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Scugog orders in-depth testing for dirty dirt at Greenbank airport

Councillors agree to spend up to \$50,000 on bore hole tests in search of contaminated soil



Greenbank Airport

Photo by Chris Tanouye

SCUGOG -- Ward 1 councillor Betty Sommerville at the front gates of Greenbank Airport. The Township of Scugog will take bore hole samples to check and see if the fill delivered to the airport for the expansion work is contaminated or not. March 14, 2015

Port Perry Star

By [Chris Hall](#)

SCUGOG -- Scugog will spend up to \$50,000 carrying out a series of bore hole tests at the Greenbank airport to check for contaminated soil at the Hwy. 47 airbase.

The Township has come under fire from nearby homeowners and the community at large since dump trucks starting lining up almost daily at the Greenbank Airways site to deliver dirt. Along with the soil shipments came questions from the community regarding the possibility of contaminated dirt.

Airport officials have estimated that it will take about 2.5 million cubic metres of soil, or roughly 250,000 truckloads, to complete the ambitious upgrades planned for the small airbase.

On March 12, a small number of councillors -- only four of seven were able to attend the sudden session -- unanimously endorsed a motion that will see the Township retain qualified environmental consultants to complete a minimum of 10 random bore hole soil tests at varying depths. At least one of those test sites will be at the southern section of the airport property where the most soil shipments have been dumped.

The sample sites will be determined by the environmental consultant in conjunction with Glen Smith, Scugog's director of public works and parks. Council has also ordered that a Township employee be on site when the testing occurs.

"(Council) believes this is something that is necessary for transparency to the public," said Scugog Mayor Tom Rowett. "It's an absolute necessary expenditure."

Scugog has earmarked \$100,000 in the funds it collects in dumping fees from the airport expansion for legal and environmental costs. The \$50,000 for the testing will come from that account.

It's expected that it will take two weeks at the most for locating work to be carried out at the site to ensure there are no underground utilities. Following that, the testing should take about four weeks to complete, Mr. Smith told councillors.

The soil test results are expected to be known at that time, said Mayor Rowett.

"I hope there are not any bad results and that's for the sake of the residents of Greenbank but I'm not naive to possibly think ... stuff couldn't slip by" the initial testing process that scans truckloads for contaminants, he said.

Scugog's reaction to any positive tests for dirty dirt would depend on what type of result, added the mayor.

"It would have to be resolved and action will be determined based on the magnitude of any sort of contaminant," said Mayor Rowett. "If it is an environmental concern, we see it as very serious -- it's not a matter we'll take lightly."

The urgency to get the work done now, he stressed, is to get testing equipment onto the airport site while the ground is still frozen.

"The safety of the residents, the water and the soil ... is our primary concern and we were elected to make sure the citizens' voices are heard and this is something that is necessary to know that as things move forward we have absolute confidence in things there," said the mayor.

The tests, he added, "should be no surprise" to airport officials.

John Packer, the airport manager, confirmed that in-depth testing was brought up in talks with the Township.

“We’re in agreement with it. It’s no problem; if it was, we’d stop them,” said Mr. Packer. “It’s something discussed with them and it’s up to them to do it if they want it done.”

Added Mr. Packer: “But any gold they find, we’re not sharing.”

Ward 1 Councillor Betty Somerville, who represents residents near the Greenbank airport, moved the motion on March 12 to carry out the bore hole tests.

“We had to do it,” she said of council’s decision, noting the tests will go “right down to the native soil.”

Coun. Somerville hoped the testing will give nearby residents a little peace of mind.

“I think it will them some reassurance. I don’t know if it will stop the worrying, but it will give them some reassurance,” she said. “The only way we’re going to know is if we do random bore holes and that will make people happy.”

“I’ll be ecstatic if they find nothing and then we know they’re bring clean fill in,” said the Ward 1 councillor before adding, “but I’ll be pretty upset if we find something.”

Also applauding council’s decision to conduct random bore hole sampling were officials with the Lakeridge Citizens for Clean Water group, who have kept a keen eye on the expansion project since it began.

“I think it is very important this is being done to give us some confidence the soil in there is clean and the monitoring they’ve done is doing the job,” said the LCCW’s Ian McLaurin. “Bore hole testing is the best way to get down to see what’s been dumped there in the past. I think it’s a great thing.”

As for how the expansion work is proceeding at the rural airbase, Mr. Packer said the wet weather has slowed things down in recent weeks.

For a week or two, said the airport manager, there’s been an average of 40 to 80 trucks a day delivering soil shipments. For a stretch of five or six days, he continued, there were no trucks at all.

“It’s been very slow,” said Mr. Packer. “We’re certainly not running our (limit of) 200 trucks a day.”

The current fill agreement between the Township and Greenbank Airways expires on March 31 and the two sides are expected to meet on March 23 to renew negotiations. According to Mr. Packer, the airport has finally received the long-awaited drawings from the Ministry of

Transportation for a new entrance to the airbase off of Hwy. 47 and Greenbank Airways “is following through with that,” he said.

HOW THIS IMPACTS YOU

- Scugog receives a fee for every truck that delivers fill to the Greenbank airport. According to the Township, it’s estimated there would be almost \$350,000 in the account at the end of 2014. Scugog also estimated early in its 2015 budget discussions there would be about \$282,000 in the fill reserve at the end of this year.
- The possibility of contaminated fill has been an ongoing concern amongst Greenbank residents and the issue was a hot-button topic in the 2014 municipal election.
- Results from the tests should be known by early May, with Township officials vowing “transparency” to the public.

Reporter Chris Hall covers the Township of Scugog for Metroland Media Group’s Durham Region Division