

# Community airs desires for airport lands in Pickering

## Idea for land trust put forth by several organizations

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PICKERING -- Residents and organizations are biding their time discussing wish lists for the Pickering federal lands as they await the results of a new land-use study.

Residents crowded into the Claremont Community Centre for a session on Nov. 20 titled 'Forty Years Later: How Should the Pickering Lands be Used?' Representatives from Land Over Landings, Green Durham Association, Claremont District Residents Association and the Rouge Park Alliance were invited to share their views on the federal lands with Ajax-Pickering MP Chris Alexander.

Brian Buckles, vice-president of Green Durham, suggested that a compromise may be in order.

"I'd love to see government commit now to a land use that protects all these lands in perpetuity from an airport or urban sprawl, however that's not going to happen so I'd like to focus on land-use possibilities that fulfill as much of that dream as possible," he explained.

Mr. Buckles noted that even if the possibility of an airport is kept alive, the government would not need the entire 18,600 acres that constitute the federal lands, which leaves the possibility of protecting a good portion of the lands.

"The airport, if it happens, is a long way off and they shouldn't be doing anything in the planning now that assumes there's going to be an airport," Mr. Buckles said, citing the results of a needs assessment study released in July that had airport contingencies scheduled as late as 2037.

"In the meantime they should focus on environmental, agricultural and community objectives. I think that makes sense even if you are an airport proponent, since they wouldn't want development on these lands either. We are very much committed to preserving and enhancing these lands and I think the community is very much in favour of that."

Mr. Buckles and other proponents of protecting the federal lands referred to a

mention of community consultation in the July report as their next focus. Residents are hopeful that consultations will allow them the opportunity to have their voices heard.

Mary Delaney, a Brougham resident and founding member of Land Over Landings, echoed the wish for the lands to be protected in perpetuity through the creation of a land trust.

"I think we have the opportunity to lead the world here or be the laughingstock of the world," she said of the lands.

"We owe it to the future, to our children and grandchildren, to save what remains of this land. We can not waste it."

Ms. Delaney said she felt the meeting was very positive in that it demonstrated there is a united front regarding the lands.

"There was certainly a sense of singing to the choir but it's good to know that it's a big choir," she said.

"I think there was a unified vision and belief and a sense that we need to be prepared to continue this fight. And that doesn't just include meetings but be prepared to give whatever we can in terms of knowledge, time and energies." Although the meeting left her optimistic that community input will indeed be heeded, Ms. Delaney called the ongoing demolitions of homes located on the federal lands in Brougham a haunting backdrop.

"All this is couched by the extreme depression and sadness of the fall of Brougham, which is sort of echoing in the background," she explained.

"I feel cautiously optimistic, then I drive by and all you see is desolation. Brougham should never have been expropriated, it should be a thriving community. But it has to remind us that the land is still here and there may be an opportunity to rebuild within the community."

MP Chris Alexander could not be reached for comment.