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News

Hearing slated for Lost Nation Airport study

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The Lake County Port Authority plans to conduct a public hearing Feb. 22 to discuss the Lost Nation Airport study.

The meeting is scheduled for 6 p.m. at the Lost Nation Sports Park in Willoughby.

Board member Donald Galea said the purpose of the meeting is to present information and to allow for questions and answers.

"It's not a debate session, but an opportunity to comment on the study," Galea said last week at the Port Authority's monthly meeting. "We're trying to structure the meeting so we can get the most bang for the buck."

The first phase of the study, conducted by Cleveland-based Michael Baker Corp., includes a review of the contract and legal matters governing the airport, outside competitive issues, economic impact study, opportunity for an alternative location, and stakeholder and public meetings.

Port Authority officials have said it's possible this phase might determine the airport's best use and that the second phase will not be needed.

If necessary, that step would cost an estimated \$35,000 to \$40,000, and would analyze data from the first phase, list possible courses of action, host an additional public meeting and provide a final recommendation to the Port Authority board.

The Port Authority has promoted the airport as a regional asset that is useful to communities beyond Willoughby and Mentor. The knowledge gleaned from the study also could be applied to other regional airports.

Port Authority board members have said they want people to know they are looking at an objective study and there are no preconceived notions for the best course of action.

Stakeholder meetings were conducted Jan. 5 and Jan. 7 and at that time, airport users and operators said they valued the airport, board Member Anthony DeBevc said.

Other issues raised during those sessions include examining safety issues and the cost to the county to take over the airport.

Lake County commissioners have expressed an interest in the county taking over the airport's assets from the city of Willoughby and have sought federal funding to help fund the potential transaction.

Before a decision is made on whether to do this, commissioners asked the Port Authority to conduct the study to determine the best use of the airport land.

In 1996, the city took its last Airport Improvement Program grant from the FAA. Attached to each accepted grant was the stipulation that the city continued to operate the airport for another 20 years.

In 2016, the city or any future owner would no longer be required to keep the airport open unless new FAA grants were accepted.

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