



MEDIA RELEASE

OTTAWA CONFIRMS: NO AIRPORT IN NORTH PICKERING!

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On Monday, January 27, 2025, the Minister of Transport, the Hon. Anita Anand, announced the end of the 53-year threat of a future airport on the Pickering Lands. We were told that the “vast majority” of these “high conservation value lands” will be transferred to Parks Canada, and a formal consultation process, involving local stakeholders, will soon be launched “to determine the best future uses of the lands.” We are awaiting clarification of this aspect from the federal government.

In the meantime, we celebrate the fact that the airport-driven cloud of uncertainty that haunted the Lands for decades has been lifted at last.

We are deeply grateful to our MP, Jennifer O’Connell, and to the Minister of Crown-Indigenous Relations and Northern Affairs, the Hon. Gary Anandasangaree, for their tireless efforts to get us to this day. Our sincere thanks go, as well, to countless others who participated, in big and small ways, in the long struggle to protect this precious land.

Today is *the first day of a positive future for the Pickering Federal Lands!*

As it happens, *A Future for the Lands* was the title of the agricultural economics study we commissioned almost a decade ago. The study showed that **a focus on diversified agriculture on the Lands, and the consequent growth of agri-tourism, eco-tourism, and trail-tourism could soon deliver more than 2,100 new jobs and nearly \$240 million in overall economic activity annually.** Such a master plan would bring multiple additional benefits – for the Lands and for the wider community. By safeguarding a critical, irreplaceable natural asset, the plan could provide new farmers – essential to our future – with desperately needed opportunities to launch their careers, and would revive the economy of nearby hamlets, reversing the financial drain of decades.

The announcement is highly significant in other ways. The deep wound inflicted on the area by the 1972 expropriation has never healed. Its consequences, traumatic and far-reaching, have never been forgotten or forgiven. The scars are still visible. But the January 27th announcement ushers in a new tomorrow. From the ashes of all that has been lost, we look forward to seeing a new vision emerge for these Lands, one that is grounded in wider access to nature, in the growing and raising of more food on this prime farmland, and in the permanent protection of its air, water, and Class 1 soil.

Quotable Quotes

“This cause has never been exclusively about cancelling an airport. It’s been about securing the potential for smaller, diversified farms in proximity to market opportunities, and amplifying the region’s historic and current agricultural excellence. We’ve never stopped working towards a pathway to prosperity for the next generation of farmers on the Pickering Lands. That work is a giant step closer to reality today.”

~ Alexis Whalen, Chair

“Now the full agricultural and tourism potential of these lands can begin to be realised.”

~ Stephen Marshall, Vice Chair

“Finally, this precious pearl of farmland will be saved for future generations to explore and enjoy. Such wonderful news to start the new year! An outcome that would never have happened without the dedication and commitment of so many people.”

~ Gord McGregor, original land owner and Honorary Chair

“I’ve always said we stand on the shoulders of giants, and in their shadow as well. People or Planes made this possible with their inspired activism in the Seventies. We continued with our ‘ag-vocacy’ in the 21st century. Now it’s up to the next generations to see it through!”

~ Mary Delaney, Past Chair

Quick Facts

- [Maps of Pickering Lands](#), 1972 and present day.
- On March 2, 1972, Prime Minister Pierre Elliott Trudeau’s minister of transport announced the expropriation of 18,600 acres of prime farmland, northeast of Toronto, for a new international airport. The airport wasn’t built but the government kept the land.
- On July 11, 2013, Prime Minister Stephen Harper’s finance minister announced that an airport would be built after all. It wasn’t, but the government kept the land
- In 2015 and 2018, more than half of the Federal Lands were transferred to Parks Canada to form Rouge National Urban Park, where agriculture has been made a feature.
- Local opposition to an airport never waned over the five decades that followed the 1972 announcement. It was first led by People or Planes (POP), whose ingenious and relentless efforts helped stop airport construction in 1975. Then came Voters Organized to Cancel the Airport Lands (V.O.C.A.L.), when the federal government attempted to revive the airport plan in the 1990s. For the past 20 years, the torchbearers have been Land Over Landings (LOL), who fought evictions and demolitions and worked tirelessly to persuade the federal government to save this Class 1 farmland.
- The creation of Rouge National Urban Park in 2015 laid the groundwork, intentionally or not, for this announcement, because an international airport and a national park have irreconcilable mandates. They would be incompatible neighbours: the airport’s mandate to protect human safety would simply override the park’s mandate to protect wildlife and the environment.

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