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News

Officials: Airport study going well

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The first phase of a study to determine the best use for the Lost Nation Airport in Willoughby is progressing well, Lake County Port Authority officials say.

The study is conducted by Cleveland-based Michael Baker Corp. The first phase 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.

Executive Director John Loftus has said it's possible this phase might determine the airport's best use and that the second phase will not be needed.

If necessary, the second phase 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.

Board member Anthony DeBevc said it will be interesting to see what stakeholders say during upcoming meetings.

"The jury is still out on whether we will need the Phase 2 portion," he said.

Loftus said the upcoming public meeting is now slated for January or February.

"It will be the test for how well we've done the study," he said.

DeBevc said the decision to spend the \$60,000 for the first phase to study was right on.

Board member Donald Galea believes once the first phase is completed, it should be fairly easy to decide whether to conduct the second phase.

"We've narrowed it down and refined it, and I think there will be enough information available to make a decision," Galea said.

DeBevc said the first phase has taken a little longer than anticipated, but that's because many questions have been asked.

"We're doing our due diligence," he said.

In other action, Loftus said it appears doubtful that the Cleveland Foundation's Lake-Geauga Fund will provide a \$50,000 grant for the Port Authority to hire a coastal development coordinator.

Rather, the philanthropic foundation is proposing the Port Authority consider a larger grant request over a three-year period to hire a coordinator who would help the agency conduct bond financing, Loftus said.

Bond financing can pump money into the local economy and provide the Port Authority with revenue based on fees collected from loans that are generated through the issuance of bonds.

The Port Authority is trying to promote a newly available bond-financing program that is available through an allocation to Lake County from the American Reinvestment and Recovery Act.

The Port Authority has \$12 million of this bond financing available for municipalities and another \$18 million available for businesses looking to expand.

The advantage of these government-issued bonds is they are generally issued at a lower interest rate for borrowers and the investors who hold the bonds can collect their interest without tax.

The Port Authority's allocation must be used before the end of 2010.

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