



Township of Algonquin Highlands
1123 North Shore Rd.
Algonquin Highlands, ON K0M 1J1

Contact: Angie Bird, CAO
Phone: 705-489-2379

Information Release

For immediate release

Algonquin Highlands, ON, Tuesday, November 08, 2011 | 4:00:03 PM

The Township of Algonquin Highlands is pleased to announce its commitment to facilitating the relocation of the Ministry of Natural Resources' North East Region Fire Management Headquarters to the Haliburton-Stanhope Airport following a Special Meeting of Council held on Monday November 7, 2011.

"Today's Council discussion and decisions follow ten months of speculation, discussion and meetings about bringing realistic development to the airport. We've had a variety of irons in the fire for some time now and it's taken this long to consolidate them into something council could actually discuss and evaluate," said Reeve Carol Moffatt, adding that the commitment of intent and investment is required for the MNR to do its final investigation of the proposed lands.

A formal contract between the Township and the MNR is anticipated following the completion of the final investigation of the proposed lands.

By way of history, candidates in the 2010 election made it clear they were interested in working toward what they felt was a more viable development plan at the airport than the four thousand foot runway for which the Township had received a \$2 million Build Canada Fund grant. The Township's one-third contribution to the project is \$1 million dollars.

Council began seeking alternatives to the controversial runway project following the first formal meeting requested by the MNR in January 2011. In response, Reeve Moffatt requested a delegation with the provincial Minister of Infrastructure, the Honourable Bob Chiarelli at the annual ROMA/OGRA conference in February 2011.

"Minister Chiarelli and then-MPP Rick Johnson supported in principle a redirection of the funds at that time and we also had exploratory discussions with MP Barry Devolin about the federal appetite for changing the scope of the project. We've been working toward being able to make formal requests to both levels of government since then," she said.

Throughout the spring, information-gathering meetings and/or discussions were held with legal counsel, Todd Bros. Contracting, government officials, and the Township's engineering consultant Mike Osborne

more

who is the Airport Group Coordinator for Central & Western Canada of exp Services Inc. (formerly Trow Engineering).

Council's four-hour discussion at Monday's Special Meeting included a comprehensive update on the technical and engineering details contained in the existing Business Vision adopted by the previous Council in 2007, as well as a review of the MNR's operational requirements as outlined in a meeting held on November 2, 2011 where ministry consultants revealed an architectural footprint of their proposed location.

Those operational requirements include parking for staff and MNR fleet vehicles, shipping & receiving, a one-story building and an apron to accommodate two helicopters and two Twin Otters. Year round staffing will be 6 – 8 persons with 54 seasonal jobs for firefighting crews. Ministry site preparation is expected to begin in the fall of 2012 with construction slated to begin in April of 2013.

"We don't have a contract just yet but we're confident that the MNR is committed to relocating to the Stanhope Airport and we're coming to the table with what we have to offer that can facilitate that move," said Moffatt.

The Special Meeting of Council also included a review of the site plan contained in the Business Vision, clarification of a \$15,000 grant received from the Haliburton County Development Corporation (HCDC) toward a development plan for the airport, and a long list of questions from Councillors.

"The MNR's request to get on the land for its testing came sooner than expected, so the Special Meeting allowed Council members to review and assimilate the information from various meetings and ensure they were comfortable with it. It was an excellent discussion and while there are still many details to sort out, Council members are excited about the opportunity ahead," said Moffatt.

After the meeting Deputy Reeve Liz Danielsen said she was "thrilled" with being so close to reaching an agreement with the Ministry of Natural Resources. "I have my fingers crossed that the steps we agreed to take today could help to cement a new and long term relationship with them. I'm very pleased that Council has set a new direction and am looking forward to continuing the planning process for an airport that can, if we plan properly, operate in a much more cost effective way and even flourish."

Ward 1 Councillor Gord Henderson also expressed his pleasure at moving forward. "Having the MNR as a major client at the airport will benefit future economic development in Algonquin Highlands without the need to build an additional runway. It appears that we can still preserve our current funding partnership with both provincial and federal levels of government to achieve this goal. I feel it should be viewed as a good plan for the residents of our township," he said.

Decisions from the meeting included:

- Approval for the MNR to undertake hydrogeological and geotechnological test holes on the area proposed for their relocation;

more

- Approval for exp Services Inc. (formerly Trow Engineering) to undertake a topographical survey in order to provide MNR with technical specifications required for their proposed relocation;
- Approval to clear the identified (approx.) 8-acre parcel of land;
- Approval to invest no more than an estimated \$30,000 for the aforementioned tree-cutting and survey work;
- Approval for exp Services Inc., in conjunction with MNR, to investigate and determine for council's consideration the detailed costs of preparing a rough-graded site including aprons and taxiways;
- Approval for exp Services Inc. to reconfigure for council's consideration the potential site development drawings contained in the 2007 Business Vision; and
- Approval to formally request a change of scope for the Build Canada Fund grant from both the provincial and federal governments.

"It's a bit chicken-and-egg because the MNR can't offer a contract until they do their testing and they can't do their testing until some land is cleared and the land can't be cleared unless Council spends money to do so. In the end, Council decided the most cost-effective decision is to clear that parcel now instead of paying the contractor to move manpower and equipment twice," said Moffatt, adding that other than tree-clearing for the proposed MNR parcel, no groundworks will be undertaken until a contract with the MNR is signed and a full costing of the project is reviewed by Council.

Council made no firm decisions about any future development at the airport other than working with the MNR and ensuring that all decisions had more than one outcome. When the scope changes are approved and a contract is signed with the MNR, Council will table a discussion about rescinding the decision to build a runway in favour of alternate infrastructure options.

The recent departure of the Airport Manager allowed Council last month to fine-tune that job description with a view to enhanced opportunities for the airport. Council has delayed striking its Economic Development committee and determining specific use of the \$15,000 HCDC grant until the new Ward 3 Councillor is elected on November 14th and a new Airport Manager is hired.

Details on costing are expected from engineering consultant Mike Osborne in the next four weeks after the MNR completes its testing and site design process.

"We have nothing but opportunity ahead and the balls we've been juggling for the past year appear to be falling into place. We look forward to pitching our case for a scope change and showing the public what the MNR site will look like. It's all good news," said Moffatt.