

No help from Ottawa to preserve Pickering heritage

Government sends City a list of 60 more homes to demolish on federal lands

May 01, 2011 - 04:30 AM

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PICKERING -- Pat Horne has been fighting an airport proposal for the past 40 years and continues to speak out.

An original member of People Or Planes, she's still a member of the newer version of the anti-airport group, Land Over Landings. The Claremont resident has seen the government demolish homes in the formerly vibrant community of Brougham since the land was expropriated by the federal government for an airport in 1972. Landowners Transport Canada recently announced the next 60 homes to be demolished, but no decision has been made on whether an airport will go ahead.

"Every house that goes, it kind of breaks your heart," Ms. Horne said.

The latest list was sent to the City of Pickering as part of correspondence from Transport Minister Chuck Strahl. The City had asked the government for financial aid to save seven locally significant homes that were slated to be destroyed in the previous round of 40 demolitions revealed last summer.

The City has convinced the government to hold off on demolishing the seven homes until deciding what to do with them, but Transport Canada recently gave word it will not pay the costs to save them. Mr. Strahl said local costs such as conservation, planning, liability and cost are municipal responsibilities.

"Transport Canada cannot replace local responsibility in this regard," he said in a letter to Mayor Dave Ryan.

The government is willing to lease those properties to the City, he said, but all liabilities would be transferred to Pickering. Transport Canada would contribute an amount equal to the cost of demolition to help the City relocate the homes, but he said the City would have to pay all other costs.

"It would fall totally to the City to do all this work," said Pickering planning and development director Neil Carroll. "There would be major financial implications if the City were to decide to take action. It's concerning certainly."

Transport Canada communications adviser Pamela Mintern explained in an e-mail the government "is demolishing vacant, dilapidated structures because they pose a health and safety risk to the public."

Occupied homes are not on the list, she said.

Safety issues include structural integrity problems, the presence of substances such as asbestos, lead and mould, she said.

"The structures pose serious security concerns, as they often attract trespassers, vandals and arsonists," she said.

But Ward 3 City Councillor Dave Pickles says the cause of the deterioration is the lack of care by the federal government.

"I think it's the federal government that's allowed properties to get into this state and should have taken care of them," he said.

Ms. Horne has similar thoughts.

"I know that some of the houses are so deteriorated it's probably safer for them to come down, but it's a shame they were allowed to deteriorate in the first place," she said.

Ms. Mintern said if the City foregoes the option to lease, Transport Canada will consider leasing the properties on commercial terms.

"If arrangements are not possible, Transport Canada will act in the interest of public safety and proceed with demolition of the structures, as appropriate," she said.

The City is currently discussing what to do with the seven homes and will also see if the next 60 contain structures of heritage value.