

# New airport won't happen: Markham councillor

By L.H. Tiffany Hsieh

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While some expressed enthusiasm this week about the prospect of a large airport on Markham's eastern border, others expressed skepticism an airport will ever be built in Pickering, despite what a federal government department recommends.

Derek Sifton, for one, wants to transfer Buttonville airport to Pickering.

The president of Toronto Airways Ltd., which owns and operates Buttonville airport, said he welcomed the "good news" that a study released by Transport Canada Monday identified the contentious Pickering Lands as "a prime location" in the Golden Horseshoe for a new airport as early as 2027.

"Definitely," Mr. Sifton said. "But we need it as soon as we close this airport."

The Buttonville site is currently undergoing redevelopment plans to be turned into a high-density, mixed-use urban subdivision, including office space, condos, hotels, retail shops and restaurants.

The airport could close anytime in the next three to 10 years, Mr. Sifton said, adding more likely in three to five years.

He said there is an average of 170,000 aircraft movements at Buttonville every year and that Pickering would be an "easy transfer" for the outgoing airport.

He said what they are proposing is consistent with why the Government of Canada bought the Pickering lands 40 years ago.

"Our proposal is not the 747 of the world — it's a smaller scenario," Mr. Sifton said. "But I'd like to put on a magic carpet and transfer it over... use it as an embryo for development in the next 10 to 15 years, when the demand is determined for a bigger commercial airport."

Mr. Sifton said he sees it as a "classic" public-private partnership that will fill the need of an aviation facility in the northeast quadrant of the region.

"The most logical step (for us) is Pickering," he said. "It's just on the other side of Markham and it's an ideal opportunity for us to get on site now."

While some area residents continue to oppose a proposed Pickering airport over issues such as potential decrease in property value, loss of farmland and negative impact on the environment, Jason Clement of Markham said an airport doesn't bother him.

Mr. Clement has lived in Cornell for six years and works there as a real estate agent.

He said while it's considered a minus to live near an international airport with added noise, hotels and traffic, "I don't think it's going to impact us too much. I don't mind it", he said.

But one of Mr. Clement's clients did.

Last month, a buyer was ready to put down an offer on a \$800,000 house on the northern edge of the airport site in nearby Claremont, Mr. Clement said.

"Then we looked at the map and it was 150 yards from the airport lands. He backed out," Mr. Clement said.

Deputy Mayor Jack Heath lives in nearby Cornell and used to be the local councillor there.

He is standing by his belief a Pickering airport will not happen.

"I'll not be a councillor when Pickering opens, let alone when Buttonville moves," Mr. Heath said. People think an airport the size of Pearson "can descend from the sky in a year or two — it's so, so long in the future".

Mr. Heath said the federal government's release this week is a way to try and ensure it maintains control over lands it expropriated in 1972.

"There has been pressure (on them) to allocate the lands," Mr. Heath said, adding Markham wants its portion of the airport lands designated for park purposes.

"This is their way of saying, 'We want to hang on to it'," he said.

Asked if a Pickering airport would be a contradiction to the proposed Rouge National Park in close proximity, "Hypothetically, I believe there will be a park in the east end of Markham and there won't be a conflict with an airport", Mr. Heath said, "because there won't be an airport."