

## Council debates Pickering airport question



February 25, 2010

By **Kristen Calis**

PICKERING -- Pickering voters will be taking part in a referendum this October, granted no one appeals council's decision.

In the early 1970s the federal government expropriated north Pickering land for an airport, but to this day, a final decision hasn't been made. Pickering council has stood opposed to the possibility over the years.

In October council voted that the City take the proper steps to put on the municipal election ballot the question, "Do you support the City of Pickering's position to oppose construction and operation of an airport in the City of Pickering? Yes or No?"

A public meeting took place Feb. 19 and no one from the public spoke against it, although a notice of the meeting was made public, said City clerk Debbie Shields.

Ward 2 City Councillor Doug Dickerson said the question is ambiguous and unclear and should be changed.

"The majority that I've asked, it's not clear to them," he said. "It's a double-negative in there. I don't believe it's clear and concise."

Ms. Shields explained the wording is necessary since the matter is not a municipal one, but a federal one. The question cannot ask if residents are for or against an airport, but it can ask if they support council's opposition.

"It has to be worded that way in order to keep it within our jurisdiction," she said.

Peter Rodrigues, resident and member of Land Over Landings, a group opposed to the airport and in support of farming the land instead, feels the question is unnecessary.

"It's a good question if you ask me," he said. "I can see some merits for it but by and large I think it's a waste of time

because it's kind of obvious when you talk to people that most people don't want an airport."

Also, he feels while many oppose the airport, some, and especially new residents, are not aware of all of the factors and the history, and may not be informed enough to give a proper opinion.

Ward 3 City Councillor David Pickles and Ward 3 Regional Councillor Rick Johnson, who represent the area on which the airport would go if it were ever approved, didn't support the referendum question.

"I do not want to clutter up the ballot with questions that are not debatable at all-candidates' meetings," Coun. Johnson said.

Ward 2 Regional Councillor Bill McLean said the question on the ballot is simply to support council's longtime opposition to the airport. Plus, it should have more clout with upper levels of government, he said, showing "this is the will of the people."

Council passed the bylaw to put the question on the ballot as is, and the public appeal period will go until March 23.

"Once that passes if there is no appeal, it will go on the ballot," Ms. Shields said.