

Critics fear Conservatives will give Pickering airport wings

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Fears over federal plans for the Pickering airport are flying high again.

Local politicians and opponents to 39-year-old plans to put an international airport on a land accumulated in 1972 accuse the Conservative government of sitting on plans to make it a reality once the election is over.

Among other things, these fears are being fuelled by an April 11 email from a construction data company informing its clients of \$2-billion project to build an airport with three large runways that would serve 10 million passengers a year.

Besides that, the government is sitting on a needs assessment study and the number of homes on the 18,600 acres straddling Pickering, Markham and Uxbridge to be demolished has increased dramatically, critics say.

“My concern is there might be legitimacy to it for a couple of reasons. One, they have been hiding this needs assessment, refusing to release it,” Mark Holland, who is running for re-election for the Liberals in Ajax-Pickering, told the *Toronto Star* Tuesday.

And then there's a comment from Chris Alexander, a high profile Conservative candidate, who told *CPAC* in an interview that "if we get a stronger government I think you will see a government that will take action on this issue."

Alexander, the former ambassador to Afghanistan, could not be reached for comment.

All of this has stirred the emotion of groups who have long opposed prime farmland being paved over for an airport they say the GTA does not need.

"At each all-candidates meeting he (Alexander) has said firmly that he's personally opposed to an airport but as we all know individual MPs don't necessarily carry any weight," said Mary Delaney, a spokeswoman for Land Over Landings, who was just 17 when the so-called Pickering airport came onto the scene.

Paul Calandra, a Conservative MP seeking re-election in Oak Ridges-Markham, recently told an all-candidates meeting that he would like to see a small airport while the Conservative's Bev Oda, seeking re-election in Durham, has refused to denounce the federal airport plan, Delaney said.

"Again, door left wide open," she said.

Neither Calandra nor Oda were available for an interview.

But the thing that "terrified" opponents the most was an email from Reed Construction Data laying out the Pickering airport

project details for its construction company clients around the world and informing them that “design, tender and construction will be set when funds are in place. Further update early winter 2011.”

An unnamed Pickering contractor passed it along to a People or Planes member who gave it to Land Over Landings.

“If they (the Conservatives) get their majority that’s our fear that this airport will finally, after all these many decades, go in,” Delaney said.

As of March 2012, the Pickering Airport issue will be 40-years-old.

A few years ago, opponents of the Pickering airport proposal changed their tact from just being opposed to an airport to now calling for the land, much of its farm, to be protected.

“That’s really the issue going into the future is the land itself. It is the most valuable commodity there is right up there with water,” Delaney said.