but the evening was peppered with false claims and misrepresentations by the other side, and not least by the mayor and a senior staff member, which will have to be challenged.
- **Apr. 28** – Letters and e-mails start flooding in to City Hall, congratulating Council on its wise vote but also castigating the mayor for his misleading comments on the quality of the soil on the Pickering Lands, his doubts about whether Class 1 soil even exists (he kept calling it Class A), and his slurs directed at tenants and agricultural leaseholders on the Lands.
- Go Transit now offers hourly 24/7 bus service between Pickering GO and Terminal One at Pearson. The ride takes roughly an hour to an hour and a half, depending on traffic. Fare is (at PRESTO rates) \$10 each way for adults. Cheaper than taking the GO bus to Union and from there the UP Express to Pearson. Less stressful than driving. Our local politicians (some, anyway) cling to the 1968 Pickering airport plan while everyone else moves on....
- **May 2** – The Mississaugas of Scugog Island First Nation supports Pickering's vote to rescind airport backing: "The region's natural and agricultural lands are disappearing at an alarming rate and MSIFN has grave concerns about constructing a major airport on prime farmland located next to the Rouge National Urban Park. The MSIFN has a deep historic and cultural connection to these lands and is a member of the First Nations Advisory Circle for the Park for this reason. This proposed airport would also destroy thousands of acres of Class 1 agricultural land – a precious resource that can never be replaced."
- **May 3** – Members of our research team, quoting primary sources, correct the misrepresentations made by Pickering's mayor and a senior staff member. David Crombie sends his congratulations to Pickering Council on returning to a no-airport policy. Over the following days, the National Farmers Union–Ontario writes to correct the record on agricultural soils. There is plenty of media coverage of the historic vote result and the false claims.
- LOL representatives attend an information session on the upcoming federal study of potential impacts of existing and potential urban development adjacent to RNUP. The session is conducted by the Impact Assessment Agency of Canada. Our reps drive home the fact that the impact of any residential development on the Duffins Rouge Agricultural Preserve would pale in comparison to the kind of damage an adjacent airport would cause.
- Envision Durham releases its recommended Regional Official Plan along with a staff report. The Plan still contains myriad references to a future Pickering airport. The staff report responds to only one of the five concerns we'd raised in our submission: they chose not to use TC's official designation (Pickering Lands) but instead settled on "federal lands in Pickering" (well, it's better than "Pickering Airport Lands"). Not noted at all are the strongest arguments against an airport: (1) Transport Canada is legally constrained from building a new airport in Pickering; (2, 3) an airport's Wildlife Hazard and Airport Noise zones would complicate the development of northeast Pickering, and would directly conflict with the Park's official mandate; and (4) adding an airport would sabotage the Region's GHG emissions reduction goals. Perhaps regional officials don't want such concerns to appear in a public document.

- **May 14** – Despite the detailed information and the messages of concern sent to the mayor in the past two weeks, he has not contacted LOL, has not explained or apologized, has not corrected the public record. It would be awkward and ethically compromising to accept an award from the hand of this mayor in the current circumstances so, while we deserve the environmental award, we decide to boycott the event as a matter of conscience.
- **May 15** – The awards presentation, live-streamed, is an evening-long affair and our turn is close to the end. We merited the award, the mayor explains, for our primary focus over 50 years: the preservation of the federal lands in north Pickering; we facilitated community engagement and workshops showing the importance of protecting and preserving the ecosystems on the Lands. The incongruity of this none-too-accurate statement in the context of his all-out support for a plan that would pave over most of the Lands, harm local farming, and undermine the integrity of a national park is stark.
- **May 16** – Mayor Ashe puts out a media statement: “While the issue of the airport has been a very polarizing one, everyone can agree that Land Over Landings is a very deserving recipient of the 2022 Civic Award for the Environment. Last night was a wonderful evening where we recognized and feted our community’s finest leaders, volunteers, and businesses. As such, I am disappointed that Land Over Landings chose not to attend and accept its award. That said, I hope we can collectively move forward and have positive discussions on the economic and cultural revitalization of the federal lands in north Pickering.” While he is papering over his misdeeds, we are receiving from supporters many comments such as this one: “An excellent stand of principle by the organization.”
- The mayor tweets a subtly barbed message to Land Over Landings, under the heading of our media release (“Land Over Landings declines to receive award from Pickering mayor”): “You missed a fantastic event. Lots of worthy recipients. Regards, Kevin Ashe.” Makes you wonder if he even read the actual release, where we explained our absence: “We assumed that an enlightened mayor would apologize, withdraw his aspersions, and retract his false and misleading statements for the public record. He did not. He even failed to reply to letters.”
- **May 17** – Durham Regional Council votes 20-6 to approve the revised Official Plan. It has the assumption of a future Pickering airport woven tightly into it, and Council requests from the federal government not a yes-or-no decision but “a firm commitment to the construction of an airport on the federal lands in Pickering.” Pickering’s two regional councillors, Brenner and Cook, had voted against.
- **May 18** – In a joint statement, Ontario’s farm leaders ask the Ontario government to pause its proposed Provincial Planning Statement and newly proposed Bill 97. “We stand in strong opposition to the 3 lot severances per farm parcel proposed in prime agricultural areas as well as other measures that weaken local farmland protection. [...] The proposed changes will exacerbate conflict between farming and non-farming neighbours for all aspects of farming including application of crop nutrition and crop protection products, wildlife control and more. [...] Ontario’s agri-food sector is an economic powerhouse, fuelling rural communities, generating nearly 750,000 jobs and contributing more than \$47 billion to Ontario’s annual GDP. [...] The province’s agri-food strategy, Grow Ontario, aims to ... ensure an efficient, reliable and responsible food supply. [...] To farm, we need farmland.”
- **May 19** – Cllr Brenner gives notice of a motion he will be bringing forward regarding the creation of a centre of excellence for the agricultural sector in Pickering. (It is later postponed.)

- **May 29** – The federal government’s Tender Notice expires for Aviation Professional Services to “Develop a Roadmap/Project Plan and the framing and scoping for the various studies; Assist Transport Canada in reviewing and assessing the studies; and, Assist in developing options and recommendations.”
- There has been no action on our request that letters to Pickering Council refuting the mayor’s inaccurate claims at previous council meetings be read into the public record.
- **May 30** – The Ford government backs down on its farmland-lot-severance proposal (part of Bill 97) in the face of the farm leaders’ combined opposition.
- The Impact Assessment Agency of Canada invites the public and Indigenous groups to comment on the draft Terms of Reference for the Rouge National Urban Park Study. We see that the federal lands have been added to the area to be studied!
- **Jun. 1** – CityNews reports that Buttonville Airport will be closing on November 30, when the lease with Cadillac Fairview expires.
- **Jun. 19** – We submit our response to the IAAC on its draft Terms of Reference for the RNUP Study. We approve the direction but take the opportunity to point out that the dangers to the Park from an airport on the Federal Lands are far greater than issues that would be caused by housing on the Ag. Preserve.
- **Jun. 21** – Some 70 individuals, organizations, and local government offices respond to the IAAC by the cut-off date. Most responses concentrate on protecting the Ag. Preserve or on the importance of the Park or both. A few raise the issue of a future airport on the federal lands. Pickering and Durham Region are largely noncommittal. There are no pro-development comments. Responses show deep concern for the Park’s future. Some include detailed suggestions on a wide range of environmental issues. We now await the final Terms of Reference and the due date for submissions.
- **Jun. 23** – From CBC News (online): “What’s happening to Canada’s farmland?” The article reports that total arable land in Canada dropped 8% in the last two decades, a trend found right across the country. And while urban development eats up farmland, farmland eats up wetlands and woodlands. Small farms are disappearing as larger farms swallow them up. This, plus the continuation of intensive-farming practices, will ultimately degrade the soil until it stops being productive. The article underscores our argument that Ottawa must expand Rouge National Urban Park to protect the rest of the rare (and growing rarer) Class 1 soil on the remaining Federal Lands.
- NASA ends its X-57 project, an experimental electric aircraft, owing to “insurmountable safety concerns.” Apparently, problems with the propulsion system posed unacceptable risks to the pilot and ground personnel during ground tests, so that was that.
- **Jun. 28** – We hold our first in-person AGM since June 2019. A good turn-out, and an inspiring presentation on the success of the Common Ground Garden on the Lands, a project sparked by an idea of former LOL exec. member Joanne Brown and brought to life by current exec. member Stephen Marshall, his wife Judy Mann, and an ever-growing number of enthusiastic volunteer gardeners from across Pickering and beyond. On half an acre of land they are showing what the thousands of acres of Federal Lands could become. Mary delivers a passionate and emotional last speech as LOL’s chair. She is given a long and well-deserved standing ovation, and we vote in a new executive, with Alexis (Lexi) Whalen as chair and Stephen Marshall as vice-chair.

- **Jun. 30** – Transport Minister Omar Alghabra announces that the federal government will contribute up to \$30 million towards a new pre-clearance facility at Billy Bishop Toronto City Airport, so as to smooth the way for travellers to the U.S.
- **Jul. 4** – Common Ground Garden is featured in an excellent article in the *National Observer*.
- **Jul. 17** – The federal government awards Toronto Pearson more than \$94 million (through the National Trade Corridors Fund) to develop two new facilities to increase the airport’s cargo capacity. Clearly, the feds care about the viability of *existing* airports and aren’t focussed on new ones.
- **Jul. 18** – On a 151-acre site at the southeast corner of Hwy 7 and Whites Road (just south of the Lands), FGF Brands plan to build three manufacturing plants and a distribution centre. FGF had acquired George Weston Bakeries’ fresh and frozen bakery division in October 2021. This will be its new home and today is ground-breaking day. With Kubota’s tractor plant down the road, the addition of a vast bakery seems to be turning Pickering’s Innovation Corridor into something more akin to an agri-innovation corridor. Our suggestion long ago!
- **Jul. 26** – There’s a major Cabinet shuffle in Ottawa: longtime supporters of LOL, Mark Holland and Gary Anandasangaree become, respectively, ministers of Health and of Crown—Indigenous Relations. Lawrence MacAulay, also a supporter of these Lands, returns to Agriculture and Agri-Food Canada. Pablo Rodriguez takes over at Transport Canada. Three strong supporters and a fourth minister who might turn out to be one...
- **Aug. 1** – Stay Grounded releases “Carbon Offsets,” a devastating factsheet exposing aviation greenwashing.
- **Aug. 15** – The Impact Assessment Agency posts the final Terms of Reference for the Rouge National Urban Park Study. They have made their references to the federal lands clearer and have boosted references to Indigenous participation, ensuring the vitality of the farming community, and identifying exterior effects on the Park and Park visitors. A Committee is to be struck within 3 months; the study is to take 18 months.
- **Aug. 22** – Toronto Pearson has, to date, seen 7 million more travellers this year than in 2022, but the numbers are still well below pre-pandemic levels.
- **Aug. 25** – With Buttonville airport set to close in November, Oshawa airport steps in to fill the gap, breaking ground today for a hangar expansion that will double the airport’s floor space. Not happy about this are the mayor and many local residents, who foresee a future of even more disruptive noise, largely caused by expanded flight training.
- **Sept. 1** – Reuters reports: Over airlines’ protests, the Dutch government announces that Amsterdam’s Schiphol airport will move ahead with capping the number of flights in and out of the airport, starting next year. The intent is to reduce noise pollution and GHG emissions. The aviation sector is fighting the decision, perhaps seeing the move as a harbinger of things to come as governments start taking climate change seriously.
- **Sept. 17** – Common Ground Garden hosts its fourth Harvest Gathering to celebrate the garden’s amazing success. The event is well attended and three Pickering Councillors (Linda Cook, Shaheen Butt, and Maurice Brenner) join the crowd. The fundraising goal isn’t just met but surpassed.
- **Sept. 20** – The Ford government backs down yet again – and this time it’s major news: Ford reverses his decision of last November to carve out segments of the Greenbelt for development, in

what he'd claimed was an action necessary to meet housing targets. Opposition to his decision has been widespread, fierce, and unflagging, and the decision has been investigated by the Auditor General and the Integrity Commissioner, resulting in damning reports. Soon, the evidence will be turned over to the RCMP. [A criminal investigation is announced by the RCMP on Oct. 10.]

- **Sept. 22** – We congratulate MP O’Connell on her appointment as Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Public Safety, Democratic Institutions, and Intergovernmental Affairs.
- **Sept. 26** – Minister Guilbeault announces the suspension of the RNUP study in response to the Ford government’s reversal of its destructive Greenbelt plans. “The Government of Canada is expecting more details regarding the reinstatement of all protections of former Greenbelt lands by the Government of Ontario and next steps in the process.”
- We send letters of congratulations to new ministers Gary Anandasangaree (Crown—Indigenous Relations), Mark Holland (Health), Laurence MacAulay (Agriculture and Agri-Food), and Pablo Rodriguez (Transport). The latter we invite to visit the Lands and/or meet with us.
- From Fortune.com: German airline Lufthansa says it’s among the biggest buyers of sustainable aviation fuel (SAF), but Lufthansa would consume half of Germany’s electricity if it were to fully switch to green fuels as things stand today. Says the Airlines’ chief, Carsten Spohr: “If the Lufthansa Group were to use all the SAF currently available, it would only be able to fly for just under two weeks.”
- **Oct. 11** – Members of our board participate in a meeting of the Pickering Community Tourism Plan Steering Committee – and find that, unlike Uxbridge, for example, which is into its third refresh of its tourism plan, Pickering has no tourism strategy in place at all. Nor has north Pickering featured in any significant way in discussions prior to our participation. We set about filling the glaring gaps.
- **Oct. 12** – We meet remotely with two new Transport Canada staffers (Daniel Kucirek, Regional Advisor, and Julie Harb, Senior Policy Advisor). They had requested the meeting after receipt of our letter of congrats to the Minister. We chiefly brief them on the situation (of which they knew very little), and they undertake to obtain answers to our questions regarding the current aviation study and what the new Minister knows about the situation and the airport/park incompatibility issue.
- **Oct. 13** – Transport Minister Rodriguez launches a new Request for Proposals for the High Frequency Rail project. A private sector consortium will operate the new services, alongside the current services of VIA Rail. The timeframe of this phase: 9 months for the consortia to develop proposals, then 3 months for evaluation. Chosen supplier to be announced in late fall of 2024.
- **Oct. 23** – We forward for the Pickering Tourism Plan a long and impressive list of north Pickering’s tourism assets, from trails to events to artists’ studios and much more.
- **Oct. 24** – Our political team meets virtually with MP O’Connell for a mutual briefing.
- **Oct. 25** – Minister Guilbeault announces a new Landscape Resiliency Program. Funded by Parks Canada and the Environmental Conservancy of Canada, the program is intended to help the purchase of, or procure the donation of, private land near or adjacent to 10 of our national parks, in order to enhance and protect ecological connectivity.
- **Nov. 4** – We point out to the Mapping Unit of the Ministry of Natural Resources and Forestry that their map covering RNUP and the Pickering Lands still shows the border between the two entities as it was after the 2015 land transfer even though, we are told, that the mapping is updated annually.

- **Nov. 26** – In our 76th UPDATE newsletter, we hail the Ford government’s reversal of its egregious plan to remove protections from, and put housing on, parts of the Greenbelt. The Duffins Rouge Agricultural Preserve just south of the Pickering Lands has, thanks to province-wide protests against this plan, been saved from destruction, and RNUP has been spared the consequences of adjacent urban development south of Hwy 407. But the Pickering Lands continue to pose an existential threat to the Park. We also look at the matter of the continued closure of the Brougham Hall, and the conflicting responses from Transport Canada and the City of Pickering as to the reason. The City’s responses are particularly confusing and suspect.
- From the *Guardian*: “The aviation industry now believes SAFs are the single biggest tool for bringing net carbon emissions down to zero – in its roadmap to 2050 that still allows for substantial growth in flying. ... There remains a huge supply issue ... and proposed waste-based fuels cannot be scaled up sustainably. ... The aviation industry argues it is a unique case – while cars, homes and power stations can decarbonise, the options for long-haul commercial planes, at least for the foreseeable next few decades, are either jet fuel or stay on the ground. ... Tim Clark, the president of Emirates, has been ... questioning whether there would ever be sufficient feedstocks such as waste cooking oil to convert into SAF. Beyond that, he argues, investing in alternative “drop-in fuels” – ie those that can power existing jet engines – risks losing focus from creating a new generation of more efficient planes, or possible future technologies.”
- **Nov. 30** – Buttonville Municipal Airport finally closes. Some nostalgia is expressed but the long-threatened hue and cry and calls for a Pickering replacement do not materialize. Flight schools, private jet owners, and other users have all dispersed with little fuss to new homes at existing area airports.
- **Dec. 20** – We meet with MP O’Connell at her constituency office to brief her and be briefed on current matters. She backs plans for a new, focussed campaign by LOL at the federal level.
- **Dec. 26** – From the *Guardian*: Ryanair CEO labels sustainable aviation fuels (SAF) a con: “They’re a wheeze. Unless governments get in behind the production and sourcing of sustainable aviation fuels – and they’re only going to come from, ultimately, the oil majors, the only ones who are going to make them – I don’t see where we will get the supply in the volumes we need. ... There isn’t enough cooking oil in the world to power more than one day’s aviation.”

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