

NOTES ON MEETING WITH
AIRPORT HANGER LEASEHOLDERS
6:00 PM THURSDAY FEBRUARY 20, 2014
COUNCIL CHAMBERS

ATTENDING:

LEASE HOLDERS: Erik Wyles, Dale Tuck, Rod Head and Gord Glover
ADMINISTRATION: Loretta Thompson, CAO
GUEST: Jean Bourdua

ABSENT:

LEASE HOLDER: Janet Hollock representing Barbara Solly

Mrs. Thompson opened the meeting at 6:05 PM and welcomed everyone for attending at short notice. She advised this is a "Without Prejudice" meeting to allow for an open frank discussion to try and find solutions.

Mrs. Thompson provided a brief background on how the Town acquired the airport, the capital and maintenance costs that the Town has put into the airport and the revenue generate by airport since taking it over in 1995. Mrs. Thompson outlined the estimated costs to upgrade the pavement and airside electrical based on an evaluation and condition report done in 2009 as:

Repairs and overlay	\$5,987,500
Electrical	\$2,257,500

She explained that Council passed a resolution to serve notice to begin the process to cease airport operations in March 2013. Since then they have been in discussion with the M.D. of Greenview about taking over the airport. The M.D. has indicated they are not interested. Based on the M.D.'s decision and the Council resolution passed in 2013, Transport Canada was notified that the Grande Cache airport would be closed and abandoned as of September 18, 2014. Mrs. Thompson noted that the Town simply cannot afford to operate the airport.

Mrs. Thompson opened the meeting for discussion.

Rod mentioned he had been given a key to access his hanger when the Town locked the gate which accessed the airside of the airport. Dale and Erik indicated they did not receive a key. Gord said SRD is at the other end of the runway and can access their site from another direction.

Gord indicated that AESRD has done an assessment to determine the cost of bringing the runway up to a standard so they could bring it up to PLR rating for air tankers. The cost estimate was upwards of \$20,000,000. Now they can only use lighter aircraft. SRD now operates an active helibase at the airport. Gord made the statement that losing the airport or some degree of functionality at the airport would be a loss to the Town.

Gord also stated that the proposed closing date of September 18, 2014 is important because SRD is the airport in Edson is being renovated this summer and there are no other airports in the area, other than Grande Cache, for water tankers in the area. They bring their heavy water bombers in from Rocky Mountain House, Grande Prairie and (he mentioned another location but I did not catch it). They use fixed wing for aerial detection. They have been known to assist with rescue operations by bringing in family members of those being rescued if their condition is critical and it doesn't look like they will make it. They would use fixed winged aircraft for this. Gord also mentioned that of the 13 fire lookouts in this area, five of them are serviced out of Grande Cache. There would also be a loss for the aboriginal communities (notes are not clear enough to determine how). They also man two firefighting units they bring in from Grande Cache. SRD work with three Wildfire Management Areas to develop Fire Management Plans. It appears they consider the Grande Cache Airport as a vital link in their provincial operation.

The position of the hanger leaseholders was that they wanted the airport to continue to operate in some manner. Some of the questions the leaseholders presented were:

- Do we need to have lights on the airport? This would mean the airport would not be accessible during the night.
- Could minor maintenance at the end of the runway be done where the condition is the worst and allow the runway to continue to operate at least for smaller planes?
- What about community safety without the airport? How would medevac get in and out?
- Could the airport/runway be reclassified/decertified?
- Has the town approached the government about funding to upgrade the runway?
- What about the legality of closing the airport in relation to hanger leaseholders? How would the Town compensate them for the loss of their investment in a facility that they had no idea would be closing?
- What does the Town plan to do with the airport once it is closed? Will they be removing the runway; leaving the runway in place with markings; what about the terminal building?

Hanger Leaseholders expressed their concern/disappointment that they were not advised of the closure of the airport until recently. As users, they believe they should have been involved in the discussion.

The possibility of someone or a group taking on the airport as a private airstrip was discussed. It was generally believed that the cost of liability insurance would make this option prohibitive.

The discussion kept coming back to continuing to operate the airport with limited maintenance perhaps usable for the fire season months – May to October.

Mrs. Thompson advised that Transport Canada has been served notice that the Town would be closing the airport September 18, 2014. She has contacted Transport Canada to see if this process can be put on hold to allow more discussion. She is waiting for a response.

Mrs. Thompson suggested the leaseholders attend either a Council meeting or a Committee of the Whole meeting to present their position. They were not prepared to do so at this time.

Mrs. Thompson committed to keep them informed of the actions Council may decide to take in this regard.

The meeting adjourned at 8:00 PM.