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Solbergs file for deadline extension

Airport's owners seek more time to consider Readington's offer.

By BRANDON LAUSCH
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READINGTON -- The Solberg family has requested two more weeks to consider the Township Committee's \$21.7 million offer to purchase the development rights to Solberg-Hunterdon Airport because the three Solberg siblings are not unanimous on how to proceed, Mayor Gerard Shamey said Thursday.

Shamey said a letter from the family, faxed to the township Thursday by Solberg Aviation counsel Larry Berger, asks for a two-week extension so the airport's co-owners, Thor and Lorraine Solberg and Suzanne Solberg-Nagle, can decide how to respond to the offer.

"I think it's fair to say that in order to get a result that benefits the reasonable objectives of all the parties, including the taxpayers, the township and the airport, we can't speculate on what the response is going to be," Thor Solberg said.

By sending the letter, the Solbergs met today's deadline, set by the township, to either accept the offer or to request more time for deliberations.

The township announced Aug. 7 the results of two commissioned appraisals -- \$20.5 million and \$21.7 million -- of the property, which fell under the \$22 million bond ordinance passed by voters in May to purchase the airport's development rights and to guard against possible runway expansion for larger planes or jet traffic.

The Solbergs have repeatedly said they have no intentions to expand the 102-acre airport and have claimed the township has plans to use eminent domain to obtain the property, which spans more than 700 acres.

The township has said eminent domain will be used only as a last resort to resolve the decades-long debate over the airport's future.

Shamey said Township Committee members were being asked Thursday night whether they would approve the extension, which Shamey said was likely. At the end of the additional two weeks, Shamey said, the Township Committee will request a written explanation of the Solbergs' position and what role the family sees a mediator playing in the negotiations.

The Solbergs have for months contended that hiring a professional mediator is the best way to reach a fair settlement. The township has argued that negotiations should be directly between the township and the family.

"It's a big decision, there are a lot of different aspects to it, so it takes time to review and thoroughly understand it," Solberg-Nagle said of the township's offer. "It's nothing you can speed-read through."

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