

AIRPORT Update January 12, 2010
Council goes before The OMB on Jan 19th

As a new year begins, the airport expansion proposal in Algonquin Highlands continues to preoccupy both sides of a debate that is almost as old as the idea itself. On the “pro” side there is apparently a small number of councillors and a few individuals hoping to benefit from taxpayers’ money and on the “anti”, the great majority of the taxpayers who have other priorities.

The initial part of the much larger over-all expansion project is essentially the construction of a second and much longer runway. The project received a positive provisional funding decision from Building Canada in April, 2009 and has been under review in the Canadian Environmental Assessment process since July last year. Since then, with the exception of a decision to allow the rehabilitation of existing paved surfaces at the airport, neither the township nor the public has had any information on the progress of the assessment. This “delay” has caused concern among the projects’ boosters, but should give comfort to the majority of us who oppose the project for reasons that go far beyond environmental impacts.

It is important that we remember how the EA will proceed: What we are all waiting for at this point is a *Preliminary Screening Report* that will list any deficiencies in existing work or reports made available to the assessment team. This report will outline further work that may be required prior to a final decision being made on the application. The public has the opportunity to review and respond to this report over a set period of time (generally 45 to 60 days) and there is the provision for public meeting(s). The discussion of and response to public input must precede the publication of a final report and recommendations.

All of us, no matter our positions, should keep this in mind: At the least, it will be three to four months after the preliminary report is issued before a Certificate of Environmental Assessment is issued and nobody knows how much more work will be required or how much it will cost taxpayers to complete the work on this assessment .

OPPOSITION MATTERS

It should not come as a great surprise to our council that this project is being subjected to a rigorous Environmental assessment. The project has faced a strong and well informed opposition with legitimate concerns. The project plan lacks sufficient study, and proper public consultation. We, in the opposition, have been *warning of the necessity for proper environmental studies and assessment processes since at least 2007.*

It has been our hope that the time afforded to us all by the assessment process would be used by council to take a hard look at all of the true costs of the project and to review, in a rational manner, the claims for public benefit which have been used to justify it. To this date, there is no evidence that this has happened. The Township has declined to respond in any meaningful way to well researched suggestions that the second runway will add little real usability to the airport, proof that fire suppression and medical evacuation services will not be improved, or that there is little or nothing in this expansion to attract business investment or even operating cost recovery -in essence not real benefits.

At a time when our County council is openly (but reluctantly) discussing tax increases of 12-17% due to loss of funding from upper levels of government, airport expansion fans in our own council seem to feel that raising the annual cost of this one, limited use facility, from between \$80 and \$100 thousand dollars to perhaps \$200,000 and more is appropriate.

This month we have learned that the township continues to pay legal and consulting fees for a property expropriation most of us thought was completed more than a year ago. Will we ever know what this property has cost? What will the numerous other property easements and damages that are yet to be dealt with cost?

Is there time for us to convince council that it is best to be content with a reasonably inexpensive rehabilitation and to focus on minimizing the cost and maximizing the benefit of what we already have?

Council, with lawyers and consultants in tow goes to an OMB hearing on January 19th re the property expropriation.

Before that meeting on the 19th let Council and your other government representatives know by phone and email that they have wasted enough of your money already (the reeve has stated publicly that they have already spent over a million \$) and to PERMANENTLY stop this project now.

1. Eleanor Harrison – Reeve- (705) 489-2128 – eharrison@algonquinhighlands.ca
2. Tom Gardner – Councillor -Ward 2 - (705) 489-3703
tomgardner01@hotmail.com
3. Carol Moffatt- Councillor - Ward 2 - (705) 489-3554
cmoffatt@algonquinhighlands.ca
4. Provincial MPP – Rick Johnston - 705-324-6654
rjohnson.mpp.co@liberal.ola.org
5. Federal MP – Barry Devolin - (705) 324-2400, Toll Free: (866) 688-9881
DevolB@parl.gc.ca