

Taking a stand on Pickering home

 [Print this Page](#)

December 07, 2009

By [Kristen Calis](#)

PICKERING -- A north Pickering home, rich with history on land designated for a possible airport, has been emptied and boarded up.

In 1972, 18,600 acres of Class A farmland was expropriated by the federal government with plans to build an international airport.

In 1975, when century-old homes were being demolished to pave way for the airport, Brenda Davies, Anne Howes and Frances Moore, from a group opposed to the airport, People or Planes, illegally occupied the mid-1800s era Bentley-Carruthers farmhouse. They stayed there without heat, hydro and water for two weeks to keep it from being bulldozed, and remained there until they learned the airport had been shelved. Many credit their actions as influencing the government's decision.

"The house is an icon because this is where the last stand was made. This is where the airport stopped," said Mary Delaney, of Land Over Landings, which replaced People or Planes.

Land Over Landings focuses on preserving the farmland for future generations.

Since expropriation, homes have been rented to tenants by the landlord, Transport Canada, which is also responsible for repairs. No final decision on the airport has been made.



Ryan Pfeiffer / Metroland

PICKERING -- Area residents, from left, Gerd Untermann, Mary Delaney and Gabrielle Untermann, members of Land Over Landings, stood outside a home on federal lands along Sideroad 32 December 1. The group hopes the government will maintain the house so it can be lived in. December 1, 2009.

Last week, the tenants of the historical home, which sits on Concession Road 8 and Sideline 32, moved out after receiving a notice from Transport Canada, and the house was boarded up.

David Zangari, 50, who rented the four-bedroom home for close to 30 years with his wife Michelle and their children, said they were shocked when the notice came about two months ago.

"It hurt a lot when they first called, but we also expected it, knowing this is the airport (land) and we've been here a long time, a lot longer than many people," Mr. Zangari said.

Locals hope the federal government will save the home.

"A house like this should be lived in," said Gerd Untermann, Land Over Landings member.

When homes are empty, they're often damaged by animals, water, vandals or fire. Five hundred homes, businesses and barns have been demolished, destroyed by fire or boarded up and vandalized since expropriation. Around 300 homes remain.

Ajax-Pickering MP Mark Holland is working to get the house saved.

"The fight to save Bentley-Carruthers house isn't over -- nor is protecting north Pickering lands from a government whose clear bias is to clear the community to build an airport," he said.

Jeremy Link, Transport Canada communications advisor, said in an e-mail the agency will explore and consider an alternate use for the building.

"Transport Canada is fully aware of the federal heritage significance of the Bentley-Carruthers House and will take this into account when considering a future use for the building," he said.

Mr. Holland noted Transport Canada restored the other Bentley house in Brougham, which is where the Greater Toronto Airports Authority set up shop.

He accuses the agency of slowly depopulating the remaining community by evicting tenants and destroying historical homes.

"The reality is we don't have a lot of heritage buildings left," he said.

Mr. Link said the Bentley-Carruthers tenant was not evicted, but relocated to another property on the federal lands.

"Transport Canada determined that substantial repairs were required to maintain the building, and subsequently made the

decision, after communicating with the tenants, to relocate the tenants to an alternate property," he said. He added the tenants agreed to move, and Transport Canada helped them do so.

He said Transport Canada's first priority is the safety and health of residents, but keeps fiscal responsibility in mind.

"Transport Canada must manage public funds considering the broad Canadian public interest, and must do so in a responsible manner, making prudent economic choices," he said.

Mr. Holland's office, after hearing the move was due to mould, called Transport Canada and asked for proof, which it hasn't yet received.

So Mr. Holland visited the home himself.

"My opinion is that it's a beautiful building. There's no doubt that the government's done a horrible job maintaining it and it needs some work," but the bones of the building are strong and it's definitely salvageable, he said.

Mr. Holland compared the situation to Tullis Cottage, another historical building, which would have been demolished due to mould in 2005 if he and the Liberals didn't demand a third-party review, which found the claims were false. The home was saved and designated as a heritage property.

-- With files from the Torstar News Services