

Airport owners seek assistance

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Municipalities hope federal, provincial governments will help pay for required repairs

Both South Bruce Peninsula and Georgian Bluffs councils have agreed to explore a couple of avenues for funding the repairs needed at the Wiarton-Keppel International Airport.

South Bruce Peninsula on Tuesday and Georgian Bluffs on Wednesday agreed to send a joint letter to Bruce-Grey-Owen Sound MP Larry Miller requesting federal financial assistance for the work.

A new Canada Build fund, which will be in partnership with the three levels of government, is expected to be in place some time in 2014.

Georgian Bluffs say Miller has indicated to them that there will be money available in the new fund for airports, however he needed something in writing from the two councils.

Councils also agreed to direct the airport board to work with the airport manager to encourage business owners to complete Southwestern Ontario Development Fund applications indicating their willingness to locate to the area based on airport repairs, which are required when making applications to the provincial fund.

"Both municipalities realize that whatever the figure will be, it will be a burden on the ratepayer," Mayor John Close said of the cost of repairs.

"We are just doing our due diligence and we are going after (the provincial fund) to see if there is any funding through them, and we are going to explore what federal monies are available."

The airport board was directed in the summer to submit a plan on how it plans to proceed with repairs at the airport after an inspection by Transport Canada found the main runway had deteriorated to the point it needed to be replaced. The 30- year- old runway is about double its life expectancy and while the 5,000-foot long, 150-foot wide strip has had some crack sealing, patch work and paving of edges done, it needs to be repaved. Approach lighting also has to be upgraded.

The airport board is on its second attempt at drawing up a corrective action plan (CAP) that meets Transport Canada approval after the first was rejected. The board has three opportunities to have a CAP approved.

Board chairman Dwight Burley has said the revised CAP, which is due Nov. 12, will include a schedule for the proposed work to be done, likely over the next 18 months. At the request of Transport Canada, the submission also removes the conditions that the repairs were contingent on councils' approval. However, the councils will still have the final say on how or if they want to proceed.

Burley has said Transport Canada has indicated if the work isn't done, the airport will lose its certification.

The board is in the process of trying to determine how much the required upgrades will cost. Past estimates have put the figure between \$2 million and \$6 million, but the board wants to get an

updated estimate and all other possible options, including only paving a portion of the runway.

The councils each approved another \$6,000 to add to the \$10,000 that had been budgeted for the request for proposal budget to secure an engineer to figure out exactly what the repairs will cost.

"This will give us the opportunity to have an engineer prepare the proper tender documents, get it out there to all the contractors to get true figures instead of estimates to get back to the board so we can say it's going to cost X number of dollars to do A, B and C," Burley said Wednesday night.