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Soil shipments stop at Greenbank airport after permit expires

Scugog, airbase officials trying to work out new agreement



Greenbank Airport construction

Jason Liebrechts / Metroland

SCUGOG -- Construction continues on the expansion at Greenbank Airport on Hwy 47. March 16, 2015

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SIDEBAR

HOW THIS IMPACTS YOU

- Scugog seeks to double the amount it receives per cubic metre, from \$1 to \$2
- The proposed new agreement will provide the Township with a guarantee of more insurance coverage, plus a larger security deposit
- Scugog plans to stop weekend soil shipments, banning Saturday deliveries

Port Perry Star
By [Chris Hall](#)

SCUGOG -- Dirt deliveries to the Greenbank airport have been brought to a halt after the airbase's site alteration permit expired at the end of March.

Scugog officials and representatives for Greenbank Airways have met several times in recent weeks, but could not hammer out a new agreement before the most recent permit expired on March 31. As a result, soil shipments ceased at the Regional Road 47 airbase on April 1.

Scugog has introduced a series of amendments to the agreement, including prohibiting trucks from delivering soil on Saturdays and doubling the amount the Township receives for each cubic metre of dirt dumped, from \$1 to \$2. Scugog has also asked Greenbank Airways to increase its insurance, up to \$10 million, and has requested the security deposit it holds to be bumped up to \$1 million.

The Township's draft agreement, which would be effective for one year, has been handed over to airbase officials to review and it's expected the two sides will meet again on Thursday.

"Certain things are not up for negotiation," said Scugog Mayor Tom Rowett. "There are many items necessary to protect the citizens and residents and to make sure the safety of the environment is protected and the Township is too."

Scugog, he stressed, is ready to draw a firm line in the dirt when it comes to the pact.

"Definitely most of the items are non-negotiable," said Mayor Rowett. "Some things are minor changes and some are major changes."

John Packer, the airport's manager, confirmed Tuesday that all soil shipments have come to a stop.

He declined to comment further, citing the ongoing negotiations.

Ward 1 Councillor Betty Somerville, who represents residents surrounding the airport, said the Township is "holding tight" to its draft agreement.

She conceded the previous site alteration agreement, which governs daily delivery limits, testing protocols and other logistics, "needed to be tightened up" and said the new pact is a step in the right direction for Scugog.

"It's a really good agreement," she said. "It's tight, direct and there's not much wiggle room in it."

As for whether the airport officials will accept Scugog's new rules, the Ward 1 councillor shrugged her shoulders.

“It’s hard to say, it’s really hard to say,” she said. “They’re playing hardball and so are we.”

Glen Smith, Scugog’s director of public works and parks, also agreed the Township is taking a firm stance in the talks.

“It’s really not a negotiation,” he said. “Council is saying what terms they want and they expect (airport officials) to meet them. (Council) is very staunch in what they expect.”

Greenbank Airways is undergoing an ambitious expansion, with airport officials estimating it will take about 2.5 million cubic metres of soil, or roughly 250,000 truckloads, to complete the upgrades at the small airbase. In a March 30 staff report, Scugog estimates it will take the airport another three years to complete the project at its current pace.

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.

On March 12, at a hastily called special meeting, councillors agreed to spend up to \$50,000 to carry out a series of bore-hole tests at the airbase in search of contaminated soil. Those tests were completed last week, with between 15 and 18 test holes dug that garnered about 100 soil samples.

Those samples are currently being tested and the results should be available in a week or so, said Ian Roger, Scugog’s chief administrative officer.

The frequency and types of testing will not be up for debate in the new agreement discussions, stressed Scugog’s mayor.

“We will absolutely not do less testing than we are now,” he said.

The mayor noted that if the bore-hole tests come back clean then the Township can take some solace in the fact its testing regimen is working. If not, then the costs of remediating the soil will be questions that need answers, said the mayor.

“I believe council made it very clear that we will keep the citizens’ and Township’s interests protected,” he said.

The mayor also stressed that doubling the Township’s fee for each cubic metre delivered to the Regional Road 47 airbase is not just a cash grab.

“We have to protect ourselves and I don’t think \$2 is enough to deal with the potential problems,” he said.

And while he's certain the residents of Greenbank are enjoying the reprieve from as many as 200 dump trucks rumbling by their homes each day, Mayor Rowett said he's eager to get a new agreement in place.

"We all want to see this put to bed so we can spend staff and council resources on other items," he said. "We definitely want to move forward on it."

But, acknowledged the mayor, there is always the possibility airbase officials will throw their hands up and walk away.

"There's a real possibility they may walk away from it," he said. "Then we go down an entirely different road."

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

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