

Solberg

From Page B-1

has gripped the township for years.

"I still think it's very unclear what is meant by a 'reasonable modernization of the airport.' The Solbergs continue to fail to present a clear and definitive proposal," township attorney James Rhatican said Friday.

"This letter does not present a definitive position or statement of any kind other than they wish to expand the airport."

Berger wrote that limiting the use of the airport as described by Rhatican in an Aug. 29 letter "is not a viable option for either the Solbergs or the aviation community."

According to township appraisals, Rhatican wrote, development of the airport would be limited to conservation,

recreation, agriculture and principal or ancillary airport uses. Ancillary uses would be limited to a restaurant, museum, offices, a gift shop, a passenger lounge, a conference room and a classroom for flying lessons, according to the township.

Rhatican wrote the ancillary uses would be limited to 35,000 square feet. Additional hangar and maintenance space would be limited to 150,000 square feet.

"If modernization includes an expansion that would negatively impact natural resources and open space around the airport, I doubt the Township Committee would consider that as an option," Rhatican said.

Berger did not return calls seeking comment. Suzanne Solberg Nagle, one of the airport's three co-owners, said she had nothing to add to the letter. The latest development follows the Township Committee's approval of a two-week extension the Solbergs asked for so they could continue to mull over the township's offer and write a response. The extension moved the Solbergs' deadline, set by the township, from Aug. 25 to Friday.

The township's latest offer is the higher of two recently commissioned appraisals — the other was \$20.5 million — of the property.

Township officials have attempted to purchase the 625 acres of land surrounding the airport and the airport's development rights to safeguard against the possibility of runway expansion that could accommodate larger planes or small jet traffic. Township officials have argued an airport expansion would depreciate neighboring property values and hurt residents' quality of life.

The Solbergs have repeatedly said they want to retain the land surrounding the 102-acre airport as a buffer from other properties. The Solbergs also have accused the township of trying to grab the family's land through eminent domain.

The issue went to voters through a \$22 million bond referendum in May. The referendum, which passed by a margin of 3,474 to 2,776, allowed the township to continue to pursue the property.

Rhatican said the Township Committee has scheduled a special meeting Tuesday to discuss the letter. Whether the meeting would be open to the public was not clear Friday.

□

Brandon Lausch can be reached at (908) 782-2300

Courier News
September 9, 2006

Solberg family wants modernization plans to be in airport offer

By BRANDON LAUSCH
Staff Writer

READINGTON — The Solberg family is willing to continue negotiations with the township over its \$21.7 million offer to buy Solberg-Hunterdon Airport's development rights as long as the township is willing to "entertain a reasonable modernization

plan for the airport," according to a letter sent Thursday by the Solbergs' legal counsel, Lawrence Berger.

But Berger's six-sentence letter, which does not specify what a modernization plan would include, adds more questions than answers to a debate that

See SOLBERG, Page B-4