

Warton-Keppel airport plan rejected

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By Rob Gowan

The Warton-Keppel International Airport board will make a second attempt to have a corrective action plan approved by Transport Canada after their first submission was rejected.

The board's submission deadline for the new CAP is Nov. 12. If the second CAP is rejected, the board has one more attempt to submit an acceptable plan.

Board chairman Dwight Burley said Tuesday that in the board's first CAP submitted at the end of August, the wording made it clear that any work to be done at the airport was upon the approval of the owners, the municipalities of South Bruce Peninsula and Georgian Bluffs. But Burley said Transport Canada has come back to them asking that any such conditions be removed from the CAP.

"We filed it to meet the deadline to see if Transport Canada would accept it and they did not accept it," Burley said. "They basically came back and said they want a firm commitment that the corrective action for the infrastructure will be done."

In the summer an inspection by Transport Canada found that the main runway at the airport had deteriorated to the point where it needed to be replaced. The 5,000-foot-long, 150-foot wide strip has had some crack sealing, patch work and paving of edges done, but is now about 30 years old, about twice its original life expectancy. Approach lighting also had to be upgraded.

The board has now directed Burley and airport manager Ken Hamilton to submit a CAP with the assumption that the councils will come up with the funds necessary to do the work, either through grants or some other means.

A safety management review plan was also rejected by Transport Canada, but Burley feels that plan needs some minor adjustments before it is approved.

"The bottom line is if Transport Canada does accept our CAP submission, the councils have the final say whether or not we are going to proceed with the work,," Burley said.

Burley said the plan will include a schedule of when the proposed work would be done at the airport, likely over the next 18 months.

Burley said if Transport Canada accepts the CAP, then it will be up to the two councils to decide how it wants to proceed with the work.

"If they don't follow through with Transport Canada's acceptance of the CAP submission, we know what is going to happen," Burley said, adding the airport will lose its certification.

Regardless of whether the airport remains certified or it loses its certification and becomes a registered aerodrome, some infrastructure work has to be done, Burley said.

"We are very positive that councils understand and we are going to do everything we can to follow through with everything and get the infrastructure up to where it needs to be," he said.

Burley said the airport board is in the process of figuring out what work needs to be done and the cost to do so.

"We are going to proceed with an engineer to prepare the necessary documents, follow the proper protocol and allow contractors to bid on the various portions," said Burley. "That is a process that will probably happen in the next month or so.

"We are trying to get firm figures so we know what we are talking about."

Burley said the airport benefits the whole area by bringing visitors and business into the region.

"We have many, many people who are inquiring and want to come in, but when they see how our infrastructure is they say, you fix it and we will come," said Burley.

"I am a firm believer we need to keep the airport and we need to keep it certified, as it is the only certified airport in the whole area. We need to keep that in order to promote this whole region."