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News

Port authority, residents discuss future of Lost Nation Airport

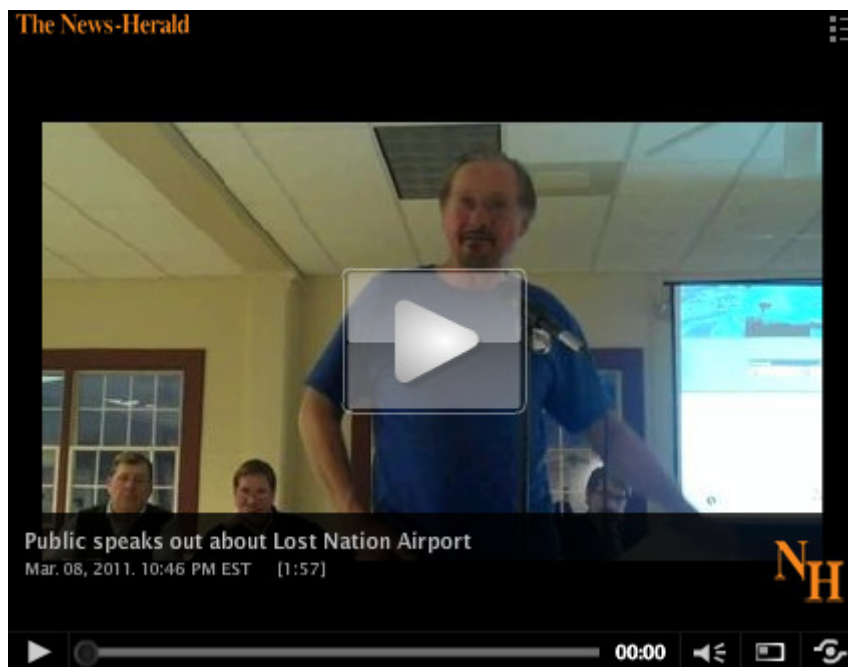
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By John Arthur Hutchison and Max Reinhart

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Lake County residents on Tuesday got a glimpse of what the future might hold for Lost Nation Airport in Willoughby.

The Lake County Port Authority had a meeting at Mentor Beach Park on Lake Shore Boulevard in Mentor to discuss information gathered thus far on the situation and seek public input to determine the best possible use of the airport.



Officials explained there are four potential solutions, each with distinct pros and cons, for what could be done with the property.

Paul Strack, a representative for the Cleveland-based Michael Baker Corp., which is conducting the study, walked the audience through the possibilities.

Strack said the airport could continue operating as it does now or close either or both of its two runways.

Staying the course, Strack said, would be beneficial to the 111 people who depend on the airport for their livelihood. However, that option has the highest operational cost.

At the other end of the spectrum, closing both runways would create an issue between the Federal Aviation Administration and the City of Willoughby because the city accepted funds from the FAA in 1996 under the stipulation the airport remain open until

2016. Federal Aviation Administration funding requires airports to stay open for 20 years after dollars are accepted.

Shutting down one runway would free up land for use by both the cities of Willoughby and Mentor. However, depending on which runway is closed, the airport might be rendered unusable in certain conditions or could lose its status as Lake County's main airport, which each Ohio county is required to have.

Should any of the runways shut down, the open space would likely be used for residential or retail purposes said Michael Cantor, a representative from Allegro Realty Advisors.

A vast majority of the those who spoke during the public portion of the meeting were in favor of keeping the airport fully operational, despite the cost. Mentor resident Ed Keyse warned that there would be no going back if the determination is made to close the airport.

"You have a facility that you couldn't replace for millions if you got rid of it and then decided you wanted one later," he said.

In September 2006, the city of Willoughby asked commissioners to take over the airport's assets.

Commissioners later asked the Lake County Port Authority to study the best use of the airport facility and make a recommendation to commissioners before they made a decision.

Baker is currently finishing the second and final phase of the study, which includes evaluation of the feasible uses for the facility and prioritization, meetings and a final recommendation to the Port Authority board, which would make a recommendation to commissioners.

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