

Council still says no to Pickering airport

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By: By Kristen Calis

PICKERING -- City Council has officially restated its opposition to the proposed Pickering airport.

Ward 1 Regional Councillor Bonnie Littley and Ward 3 Regional Councillor Rick Johnson introduced a motion reconfirming Council's support of a public and independent due diligence review of the Greater Toronto Airports Authority's (GTAA) Master Plan for the Federal Lands in Pickering. Similar resolutions have been written in the past, but council approved this updated one at the meeting on April 16.

The resolution urges the federal, provincial and regional governments to support that the review be conducted in an open, public and transparent process. It also asks the GTAA to include how the following factors would affect the business case for Pickering and the future of air transportation: rising fuel prices and peak oil; the impact emissions would have on air quality and how it would contribute to climate change; and the economic impact future emission controls may have.

The City's statement of opposition resulted from Ward 1 City Councillor Jennifer O'Connell's concerns. She said the last time Council stated its opposition to the airport was in 1998.

"Nine years is a long time not to have open public discussion on such an important issue," she said.

Coun. O'Connell said she thinks it's important today's residents get a chance to state their opinions.

"My personal opinion is that I feel an airport in Pickering would be environmentally devastating and I therefore do not support it," she said. "However I was not elected to represent only my personal opinion, but the opinion of those whom I represent."

When she asked Mayor Dave Ryan if he'd consider factoring in a public airport meeting into his upcoming Town Hall meetings, he said he'd take it under advisement.

Coun. Littley said she would also like a public meeting and is opposed to an airport in Pickering.

"A bad idea 30 years ago is still a bad idea," she said in an interview.

She believes money would be better spent in areas such as transit, alternative energy and the agrifood market. She explained all of these issues support a sustainable Pickering.

"We need commercial economic growth and that's how you can get it," she said.

Coun. Johnson said he's been adamantly opposed to the airport for the past 35 years. He's concerned about the lack of families remaining in areas such as Brougham, which he pointed out only has about 30 left, mainly resulting from the demolishment of homes.

"We have lost the heart of central Pickering," he said.

He said the frozen lands need baseball diamonds, churches and jobs - not simply the belief that a runway may be built there in the future.

Ward 3 City Councillor David Pickles moved similar resolutions, including the one in 1998 stating the City's official opposition to the airport. He agreed that a public consultation is important, especially in the review, and said "the key is it's done properly and with public input."

He also thinks the business case for the airport is not very strong and said an independent expert should review it.

"They're not doing the work that's necessary to have full discussion of an airport," he said in an interview.

He said growth in Pickering is not strong and projections of the airport are too rosy. He also said a lot more people can go through Toronto Pearson International Airport than what the GTAA actually says.

He said the new motion gives new councillors the opportunity to state their opinions, including Coun. Littley's environmental additions.

In the motion, she noted the United Nations Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) estimates that high-altitude emissions from aircrafts could have a high warming impact. She also noted the IPCC said they don't foresee any practical alternatives to kerosene-based fuels that commercial aircraft require over the next several decades.

The motion requests that a copy of the resolution be sent not only to the GTAA, but also to federal, provincial, regional and local bodies of government as well.