



Duffin Rouge tenants still waiting to buy their land

Ontario Realty Corporation's previous land deals under police investigation

BY MIKE ADLER
Staff Writer

Tenants of the former Duffin Rouge Agricultural Preserve in Markham and Pickering say sales of the government-owned lots they rent have been held up for months.

In 1996, the Ontario Realty Corporation announced it was selling the preserve lands but promised its tenants — some of whom had their farms or homes expropriated a quarter-century before — would get a chance to buy their lots.

Since then, disagreements with the towns have delayed sales and the agency's previous deals have become the subject of a police investigation.

At a tenants' meeting last week, community association president Bruce Flattery said no sales have closed with the ORC since March, although two tenants said they were close to a deal.

"The rest of us have got silence," Flattery said in Locust Hill. "People are fed up with waiting."

This week, ORC spokesperson Judith Baird said the agency "has a new system of checks and balances" that may slow down the sales process, but said sales will continue.

The new system protects the purchaser and the vendor, and ultimately the taxpayers of Ontario, Baird added.

Flattery said 33 of the 86 properties offered on the Pickering side last summer have been sold, most of them farmland with no residences. There were no recent sales on the Markham side.

Last year, the agency proposed a land swap with the Toronto Catholic Cemetery Board that would exchange an approved cemetery site in Box Grove with a new location at Steeles Avenue and Reesor Road, displacing six tenants in the former preserve.

Baird confirmed the deal is still awaiting a minister's zoning order on the new site.

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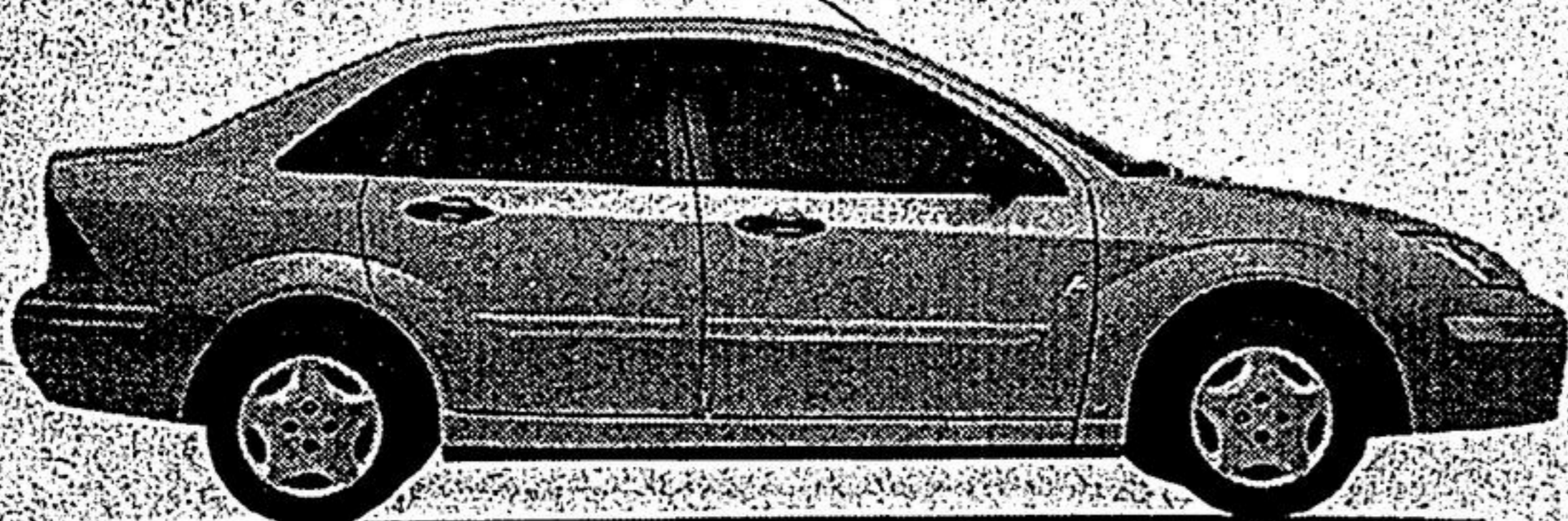
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