

Pickering politicians work to save heritage homes on airport land

Transport Canada targets 42 buildings for demolition due to 'safety risk'

Jan 04, 2011 - 04:30 AM

KRISTEN CALIS

PICKERING -- As demolitions continue on the federal lands, a couple of Pickering councillors and a local MP are determined to keep heritage homes alive.

In December, Ajax-Pickering MP Mark Holland, Ward 3 City Councillor David Pickles and Ward 3 Regional Councillor Peter Rodrigues assessed the homes facing demolition on federal land in Pickering, that the City of Pickering believes are of heritage value.

"We're going to try to make the case that these are of architectural significance," said Coun. Pickles in an interview.

Landlord Transport Canada is currently demolishing vacant structures on the federal lands, as it intends to remove 42 by the end of March. The federal government has been renting out houses and boarding up others on the land since it expropriated 18,500 acres in 1972 for a possible airport.

"This is the soul of our community if you will," Mr. Holland said of the heritage homes in an interview.

Transport Canada spokeswoman Paula Fairfax confirmed in an e-mail Transport Canada is currently working with the City regarding nine structures, which have been included in the Pickering Heritage Register.

"City staff and consultants are in the process of inspecting these structures in order to undertake a detailed assessment of the buildings and to salvage structural and decorative elements within them for potential display at the Pickering Museum (Village)," she said.

The properties Mr. Holland and the councillors visited included the Hoover-Watson house, a rare plank-on-plank construction, and one of six workers' cottages along Uxbridge-Pickering Townline Road.

"These are very rare examples of southern Ontario architecture that are in real peril of being demolished," Mr. Holland said.

They also stopped by the Bentley-Carruthers farmhouse since it's been

recently boarded up. This concerned some that the federal government was planning to destroy it, despite plans to consider other uses for the building. But Ms. Fairfax eased some of the concern.

"The Bentley-Carruthers house has been winterized and secured to protect against trespassing, vandalism, arson and other illegal activity," she said. "While it is unoccupied, it is not among the 42 structures slated for demolition."

The two councillors and Mr. Holland believe the demolitions are for one reason only.

"It's very much a depopulation of the area," Coun. Rodrigues said.

Ms. Fairfax said Transport Canada is demolishing "vacant, dilapidated structures because they pose a health and safety risk to the public."

She said problems range from structural integrity issues to the presence of asbestos, lead or mould. They pose "serious security concerns," she said, often attracting trespassers, vandals and arsonists.

"In fact, some of our tenants have requested that vacant structures next to their rented residences be taken down," she said. "Transport Canada is acting as a responsible landlord in addressing these security concerns."

But Coun. Pickles said it's Transport Canada's failure to maintain the structures in the first place that has deemed them unlivable.

"When you look at property to south and east, people invest in them, they don't have health issues," he said. "Some are maintained for decades, even hundreds of years."

[Add to your favorites](#) Recommend : 14