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Airport owners open to talks

Solberg representative declares land-sale negotiations possible.

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READINGTON TWP. | The owners of Solberg Airport are willing to negotiate a sale but haven't offered township officials a firm proposal.

An attorney representing the owners responded Thursday to the township's \$21.7 million proposal for land surrounding the airport and the airport's development rights.

While township Mayor Gerard Shamey called the response vague, he is heartened by one point.

"What is in the letter is they're apparently interested in selling," Shamey said. "So that's good news."

In a letter to township officials dated Sept. 7, Lawrence Berger wrote the airport owners are willing to negotiate as long as the township is "willing to entertain a reasonable modernization plan for the airport."

Berger also wrote "freezing the airport in place as the Town has previously suggested" and limiting its use isn't "a viable option for either the Solbergs or the aviation community."

The committee scheduled a special closed-door session for Tuesday to discuss the letter, but Shamey doesn't expect they will take action.

The township wants to strike a deal to preserve 624 acres of space around the airport and ensure the airport doesn't expand. The family that owns the airport has said they don't have immediate plans to expand the airport.

They have also said land was not for sale.

Past negotiations fell apart with the sides at odds largely over runway length. Township officials wanted to restrict runways to only minor improvements and claimed the airport owners wanted to preserve the right to significantly expand them, although the owners have denied that was their intent.

Co-owner Suzy Solberg Nagle referred questions to Berger, who did not return a call seeking comment Friday.

Shamey doesn't know what Berger means by "reasonable modernization." He said township officials would not consider it reasonable if it calls for enlarging the airport into the space the township wants to preserve.

Township special counsel James Rhatican said Berger failed to specify his role in the issue, as township officials requested. In a letter to Rhatican earlier this month, Berger wrote the Solbergs, who co-own the airport, didn't agree on how to handle the issue.

"Given those facts and what we've been told is a lack of unanimity of the Solbergs themselves has made discussions with the Solbergs virtually impossible," Rhatican said.

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