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The Regional Municipality of Durham Report

To: Community Growth and Economic Development Committee
From: Commissioner of Community Growth and Economic Development
Report: #2026-CG-12
Date: April 7, 2026

Subject:

Regional Staff Comments on Transport Canada's Pickering Lands Public and Stakeholder Consultation

Recommendation:

That the Community Growth and Economic Development Committee recommends to Regional Council:

- A) That the following Regional staff comments be endorsed and submitted to Transport Canada as the Region's response to the public and stakeholder consultation on future uses for the Pickering Lands:
 - i) That the federal government define its priorities and long-term planning horizon for the Pickering Lands and prepare alternative land use concepts for stakeholder evaluation;
 - ii) That should the federal government determine that the Pickering Lands will be used to generate housing opportunities, a comprehensive land use framework be prepared to demonstrate that the creation of a complete and sustainable community balances the various interests in the land;
 - iii) That should a portion of the Pickering Lands be identified for residential development, sites should be set aside in advance for non-market housing, affordable, and supportive housing and that the cost of land to be made available should be discounted in exchange for long-term guarantees for affordable and attainable housing;

- iv) That should a portion of the Pickering Lands be identified as appropriate for employment uses, the federal government should target such industries which support advanced manufacturing (including modular construction);
- v) That timely resolution to align the federal Pickering Airport Site Zoning Regulations and provincial Ministers Zoning Orders on the Pickering Lands be prioritized;
- vi) That the federal government consider the scale of development and rate of growth of surrounding communities when determining the future of the Pickering Lands;
- vii) That the federal government engage with technical experts at the Toronto and Region Conservation Authority (TRCA), Indigenous communities, the Ministry of Agriculture, Food and Agribusiness (OMAFRA), the Ministry of Rural Affairs (MRA), and the Ministry of Environment, Conservation and Parks (MECP) to establish data informed criteria for evaluating high conservation value lands;
- viii) That the federal government prioritize a systems-based approach to expanding Rouge National Urban Park (RNUP), focusing on protecting and enhancing natural features and the linkages between them, but also preserving productive farmland as a stable supply of local food and support to Durham's food value chain and industries related to food production;
- ix) That the federal government consider the Durham Natural System Climate Change Vulnerability Assessment mapping in its assessment of the Pickering Lands;
- x) That the federal government review the Highway Access Management Plan Study, Preliminary Design Study and Class EA for the widening of Highway 7 and the Central Pickering Development Plan Class EA for Regional Services, 2014, for planning purposes for the Pickering Lands;
- xi) That further analysis and consultation specific to water and wastewater servicing and transportation infrastructure will be required for any new land use concept to ensure timing of development will be aligned with other development areas and planned Regional infrastructure expansions and that the appropriate financing arrangements will be in place to support the infrastructure costs related to servicing the Pickering Lands, to ensure that these costs are not funded from Durham residents and businesses;

- xii) That the Region encourages the federal government to ensure meaningful engagement with Indigenous rights holders, including providing appropriate capacity funding to support participation; and
- B) That a copy of this report be forwarded to Durham's area municipalities, conservation authorities, and the Williams Treaty First Nations.
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Report:

1. Purpose

- 1.1 On March 2, 2026, Transport Canada launched public and stakeholder consultations on future uses for the Pickering Lands (former Pickering Federal Airport Lands). Feedback will be accepted until April 17, 2026. The City of Pickering requested and are awaiting confirmation of an extension to this timeline, as they have retained a consultant to complete a Land Use Review and Economic Analysis for the Pickering Lands.
- 1.2 The purpose of this report is to provide an overview of the consultation program and seek endorsement of Regional staff's comments for this stage of the process.

2. Background

- 2.1 In 1972, the federal government acquired 18,600 acres of land, largely in Pickering, but also Markham and Uxbridge to develop a future airport. The lands are commonly referred to as the Pickering Lands. In 1975, the plan for an airport was put on hold and the land was leased to residential, farm and commercial tenants.
- 2.2 Between 2011 and 2015, the federal government transferred 9,900 acres to Parks Canada for the Rouge National Urban Park (RNUP), retaining 8,700 acres for an airport and related uses. This process was finalized in May 2017.
- 2.3 The Regional Official Plan (ROP) has always recognized and protected the Pickering Lands for a future airport, with no consideration or planning for other land uses. Most recently, Envision Durham, the municipal comprehensive review of the ROP (approved by the province in December 2024) maintained these protections¹.

¹ Pursuant to Bill 23, as of January 1, 2025, the Region of Durham is defined by the province as an "upper-tier municipality without planning responsibilities". The new Regional Official Plan (ROP) has now become part of the Area Municipal Official Plans of Durham's eight municipalities. Each area municipality may repeal or amend it, meaning that each area municipality will have responsibility for the ROP as it pertains to their municipality.

- 2.4 In January 2025, the federal government announced that the Pickering Lands would no longer be used for a future airport. Instead, lands deemed to have high conservation value would be transferred to Parks Canada to support the mandate of RNUP and consultations would commence to determine future uses for the remaining lands.
- 2.5 It is unclear whether the federal government intends to continue to retain ownership and control over all or parts of the Pickering Lands for federal purposes or offer any part of the lands to other levels of government, housing providers, or others for development or conservation purposes.
- 2.6 On September 2, 2025, the Region received a letter from Transport Canada, as the lead on behalf of the federal government, requesting our participation in consultations related to the development of a land management strategy for the Pickering Lands.
- 2.7 To ensure a coordinated response to this request and also future consultations, Regional staff formed an internal working group with representation from Community Growth and Economic Development, Works, Finance, Durham Region Transit, and the CAO's Office.
- 2.8 On September 23, 2025, Regional staff met with representatives from Transport Canada, Canada Lands Company, and Public Service and Procurement Canada for a technical meeting and provided information about the context of the Pickering Lands namely, existing and planned infrastructure investments (roads, transit, water and sewer, etc.) in the vicinity. At the time, Transport Canada indicated that formal public and stakeholder consultations would begin in early 2026.
- 2.9 Following the Minister's announcement that the Pickering lands would not be used for an airport, the City of Pickering retained a consultant for a Land Use Review and Economic Analysis of the Pickering Lands that is anticipated to be complete by mid-May. It is Regional staff's understanding that this analysis will identify Pickering's preferred land use concept, centered on employment area uses, agricultural land protection and potential expansion to RNUP, and that it will form their submission to Transport Canada for this stage of consultation. Regional staff are participating on the steering committee for this analysis and will keep Council informed of its outcome.

3. Previous Reports and Decisions

- 3.1 An update on work to support the development of the potential future airport on the Pickering Lands was provided in [Report #2018-INFO-91](#) (dated June 1, 2018).
- 3.2 An overview of the Minister's announcement that the Pickering Lands would no longer be used as an airport was provided in [Report #2025-INFO-74](#) (dated September 19, 2025).
- 3.3 An update on the launch of public and stakeholder consultations for future land uses of the Pickering Lands was provided in [Report #2026-INFO-011](#) (dated March 6, 2026).

4. Transport Canada Pickering Lands Public and Stakeholder Consultation Program

- 4.1 On March 2, 2026, Transport Canada launched public and stakeholder consultations related to future land uses for the Pickering Lands. Feedback is invited until April 17, 2026.
- 4.2 A [consultation website](#) was developed that includes additional information to help focus public and stakeholder feedback.
- 4.3 Comments can be provided through an [online survey](#) and were also sought at four hybrid consultation sessions held at the Pickering Glen Golf Club on March 11 and 12, 2026. Regional staff participated in a session on March 11, 2026.
- 4.4 Regional staff have also participated in two Transport Canada sector-specific consultation sessions, including a municipal roundtable on March 16, 2026, and a housing roundtable on March 30, 2026.
- 4.5 The municipal roundtable included staff from municipalities in the vicinity of the Pickering Lands, including Durham, Pickering, Ajax, Uxbridge, Whitby, Oshawa, and Markham. The format of this meeting was an open-ended discussion where comments centred on the need for a balanced approach to future land uses. Transport Canada staff were particularly keen to hear municipal staff perspectives on the following key themes:
 - expansion of RNUP;
 - other conservation and environmental protection;
 - agricultural uses;
 - residential, commercial and industrial development;

- infrastructure to support development with discussion on payment in lieu of taxes; and
 - transportation, including the Alto High Speed Rail Canada.
- 4.6 In addition to Regional staff participation in sector-specific roundtable discussions, Transport Canada also invited representatives from the Durham Agricultural Advisory Committee (DAAC) to participate in an agricultural roundtable session on March 26, 2026.
- 4.7 As a result of [Report #2026-INFO-011](#), the launch of the consultations for the Pickering Lands was also discussed at the March 3, 2026, DAAC meeting where the following motion was passed and subsequently used to inform Regional staff comments herein:
- “That with respect to the Federal Airport Lands, the Durham Agricultural Advisory Committee (DAAC) re-affirms its position from the May 10, 2022, DAAC meeting stating that the preservation of agricultural land is vital to ensure Durham Region residents have access to a substantial and stable supply of local food, now and into the future as Durham’s population grows; and that access to growing food supports an entire food value chain and multiple industries related to food production that are imperative to Durham’s overall economic health.”
- 4.8 In addition to the roundtables that Regional staff have been invited to participate in, Transport Canada has also scheduled an environment roundtable that TRCA has been invited to.
- 4.9 It is Regional staff’s understanding that Transport Canada will be preparing a “What we Heard” document following consultations, which will be shared with Regional Council.
- 4.10 In parallel to the consultation opportunities noted above, Transport Canada has indicated that they are actively engaging with First Nations and intend to prepare an internal “What we Learned” document. Regional staff have been discussing the file with the Mississaugas of Scugog Island First Nation (MSIFN) through regular working meetings.

5. Regional Staff Analysis and Comments

- 5.1 The following comments will be provided to Transport Canada in advance of the April 17, 2026 deadline. Regional staff will advise Transport Canada of any changes made to these comments following Regional Council consideration.

Complete Communities

- 5.2 The consultation approach by Transport Canada on the Pickering Lands thus far has been very open-ended. For the Region to effectively comment on this consultation exercise, **it is recommended that the federal government define its priorities and long-term planning horizon for the Pickering Lands and prepare alternative land use concepts for stakeholder evaluation.**
- 5.3 **Should the federal government determine that the Pickering Lands will be used to generate housing opportunities, a comprehensive land use framework be prepared to demonstrate that the creation of a complete and sustainable community balances the various interests in the land, including:**
- natural heritage protection and enhancement, and the preservation of Prime Agricultural Areas, including the transfer of lands deemed to have high conservation value to the RNUP;
 - a range of housing units by size and tenure, for all stages of life and household types, including affordable housing opportunities;
 - community energy planning with a goal of achieving low or net zero carbon energy systems to serve new housing development;
 - a mix of commercial services and employment areas that capitalize on economic opportunities for job creation, including the establishment of prestige Employment Areas located along the Highway 7 corridor and in proximity to Highway 407; and
 - associated public services and amenities, including access to transit, active transportation, and connectivity to surrounding communities.
- 5.4 **Should a portion of the Pickering Lands be identified for residential development, sites should be set aside in advance for non-market housing, affordable, and supportive housing and that the cost of land to be made available should be discounted in exchange for long-term guarantees for affordable and attainable housing.**
- 5.5 **Should a portion of the Pickering Lands be identified as appropriate for employment uses, the federal government should target such industries which support advanced manufacturing (including modular construction).**
- 5.6 The Pickering Airport Site Zoning Regulations, passed under the federal Aeronautics Act, prescribed approach surfaces, bird hazard zones and transitional surfaces which have implications on potential land uses well beyond the Pickering Lands. Further, the Noise Exposure Forecast (NEF) contours from the proposed

airport extended into the new urban expansion area of Northeast Pickering (NEP), which is within the designated urban area. Provincial Ministers Zoning Orders (MZO) are also in place which protect the airport as a land use. **Timely resolution to align the federal Pickering Airport Zoning Regulations and provincial Ministers Zoning Orders on the Pickering Lands should be prioritized.**

Growth Management

- 5.7 To inform Envision Durham, the municipal comprehensive review of the ROP, the Region undertook a Growth Management Study (GMS) which estimated that the City of Pickering's population is anticipated to increase by over 150,000 residents over the next 30 years; a significant portion of which would be anticipated within greenfield areas in the communities of Seaton (immediately south of the Pickering Lands) and the new urban expansion area of NEP (immediately east of the Pickering Lands).
- 5.8 At present, Seaton has approximately 20,000 units of various housing forms in the development pipeline, while NEP anticipates an additional 24,000 units over time. The City of Pickering is currently considering the NEP Secondary Plan; wherein it is not expected that all land in NEP will be built out by 2051.
- 5.9 Given the proximity of both Seaton and NEP to the Pickering Lands and their existing potential for greenfield development within the Urban Area Boundary, as well as the intensification potential that already exists in the City (particularly along the Kingston Road corridor), **the federal government should consider the scale of development and rate of growth of surrounding communities when determining the future of the Pickering Lands.**

Agricultural System Protection and Rouge National Urban Park

- 5.10 The federal government has outlined that a significant opportunity for the Pickering Lands is the transfer of "high conservation value lands" to Parks Canada to expand RNUP. However, the term "high conservation value lands" has yet to be defined. **It is recommended that the federal government engage with technical experts at TRCA, Indigenous communities, the Ministry of Agriculture, Food and Agribusiness (OMAFRA), Ministry of Rural Affairs (MRA), and the Ministry of Environment, Conservation and Parks (MECP) to establish data informed criteria for evaluating high conservation value lands.**

- 5.11 The RNUP's mandate is protecting and presenting the natural and cultural heritage of the Park and its diverse landscapes, promoting a vibrant farming community, and encouraging Canadians to discover and connect with their national protected heritage areas. In recognition of this mandate, **it is recommended that the federal government prioritize a systems-based approach to expanding RNUP, focusing on protecting and enhancing natural features and the linkages between them, but also preserving productive farmland as a stable supply of local food and support to Durham's food value chain and industries related to food production.**
- 5.12 Durham's Natural System Climate Change Vulnerability Assessment, completed by the Toronto Region Conservation Authority in 2022, includes mapping of natural system vulnerability. To assist in the review of land for transfer to RNUP and/or identification of potential lands for natural heritage system planning and implementation, **it is recommended that the federal government consider the Durham Natural System Climate Change Vulnerability Assessment mapping in its assessment of the Pickering Lands.**

Transportation

- 5.13 In May 2024, the Seaton Landowners Group undertook a Highway Access Management Plan (HAMP) Study for the Ontario Ministry of Transportation (MTO) along the Highway 7 corridor within the Seaton community. The purpose of the Study was to identify intersection spacing and control measures, and access management to support new development, within the Pickering Innovation Corridor lands, located mostly along the south side of Highway 7. The HAMP Study recommends the realignment of three sideline roads on the north side of Highway 7 within the Pickering Lands to align with existing and proposed road connections within the Seaton community on the south side of Highway 7.
- 5.14 In October 2025, the MTO initiated a Preliminary Design Study and Class Environmental Assessment for the widening of Highway 7 adjacent to the Pickering Lands. The limits of the Study are from 200 metres west of Reesor Road to 200 metres west of Brock Road in the City of Markham and City of Pickering. The Study will evaluate alternatives to widen Highway 7 to tie into the existing four lane cross-sections west of Reesor Road and east of Brock Road. A Public Information Centre (PIC) is planned in the spring, with further information available on the [project website](#).

5.15 With respect to the Highway 7/Whites Road and Highway 7/Peter Matthews Drive existing and planned intersections, the Central Pickering Development Plan Class EA for Regional Services, 2014, includes a short section north of Highway 7 as part of the preliminary design to identify how future north legs for these intersections can be accommodated. **It is recommended that the federal government review the HAMP Study, Preliminary Design Study and Class EA for the widening of Highway 7 and the Central Pickering Development Plan Class EA for Regional Services, 2014, for planning purposes for the Pickering Lands.**

Water and Wastewater Servicing

5.16 Beyond an airport, the Region has never contemplated development on the Pickering Lands. Accordingly, downstream water and wastewater systems have been designed based on anticipated flows for an airport and supporting employment uses. **Further analysis and consultation specific to water and wastewater servicing and transportation infrastructure will be required for any new land use concept to ensure timing of development will be aligned with other development areas and planned Regional infrastructure expansions (e.g., Ajax Water Supply Plant and Duffin Creek Water Pollution Control Plant, and twinning of the York-Durham Trunk Sanitary Sewer) and that the appropriate financing arrangements will be in place to support the infrastructure costs related to servicing the Pickering Lands, to ensure that these costs are not funded from Durham Region residents and businesses.**

Indigenous Engagement

5.17 The federal government has indicated that consultation with Indigenous communities on the Pickering Lands is ongoing and that an internal “What we Learned” document will be produced. **The Region encourages the federal government to ensure meaningful engagement with Indigenous rights holders, including providing appropriate capacity funding to support participation.**

6. Relationship to Strategic Plan

6.1 This report aligns with the following Strategic Directions and Pathways in Durham Region’s 2025-2035 Strategic Plan:

- Connected and Vibrant Communities
 - C1. Align Regional infrastructure and asset management with projected growth, climate impacts, and community needs.

- C2. Enable a full range of housing options, including housing that is affordable and close to transit.
- C7. Create accessible, lively, and culturally welcoming public spaces, including opportunities to access nature.
- Environmental Sustainability and Climate Action
 - E5. Respect the natural environment, including greenspaces, waterways, and agricultural lands.
- Resilient Local Economies
 - R4. Protect and strengthen the local agriculture sector and food supply chains.
- Strong Relationships
 - S4. Advocate to the federal and provincial government and agencies to advance regional priorities.

7. Conclusion

- 7.1 Transport Canada has launched consultations specific to the public and stakeholder vision for future land uses of the Pickering Lands. Feedback on this stage of consultation is requested by April 17, 2026.
- 7.2 A Regional staff internal working group, represented by Community Growth and Economic Development, Works, Finance, Durham Region Transit, and the CAO's Office collaborated on the development of these comments and are seeking Committee and Council endorsement.
- 7.3 Regional staff comments, in the form of this report, will be provided to Transport Canada prior to their consultation deadline. Transport Canada will be made aware if Regional Council makes any changes to the comments following their April meeting.
- 7.4 Regional staff will continue to participate in future consultation opportunities and work with Transport Canada and other ministries to advance federal, provincial and municipal priorities for the Pickering Lands.
- 7.5 For additional information, please contact: Amanda Bathe, Principal Planner, Amanda.Bathe@durham.ca.

Respectfully submitted,

Original signed by

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Recommended for Presentation to Committee

Original signed by

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