

# City of Pickering Sucks Up Acreage



After approving the development of northeast Pickering lands, the City of Pickering announced it is now "advocating for the protection" of nearly 80 per cent of the federal lands. It, however, is asking to unlock 1,900 acres for economic opportunities. Councillor Lisa Robinson publicly condemned the two major votes taken by Pickering Council that she claims will dramatically alter the future of Pickering's rural, agricultural, and environmentally-sensitive lands. Council voted to advance both the Northeast Pickering Secondary Plan and the Pickering Federal Lands Recommendation Framework — decisions Robinson says represent a clear shift toward long-term urban sprawl, infrastructure expansion, and development pressure despite significant public concern. This week the City of Pickering Called on the Government of Canada to

Protect 7,500 Acres of Federal Land and Unlock 1,900 Acres for Economic Opportunities. At this week Council meeting, the City of Pickering endorsed the Pickering Federal Lands - Land Use Review and Economic Analysis Recommendation Report, which calls for the protection of more than 7,500 acres of federal lands in north Pickering, with over 6,500 acres proposed for agricultural use within an expanded Rouge National Urban Park. The report recommends that 30-year farming leases be offered to encourage long-term agricultural investment. With the City advocating for the protection of nearly 80 per cent of the federal lands, it also envisions setting aside 1,900 acres for prestige employment uses. The resulting economic impacts would be significant for Pickering, with an estimated \$3.7 billion in investment, \$244 million in upfront revenues, and \$18 million in annual tax revenues. From a property tax perspective, if applied to the 2026 residential tax levy, the annual \$18 million in commercial and industrial tax revenues would effectively reduce property taxes by approximately 17 per cent. Robinson says residents were never truly given the option many of them actually wanted: An option 4 - to preserve the lands, expand Greenbelt and Rouge National Urban Park protections, and leave the lands largely untouched. "Once these lands are paved, fragmented, and

opened to long-term urbanization pressure, we do not get them back," Robinson stated. Equally important, this employment area is expected to generate approximately 16,000 high-quality jobs for local residents. Economic development and job creation are powerful antidotes to sprawl, and by creating commercial investment and employment opportunities close to home, the City can reduce the need for residents to commute to Toronto, Markham, Vaughan, or Mississauga for work. This shift will ease congestion on highways, lower emissions, and give residents more time to spend where it matters most - at home with family and friends. In 2025, the federal government launched a consultation process to determine the future of what was formerly known as the Pickering airport lands. In response to this ongoing work, the City completed its own comprehensive review to clearly articulate Pickering's priorities. The now-endorsed report, prepared by SGL Planning & Design Inc., outlines a balanced vision that reflects extensive public engagement and aligns with federal priorities such as environmental protection, Rouge National Urban Park expansion, agricultural preservation, and economic development, and will be submitted to the Government of Canada as Pickering's formal contribution to the federal consultation process. Ultimately, it is the

Government of Canada that will decide the future use, management, protection, and long-term direction of these federally-owned lands. "This is a once-in-a-generation opportunity to shape the future of these lands in a way that reflects who we are and where we want to go as a community. By protecting the vast majority of the federal lands through the expansion of Rouge National Urban Park while strategically planning for high-quality employment uses, we are advancing a vision that supports environmental stewardship, strengthens agriculture, and creates thousands of good-paying jobs close to home. It's a balanced approach that will reduce sprawl, ease congestion, and give more families the opportunity to build their future right here in Pickering." Kevin Ashe, Mayor, City of Pickering. The result of the vote was 6 for and one "no". Councillor Lisa Robinson publicly condemns two major votes taken by Pickering Council this week that will dramatically alter the future of Pickering's rural, agricultural, and environmentally sensitive lands. Council voted to advance both the Northeast Pickering Secondary Plan and the Pickering Federal Lands Recommendation Framework — decisions Robinson says represent a clear shift toward long-term urban sprawl, infrastructure expansion, and development pressure despite sig-

nificant public concern. Robinson was the sole vote against the Federal Lands recommendation and one of only two councillors to oppose moving Northeast Pickering forward. "Most of us campaigned on protecting farmland, protecting our environment, and opposing urban sprawl," said Robinson. "But these votes tell a very different story." The Federal Lands framework includes recommendations involving:

- widened and paved rural roads,
- economic corridors, transportation expansion, servicing frameworks, and long-term infrastructure intensification on some of the most environmentally sensitive lands in the region.

Robinson says residents were never truly given the option many of them actually wanted: An option 4 - to preserve the lands, expand Greenbelt and Rouge National Urban Park protections, and leave the lands largely untouched. "The public was presented with three different versions of expansion, but never a true preservation option," Robinson stated. "That is not meaningful consultation." Robinson also criticized the City for failing to conduct broader public engagement before federal consultation timelines involving Parks Canada and Transport Canada progressed. "We failed to properly ensure broader resident concerns became part of the official federal record before these recommendations

advanced," said Robinson. "For one of the largest land-use decisions in our city's history, that should deeply concern every resident." During debate, Robinson warned that these approvals would become "stepping stones" for future approvals. "Once Council endorses corridors, servicing concepts, transportation frameworks, and growth directions, those endorsements are repeatedly used later to justify the next stage of expansion," she said. Robinson also raised concerns regarding environmental impacts, endangered species, groundwater systems, wetlands, prime farmland loss, and long-term taxpayer exposure connected to future infrastructure obligations. "Once these lands are paved, fragmented, and opened to long-term urbanization pressure, we do not get them back," Robinson stated. Robinson attempted to bring forward an emergency motion to defer the Federal Lands recommendation until broader consultation could occur and a true preservation-focused Option 4 could be examined. The motion did not proceed. "These decisions are permanent," Robinson concluded. "Future generations will never criticize us for protecting farmland, wetlands, groundwater, and ecological lands too carefully. But they may absolutely criticize us if we lose them forever because we failed to slow down and ask harder questions."



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