

Aug 18, 2023

c/o Mr. Andy Doersam

Honourable Stephen Clark, MPP  
Minister of Municipal Affairs and Housing  
Municipal Services Office - Central Ontario  
16th floor, 777 Bay Street  
Toronto, ON M7A 2J3

Re: Lands between Hwy 7, Sideline 16, Sideline 14 and Concession Rd 7

We, the undersigned, are owners of 13 out of the total of 15 privately owned properties located in the above block of land in Northeast Pickering, which is approximately 350 acres in area.

The purpose of this submission is to object to the new proposed Durham Regional plan, in general and in particular that it has excluded a key block of whitebelt land in NE Pickering from consideration for urban development.

The Durham Region has proposed the new official plan on the basis of certain population projections that are vastly short of the current reality. To get the current numbers, one could simply listen to Premier Doug Ford who at a recent press conference on August 9, 2023 said exactly this: "Ontario is experiencing unprecedented growth. Last year alone, Ontario grew by more than 500,000 people. Put that in perspective. The federal government brought in more than 1.1 million people into our country...That's more newcomers than Texas and Florida – the fastest growing states in America. We are now the fastest growing region, bar none, in North America. **At current rates, Ontario will grow by more than 5 million people in the next ten years. That's close to adding two new cities the size of Toronto in a decade.** These are staggering numbers...Failing to act would hurt everyone in Ontario by driving up the costs of goods and services by hampering new job creation and investment".

The shortfall for land is not just for residential uses. The new population also needs spaces for employment, shopping, healthcare, recreation, education, and various other industrial and commercial needs. Across the GTA, industrial vacancy rates have been below 2% for the last five years. Industrial land values across the GTA have soared and rents have increased by as much as 36% in just the last two years. According to the Toronto Board of Trade, available uncommitted, serviced industrial land within the 30 km radius of the Pearsons Economic Zone is at an all-time low of less than half a percent. According to Avison Young's second quarter 2023 Greater Toronto Industrial Market Report, the East GTA (Durham region) vacancy rate is only 0.6% with lease rates rising more than ever before. Shortage of industrial and commercial space naturally leads to current employers leaving Ontario and prevents new ones from setting up shop. High costs of industrial and warehousing space also leads to these costs passed onto consumers and other

businesses, further fueling inflation and reduction in productivity. Compared to other jurisdictions in N. America, Ontario's gross domestic product per capita has been falling rapidly and is now comparable to the US states with the lowest GDP per capita – Alabama and Mississippi (thehub.ca/2023-06-15/trevor-tombe-most-provincial-economies-struggle-to-match-the-u-s/).

As stated in their new official plan, the region has based their projections on a provincial forecast that doubles the Region's population and employment to 1.3 million residents and 460,000 jobs by 2051! As stated above, the province now estimates 10 million new people will be added within the next 10 years alone. With a current population of 14.5 million, that amounts to a 68% increase in Ontario's population by 2033. Even if one assumes an equal distribution of the new population over Ontario, that would project to a doubling of Durham region's population by 2038, not 2051. In reality, the population growth of Ontario will not be equally distributed. A greater proportion of the increase will concentrate in urban areas and within the GTA and the Durham region, and the region's population will double earlier than 2038.

The region's new official plan is misguided by their serious underestimate of the population growth projections. This has led to their exclusion of lands that are otherwise perfectly suited for urban development. Specifically, their final version of the plan excluded our 350-acre block of land that is between Hwy 7, Sideline 16, Sideline 14 and Concession Rd 7 – see the map attached. **These lands are not in the greenbelt. They are not under control of the conservation authority, nor are they under any other restriction.** While their designation is rural/agricultural, very little farm class activity, as defined by Agricorp of the OMAFRA, is taking place over them. The lands are not flat enough and the parcels are too small to support meaningful agricultural activity such as growing crops or livestock. Also, there is too much slate stone underneath the thin, low-quality soil. The vast majority of the parcels just have old decaying bungalows on them with no use of the 10-acre parcels of land. The lands are the only block of whitebelt land adjacent to the 407 Hwy that has been left out of the urban boundary expansion in the GTA, West of Clarington. The lands are the most accessible to Toronto, and are strategically located at the confluence of highways 7, 407 and major route 1 (Brock Rd). They are not restricted by the availability of servicing. All the services are at or nearby the said lands. Natural gas, electricity and cable internet are already present. Water and sewage are in the process of expanding on Brock Rd to just South of Hwy 407 - the other side of the highway from these lands. Also, the very close area known as Veraine is being bought into the urban boundary where potential water and sewage lines can come from. These lands do not comprise a specialty crop area and are not within the natural heritage system. They are not in the Moraine Natural Core and linkage areas. These lands are experiencing growth pressures and can achieve a healthy, connected, thriving and complete community with Seaton and Veraine next door. There are currently no or very limited commercial amenities such as petrol stations, restaurants and retail plazas in the residential areas existing or planned around Brock Road and Highway 407. The said lands can support residential, employment, industrial or transportation needs.

Envision Durham was the process by which the region decided on the lands to be included in the urban boundary. In all the interim reports that were issued in the process, this block of land was

included in the areas proposed for expansion as part of a larger proposed area by the City of Pickering Council known as BER-12 (Boundary Expansion Request area 12), including in the last interim report known as #2022-INFO-91 (attached) which was released on November 10, 2022. In that report, the nearby lands known as "Special Study Area 1" were mentioned about being excluded from the urban boundary expansion due to being close to the federal airport lands. The interim report said nothing about excluding the concerned block of land which are privately owned and have never been included in any past or present airport development proposals. Unfortunately, in the next edition which was the final report by Envision Durham, released on March 7, 2023 (attached), the subject lands just vanished from the proposed expansion areas without any written explanation - the only explanations provided were again for the Special Study Area 1. The report said specifically: "...Lands next to the federal airport lands (Special Study Area 1 in the current and new ROP) are proposed to remain outside the Urban Area Boundary until such time that a federal decision to build an airport is made, at which point they could be planned for airport compatible and supportive uses." It seemed almost as though someone at the Region had made the mistake that the subject lands were part of the Special Study Area 1, which is not correct as the publicly owned lands in SSA1 end at Sideline 16, not Sideline 14 – though it is easy to confuse this.

In their new official plan, the Regional planning department decided to arrest the subject lands in the unusable "prime agricultural" label, until perhaps one day the federal government might decide what to do with the airport lands in NE Pickering. It is important to note that the officials at the region did this without any request from the federal government. These lands are privately owned and if the federal government had thought they were essential to an airport, they would have expropriated them when they expropriated over 20,000 acres for that purpose. The airport idea has been defeated many times at various levels of government over the last 51 years. The city of Pickering Council recently on April 24, 2023, passed a motion to oppose an airport in Pickering permanently in a 6:1 result in favour. Additionally, the federal minister of transportation recently stated the government had no plans to build a Pickering airport in the short term. He added perhaps not even in the long term, while announcing another years-long study into aviation of Southern Ontario. With climate change now being the most frequently cited issue by the federal government, it is quite likely that the study will produce the same conclusion as previous studies which were indeterminate and resulted in no action. The region's planning department has acted unjustly in holding these very accessible lands in open-ended limbo when they are not part of any proposed plans for an airport.

The region's planning officials said they would not put sensitive land uses close to a potential airport. However, immediately next to the subject lands, South of Hwy 407, one can witness the building of sensitive uses, i.e., residential homes right up to the edge of the highway 407. How is it that sensitive uses like these homes can be situated near the airport site, but even non-sensitive low-lying uses would not be allowed in the adjacent block? The proposed runways for a possible airport have changed direction paths several times with no certainty as of this moment in time regarding the acoustic aspects.

The region's decision to hold these lands in limbo is irrational and economically harmful. If the airport is really the issue, why not allow these lands to be used for the much-needed non-sensitive uses such as commercial, industrial or transportation needs? They could be built in low-rise warehouse heights for the possibility of an airport. Being at a 6-way highway interchange, these lands have better transportation access than all the other lands the region has proposed for "employment" in the new official plan. Occupancy rates for transportation-related lands such as truck yards, warehouse loading sites, and outdoor vehicle storage around the GTA are over 99%. Why not use these lands for that purpose? If the objective is to hold them in limbo until perhaps an airport comes, why not hold them in limbo in a use that's much needed and that's actually compatible with an airport? The current designation of "prime agricultural" has no great use and is not compatible with an airport. Even if an airport some day comes and other uses are needed, transportation and warehouse uses are just as convertible to other uses as are the lands in their current state. The possibility of an airport in NE Pickering should encourage the development of these lands for related uses, not discourage it.

All the residents and property owners in the subject lands have previously approved the issues discussed in this letter. Mayor Kevin Ashe of Pickering and the local city/region's Councillor, David Pickles have shown their support for inclusion of this block of land into the employment designation. Their support was the reason why Councillor Pickles introduced a motion to the Regional council, seconded by Mayor Ashe on May 17<sup>th</sup>, 2023 to amend the new draft official plan to bring these lands into the urban boundary for employment (link to video recording of this motion's discussion and vote at the regional council public meeting May 17, 2023: <https://youtu.be/Lkuaat0ROj4>). As the recording shows, this motion for amendment almost passed but lost very narrowly by 13 votes to 14, and only after Councillor Maurice Brenner objected to the amendment and espoused the misinformation that this area's expansion into the urban boundary might not have been originally requested by the city of Pickering council. He then asked the Commissioner of Planning, Brian Bridgeman to verify that this area had not been originally requested by the city Council to be brought into the urban boundary. Mr. Bridgeman said he didn't know. He then asked Gary Muller, the Director of Planning of the Region, who indicated he didn't know either, and then Colleen Goodchild also of the Regional planning department who said this area perhaps was not in the request by the Pickering Council. This was incorrect as the attached Envision Durham report from November, 2022 does show the Region was aware that this area was included in the general Boundary Expansion Request BER-12 by the City Council of Pickering. One cannot be certain how much this misinformation mattered in the extremely narrow loss, but please note Councillor Brenner has the record as a radical anti-development advocate who was also one of only 6 out of 26 councillors who voted against the entirety of the new regional plan itself (not just on the amendment motion), which is what is before the province now for approval.

In summary, the region has vastly underestimated the projected growth of its population as the basis for the new proposed official plan. In particular, the 350 acres of whitebelt lands adjacent to the 6-way highway interchange in NE Pickering was unreasonably taken out of urban area expansion for employment for the final draft while it was included in the interim reports of the

Envision Durham process. There is a severe shortage of warehousing and transportation lands in the GTA for which this area seems perfectly suited for. The very high cost of industrial and transportation use lands is adding to the cost of goods for transportation and discouraging many potential employers from expansion into the GTA. The issue that this privately owned block of land is somewhat close to a possible future airport is not a rational basis for its exclusion from employment uses in the interim. The possibility of an airport should encourage the development of these lands not discourage it. Including these lands into the urban boundary has had solid support from all the area property owners, the local councillor and the city mayor. As detailed above, in a recent amendment motion at the regional council, backed by the local councillor and mayor, it lost by only one vote but only after presentation of misinformation by a councillor known for extreme anti-development agendas. We highly urge the province to add the subject area for urban expansion for employment uses.

Sincerely:

Electronically signed; Shahram Emami, Michael Tillaart, Marlin Tillaart

On behalf of the property owners in the said block of land who have authorized their support to this matter:

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