

Tottenham Airfield to hold open house to discuss concerns with residents

Transport Canada says public consultation not required

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The front entrance of the Tottenham Aerodrome on Highway 9. - Metroland file photo

The Tottenham Airfield Corporation (TAC) will be holding an open house this summer to try and address the growing number of concerns from neighbouring residents about the large-scale fill operation at the Highway 9 property.

Martin Zimmer, who is a consultant working for TAC, says the open house will be held in either July or August.

"We see this as an opportunity to have our neighbours visit and see what has been developed (a new runway is in operation), ask questions on the works being constructed, voice concerns, and allow TAC an opportunity to respond and discuss the measures that we have in place to protect the environment," he wrote.

He said the consulting team will be on hand to address questions on soil testing and what's being done to ensure the materials meet the conditions of the site plan agreement, and to also provide information on groundwater well monitoring, drainage, and how the operation is being managed.

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Recently, New Tecumseth council voted to revoke the site's fill permit over concerns about the soil quality and migration problems with neighbouring properties, but the decision was walked back two weeks later after the town's solicitor advised council to do so.

According to the site plan agreement, the town has to give the company an opportunity to fix any issues at the site before the permit can be revoked. By not following the terms of the agreement, the solicitor said the town would have a difficult time defending the move in court.

In April, TAC president John Bailey sent a letter to the town stating his company is working to resolve the issues, including the removal of PCB-contaminated soils from the property.

Town spokesperson Tatjana Milne said staff are in the process of identifying the issues and establishing a timeline for resolution.

Milne said the list of concerns includes sediment control breaches, timely reporting, standard operating procedure, and importation of fill in accordance with the terms and conditions of the agreement, among other issues.

"Staff will be continuing to work with TAC and, as further directed by council, be providing twice annual reports on the status of the site," she said.

Coun. Shira Harrison McIntyre, whose ward contains the property, believes Transport Canada should step in to determine whether the operation is in the public's best interest.

Transport Canada spokesperson Steve Bone said the operation is not required to conduct a public consultation since it started before the amendments to the Canadian Aviation Regulations (Aerodrome Work Consultations — CAR 307) came into effect on Jan. 1, 2017.

"The amendments were made to support aerodrome development in a way that considers safety and the potential impacts on communities, and to give Canadians a platform to make their voices heard before an aerodrome is built or changed," he wrote.

While some members of council and many residents would like to see the federal government take on a more active role at the property, Bone said Transport Canada's jurisdiction "pertains only to matters that are considered integral to aeronautics."

He said this includes aerodromes and all related buildings or services at aerodromes that are used for aviation purposes.

"The question of the application of environmental or other laws is not a question that Transport Canada can determine," he wrote.



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