

News

## Port Authority to select contractor for Lost Nation Airport study

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The Lake County Port Authority has moved closer to selecting a consultant that will help recommend the best course for the future of Lost Nation Airport in Willoughby.

Port Authority board members recently narrowed their choices to seven consultants, and from there narrowed the list to a final three that were interviewed on Monday.

The Port Authority board on Thursday voted to select Cleveland-based Michael Baker Jr. Inc. as the preferred consultant and now will enter into contract negotiations that will include the price for the study, said Port Authority Executive Director John Loftus.

Cleveland-based Delta Airport Consultants Inc. is the second choice if an agreement cannot be reached with the Baker group, Loftus said.

The third contractor of the final three was listed as Columbus-based Crawford, Murphy & Tilly Inc.

Board member Tony Debevc said the Baker group seemed to have the best package of the three.

"They've done both airport planning, airport expansions and also have done decommissioning," Debevc said, adding that the consultant is well-known for its work within the county on a number of matters.

The method of selecting a contractor through a preferred and second choice and agreeing to enter negotiations with the Baker group was consistent with Federal Aviation Administration guidelines, Loftus said.

He said it was important to follow these guidelines because it will likely take FAA funding to proceed with the consultant's recommendation about what to do with the airport.

Lake County commissioners initially asked the Port Authority to conduct the study. So what the study unveils will be an important step for the airport's future and for the decision commissioners will make on whether to assume the airport's obligations and operations from the city of Willoughby with the help of federal funding.

No matter what decision is made about the airport, it will remain open until at least 2016, because Willoughby last accepted improvement funds from the FAA in 1996 and each time that money is accepted it comes with a 20-year obligation to keep an airport open.

Loftus said the Port Authority will have a public hearing soon when it comes to the study and anyone interested in the airport's future will have the chance to voice their opinion.

Mentor resident Bruce Landeg attended the Port Authority meeting and was encouraged with the Port Authority's selection of the Baker

group.

He said it appears an objective evaluation will be conducted.

"I think you made a fine choice," Landeg said.

"As a resident of Lake County, I have a concern about the airport as an economic tool versus an economic white elephant. ... The analysis of the flights and what they really do is something that the public really needs to hear from the study."

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