

HR EARLY 1990'S

Solberg asks township, public to take part in master planning

READINGTON TWP. — Solberg Aviation Company has proposed that the Township Committee, the public and county officials take part in its long-range master plan study.

Copies of its lengthy proposal were sent to committee members over the weekend.

On Tuesday, Sept. 4, the committee discussed taking over Solberg Airport through the power of eminent domain, to prevent expansion. Mayor Stephen Mirota said he thinks 95 percent of the cost would be covered through a grant from the Federal Aviation Administration (FAA). The township would have to make up the difference, using the airport's income, he said.

Solberg said he is not willing to sell and would resist a takeover. He and his sisters, Suzanne Nagle and Lorraine Solberg, are seeking an FAA grant of up to \$100,000 to undertake a master plan that will cover a wide array of topics influencing its growth over the next two decades.

Those topics include forecasting demands on the airport in a 30-mile radius, a comprehensive environmental review, facility requirements, airport layout, access by roads, a schedule of proposed development and economic feasibility.

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The Solberg's proposal reads, in part: "It is important that this study consider the environmental and community concerns expressed by host Readington Township officials and the airport's neighboring communities and citizens. Thus, an expanded comprehensive environmental review and community/public involvement program had been outlined to accomplish this effort."

Thor Solberg said on Monday he has no plans for expansion at present, but that the airport should be prepared to handle small corporate planes up to the size of four to five passenger jets. These are quieter than many other small planes commonly flown from the airport, he said. There would not be many such flights, and they would come and go at times when most people are away at work, he added.

"The beauty of corporate activity is that flights take place when most people are not home, whereas recreational

flying is done at the peak times for people to be at home," he said.

Asked if he considered his and his sisters' goals compatible with the wishes of the Township Committee and his neighbors, Solberg replied, "Absolutely."

He continued, "This would be giving the governing body a real role in our planning. The point I've been trying to make with the Township Committee is that the airport is a resource, but it's always perceiving the worst...A plan, no matter what it says, is valuable only if it can be implemented. Without that, it will be nothing but a plan."

That is, he said, the airport cannot be expanded without local approvals. And, the FAA cannot over-ride local jurisdiction, he said.

There are three runways, two grass, one paved. The longest runway is 3,735 feet long with a 305-foot safety over-run.

The 58-acre facility is part of 727 acres owned by the family.