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Council deletes Pickering airport question from election ballot

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PICKERING -- Council has changed its mind regarding an election ballot referendum on the proposed Pickering airport, much to the delight of residents.

In the early 1970s the federal government expropriated north Pickering land for an airport, but to this day, a final decision hasn't been made. Pickering council has stood opposed to the possibility over the years.

In October, council voted to begin the process of putting the following question on the 2010 municipal election ballot: "Do you support the City of Pickering's position to oppose construction and operation of an airport in the City of Pickering? Yes or No?"

In February, council approved the question, and an appeal period was set until March 23.

Members of Land Over Landings, an anti-airport group in favour of farming the lands, decided to appeal council's decision.

Mary Delaney of LOL felt the question was confusing, saying it could yield inaccurate results.

"It ain't broke, so please don't try to fix it," she told council Monday. "This is one can of worms you don't want to open."

City clerk Debbie Shields explained the question had to be worded in such a way since the federal lands are not under municipal jurisdiction. The question could not ask if residents are for or against an airport, but it could ask if they support council's opposition.

Ms. Delaney explained the matter is long and complicated.

"We elect our politicians to work with experts, be they existing staff or consultants, to make the best decisions for us," she

said. "Ballots don't ask the masses of the public to give their "yay" or "nay" on footbridges over the 401, on odour facility plants, or on the budget. Why would we throw this question, which is arguably even more complicated, out to the public?"

Pickering resident and LOL member Peter Rodrigues said since there is no sensible business case, and local opposition to an airport has been obvious, the question should be withdrawn.

"Personally, I think it's quite pointless to raise a question as to which we clearly know the answer," he said.

Ward 3 Regional Councillor Rick Johnson said since the question is confusing, the answer will only be convoluted, and no real legitimate results will come of it anyway.

"You're going to get a convoluted-type response," he said. "It's not going to be easy to weigh that, and where do you go from there?"

Ward 1 Regional Councillor Bonnie Littley brought forward a motion to repeal the ballot question "because the public does not feel the questions is clear."

Council approved the repeal, and the clerk will notify the chief electoral officer for Ontario.