

Solbergs get time to mull \$21M sale

Readington OKs two-week extension to consider development rights offer

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READINGTON — The Township Committee on Friday granted a request by the Solbergs for a two-week extension so the family can further consider the township's \$21.7 million offer to purchase the development rights to Solberg-Hunterdon Airport, township Administrator Vita Mekovetz said.

Airport owners Thor and Lorraine Solberg and Suzanne Solberg-Nagle sent the request to the township Thursday, a day ahead of the family's deadline to either accept the offer or request more time.

At the end of the additional two weeks, the Township Committee will request a written explanation of the Solbergs' position and what role the family sees a mediator playing in the negotiations, Mayor Gerard Shamey said.

The Solbergs have repeatedly argued that hiring a professional mediator is the best way to resolve the decades-long dispute over the airport's future.

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The township has countered that deliberations should be between officials and the family, though Shamey has said a mediator will be considered if it prompts the Solbergs to negotiate.

The debate over the airport's future centers on the township's contention the Solbergs plan to extend the paved runway at the 102-acre airport to accommodate larger planes or small jet traffic.

Township officials have said they're fearful the airport's master plan, which shows an expansion of the main runway from 3,735 feet to 4,890 feet, could become a reality.

Officials have argued an airport expansion would depreciate neighboring property values and hurt residents' quality of life.

The Solbergs have repeatedly denied those claims and have said they want to retain the 625 acres surrounding the 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 township has said eminent domain would be used only as a last resort to resolve the dispute.