

Mould clears tenants from airport land homes

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themselves of tenants and mould is their excuse to board up a house.

"They wouldn't dare re-rent it because they'd be sued. They have to tear it down," he said.

The government must be certain the homes it rents are safe to live in, said Gail Crossman, regional communications director for Transport Canada, which directs Public Works on an assembly of 18,500 acres it has held in Markham, Pickering and Uxbridge since the 1970s. The land was expropriated for an international airport but the plan for it was shelved in 1975.

Crossman refused to discuss individual cases, but said the government ordered eight leaseholders to leave this year for health and safety reasons or non-payment of rent. Some tenants were offered another, mould-free, home to rent, Crossman added. "This is just being a responsible landlord."

But Norm Peer, familiar to many locals as a furniture vendor at Stouffville Country Market, doesn't share this view.

Peer, who has lived 25 years with his family in a seven-bedroom home on the York-Durham Townline, said the government did nothing to maintain the house, which has a pool, air conditioning and a deck. "Everything that was done to this house, I did," said Peer, who has been ordered out by Dec. 31 follow-

ing a dispute over rent and mould inspection.

"We've been squawking now for five years about mould in the basement," he said this week, charging other houses previously cleared of tenants by Public Works are kept empty.

"They're finding any reason they can to clear those places."

Longtime observers say hundreds of houses, barns and other buildings on the airport lands have been demolished or otherwise destroyed in the past three decades. Pickering council this week paid for a survey to find how many buildings of architectural or historical value have been lost.

Laurie Barclay said her husband Gary's direct ancestor built the 1850s-era cottage the family rents in north Pickering. His routine request for attic insulation, she said, brought inspectors to the home who noted "possible toxic mould" after the couple refused to allow holes to be made in walls and the ceiling.

Like Leewood, the Barclays, still in negotiations with Transport Canada, were ordered out by Aug. 31 — even though no real evidence of toxic mould was found, Laurie Barclay maintained. "I guess they thought we were stupid and wouldn't read the report."

Long-range planning for a future air-

port on the federal lands began this year. Planning for some form of park on 7,500 acres of the assembly is also underway.

Not all tenants displaced by mould were angry. Public Works moved Ellon Barnett from an 1888-vintage farmhouse on the Pickering side of the York-Durham Townline to a smaller house in Uxbridge this year. "I look at it as conscientious on their part," Barnett said this week.

"There's no sense fixing up something they're going to be tearing down eventually."



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