

Ottawa International Airport - Red Pine Plantation

Supplementary Note to Ottawa City Council following Notices of Motion tabled on February 9, 2022 February 22, 2022

Overview

The Ottawa International Airport Authority's mandate is to develop airport facilities and lands in support of the economic growth of Canada's Capital Region. The Authority has a 10-acre parcel of land available for lease. The land, which is zoned T1A, faces Hunt Club Road and is bordered by commercial development on both sides.

The parcel forms part of the land included in the Authority's lease agreement with Transport Canada. While we wait for appropriate commercial development opportunities that the land is home to a red pine plantation that was planted approximately 55 years ago for harvesting purposes. "Beginning in the early 1900s red pine plantations were promoted by successive Ontario governments for planting throughout Eastern Ontario and beyond. This is because of the species' relatively fast growth rate on degraded sites such as this one Also, equally important, because its wood is easily penetrated by preservatives, red pines have the potential for high-end uses in the structural timber market – in particularly utility poles."¹

Plantations of this nature are common and important for the provision of telephone poles, and lumber for construction, however; they need to be maintained to ensure proper and safe growth until they are harvested. The plantation is not and has never been maintained by YOW. Further, it is well signed by the Authority as private property, and it is fenced along Hunt Club Road.

Various studies commissioned over the years by the Authority and others confirm concerns with the viability of the plantation that begin with its origin. "From 1945-1958, portions of the property now occupied by the pine plantation were used by local residents as dumping grounds for household garbage"², "The crowding appears to have impacted the growth of the trees."³, "No documented critical or important wildlife habitat is reported for the subject property based on literature review and agency consultation."⁴

It has been deemed "an artificial vegetation community which does not qualify as part of a Significant Woodlot under either the City of Ottawa's criteria for the urban area and/or the provincial assessment criteria. The red pine plantation is not considered an ecologically significant feature, and therefore the tree clearing associated with the proposed development is not anticipated to result in significant negative impacts to the natural features and functions of the Site."⁵

Approximately 43 acres of adjacent land is owned by the Department of National Defence. Their land is a naturalized forest that is lush and healthy. The public has access to this land, and DND has indicated they have no plans to develop it or to restrict access.

¹ IFS Associates – Urban Forestry & Forest Management Consulting, 2021

² Jacques Whitford Environment Ltd. quoting Paterson & Ass., 2000; Robinson Consultants, 2002) (pg. 4)

³ Ibid (pg. 5)

⁴ Ibid (pg. 6)

⁵ McKinlay Environmental Solutions Combined Environmental Impact Statement & Tree Conservation Report (pg. 1)

The Authority has been actively marketing the land along Hunt Club Road for development since it assumed responsibility for airport operations in 1997. This includes the Lowe-Martin printing plant that required 7.6 acres of the plantation to be cleared in 2004. Discussions with Otto's BMW go as far back as ~2013, and perhaps farther. Although the idea of taking land on both sides of Dowler Ditch, which runs along the east side of the property (a bridge connects both sides), had been discussed, Otto's initially only moved forward with the East portion (1.75 acres) in 2015.

The continued growth of Otto's business (pre-COVID) accelerated the need for more new vehicle storage, and the demand for the west portion resurfaced in 2016-17. Negotiations with Otto's resumed recently in the context of a more comprehensive effort by the Authority to market the remaining property along Hunt Club Road, which was supported by a planning and servicing study done by Stantec⁶ between late 2017 and summer 2018. Community consultations related to the Authority's Airport Master Plan, which was updated in 2018, elicited no comments or concerns regarding the potential development of the property, which is clearly identified as aviation/non-aviation related commercial land in the companion Land Use Plan⁷.

The property was never intended for public use. In fact YOW is constantly putting up signs to indicate that fact (for liability purposes) and locking a gate to limit its use as an access to paths going to and from residential areas to the south and south east of the property. Locks are cut and signage is removed regularly.

The Property



⁶ Stantec Geotechnical Investigation Study, November 2018

⁷ 2018 Master Plan/Land Use Plan



Current Situation

Discussions with Otto's in 2019 progressed to the point where Otto's felt inclined to submit a zoning application to the City of Ottawa to accommodate vehicle storage due to concerns that their intended use did not properly fall within T1A zoning permitted uses. The application drew the ire of the local community that has claimed the plantation as their own recreational space.

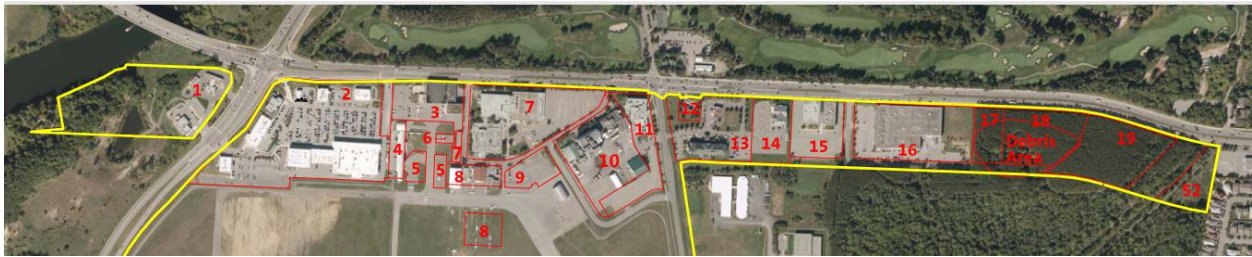
Activities, which are depicted in photos taken in 2021, include the creation of biking trails, shelters, and fire pits. There is extensive evidence of vandalism of Airport Authority water quality monitoring equipment, private property sign removal and vandalism, repeated lock cutting, and graffiti on everything from signage to the trees themselves.

The group has mobilized to fight the application in favour of saving the plantation for public/recreational use. Their tactics include an online petition, demonstrations and social media campaigns aimed at the Authority, politicians, environmental groups and Otto's.

Other commercial opportunities were also being considered. These opportunities included a sports/recreational facility on most of the remaining plantation property. The proponent has now abandoned its plan for a variety of reasons, the main ones being the property's lack of readiness for construction as well as the associated community activity. YOW has therefore concluded that harvesting the timber on the entire 10 acres will best position the Authority to develop the land and achieve the highest and best use of the land per its zoning.

Because of Councillor Brockington's expressed support to keep this property for public recreational use, YOW was willing to lease the property to the City at fair market value. We understand that the City does not want pursue the leasing opportunity for this use and therefore intend to continue to actively market the property.

YOW development along Hunt Club Road:



Airport Authority activities to prevent/discourage access:



Resident activities in the plantation:



Water monitoring equipment vandalized and covered in graffiti, signage removed and vandalized, locks repeatedly cut to gain access to Private Property





Visitors have constructed bike trails and obstacles throughout the plantation



Fallen trees used to form a shelter and as firewood in the fire pits – which are in close proximity to each other





The amount of tree damage is extensive and visible throughout the plantation, whereas the undergrowth is minimal. The trees were never thinned or maintained properly. They are extremely tall, thin, and interconnected at the crown level. This puts them at greater risk for stem failure in adverse weather conditions such as high wind events or ice storms.

Recent observations – February 16, 2022:





Evidence of more falling trees and increased use. Most concerning is the transition from children's graffiti to hate messages (misogynistic, homophobia and satanic words/symbols).



Left: Lock and no trespassing sign removed. Right: High foot traffic through the plantation and into the DND forest.

The adjacent naturalized forest:



DND forest is lush and naturalized - *they have* no plans to develop or restrict access

To ensure that we had current guidance to follow, the Authority engaged an arborist to survey the plantation and report on its health. IFS Associates submitted their final report on November 17, 2021. As a part of their study, we asked them to comment on a scenario in which the City would assume responsibility for the land and preserve it as a park. Their response was as follows:

“c) Invite the City of Ottawa to lease the land for public use – walking and bike trails, playgrounds with structures, etc.

... this will be exposing the public to the danger associated with trees particularly prone to failure. If the public is invited into the plantation signage explicitly detailing the danger will need to be posted along with warnings to vacate the area under certain wind speeds and other weather events, in particular heavy snow and ice storms. If active management is undertaken as detailed in b) above, it would be highly advisable to completely restrict public access from the plantation.”

Development of this parcel of land represents approximately \$500K per year in revenues. Revenue generated by commercial leases on land managed by YOW offsets the cost of operating the airport allowing us to limit our fee increases as we recover from the devastating losses of the past two years in particular. The Authority is extremely proud of the important role the airport plays in the economic development for Canada’s Capital Region, and we are anxious to resume our role as an economic generator.

Recent Activities

- July 12, 2021 Meeting between the Airport Authority and Councillor Brockington as well as a staff member from Councillor Deans’ office. The meeting included a presentation that includes much of the information contained in this overview.
- October 26, 2021 Letter to Mayor Watson offering the land for lease if the City wants to preserve the plantation
- November 17, 2021 Final Report from IFS Associates confirming state of the trees and inherent safety issues

- December 1, 2021 Reply received from Steve Willis declining the land lease offer
- December 8, 2021 Confirmation to the City that we intend to pursue development
- January 27, 2022 Virtual Meeting with Councillor Brockington and Councillor Deans to discuss options
 - Discussed the Authority's mandate, the impact of the pandemic on finances and described the safety issues
 - Councillors requested a window to explore a land swap – we extended two months
 - Caveat: the land is federally-owned and not the Authority's to transfer
- February 9, 2022 Motion at Council regarding the land swap discussion and 2 points not discussed during the January 27th meeting (NCC authority and discussion with Authority nominees)

Summary Points

- The trees were planted over a household waste landfill for the purposes of harvesting.
- The soil is shallow which is fine for red pine growth, however
- Wood from plantations such as this are important for construction purposes and uses such as telephone poles. Harvesting plantations saves old growth and other naturalized forests from being clearcut for these uses.
- They were not maintained properly and are unsafe – they are connected at the crown level and at risk of falling in mass due to stem failure
- The land is clearly marked as private property and access is restricted
- Community members are using it as recreation space despite it not being maintained for this purpose
- The Authority's mandate is to manage, operate and develop airport facilities and lands in support of the economic growth of Canada's Capital Region
- The plantation is zoned T1A, which permits a range of employment uses, including vehicle parking