

## Will Iron County create new airport committee?

Written by Peter Nocerini

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CRYSTAL FALLS—Vey cautiously, the Iron County Board is considering whether to create a formal airport committee, to look into the feasibility and possible sites for a new airport.

At its Nov. 14 meeting, commissioners received a report from the existing ad hoc airport committee, which has been studying possible sites.     \_\_PUBLIC\_\_

The top site identified by the ad hoc group is south of Gaastra and south of the Iron River, east of M-189. The area is accessible via Osterlund Road.

Commissioner Patti Peretto said the committee has done a great job. “We don’t have any money, so we can’t do anything,” she said, “but I feel they have a viable site, and it’s something we should continue on and see if we can find funding for it.”

Commissioner Jim Brennan said the site seems to be “a pretty good place to put an airport.” The property is apparently privately owned, and whether the county could acquire it is a major question.

Board Chairman Carl Lind said the committee has done “a tremendous job.” While noting that he has been opposed to an airport, Lind said, “There’s three things I’d like to see done, and I’d welcome an airport as much as anybody else.”

But those three things amount to some pretty big hurdles:

--Take the current Iron County Airport (south of Crystal Falls) off county taxpayers’ hands.

--Take the Stambaugh Airport off county taxpayers’ hands.

--Guarantee that the cost of a new airport “should not be borne by the taxpayer.”

“If you can rid the taxpayer of the Alpha airport and the Stambaugh airport,” Lind said, “and find funds for a new airport so it costs the taxpayers of Iron County zero, I’m 100 percent behind that.”

The county’s civil counsel, Steve Tinti, said he’s not sure what needs to be done with the current airport property--whether the land would revert back to its previous owner and how proceeds from any land sale should be distributed.

The county owns the Stambaugh Airport property outright, Tinti said, so no reverter problem there.

The main problem, he said, is that if a new airport is built, “no matter how any funding goes, you still have to come up with significant local dollars.”

“If you’re ruling out the general fund from doing that, then you have to look for methodologies for doing that. That’s something you need to keep in mind.”

Peretto talked about previous efforts to build a new airport and area companies that were behind it. “I’m sorry,” she said, “but if we would have had an airport here 10 years ago, we wouldn’t be looking at the town we’re looking at right now,” citing all the area businesses that have closed in recent years.

“We have to at least move forward and see if this is viable,” she said. “It’s not saying we’re going to spend any money. But how do we just say no and then wonder? I think it’s a chance we have to take.”

Tinti said the county can organize a formal airport committee, which has powers and capabilities that the ad hoc committee doesn’t have. He said he can prepare a report on that for the county board’s next meeting, and the commissioners agreed.

- The board delayed action on a contract with 906 Technologies. There is a question about indemnification, and the county will prepare a revised contract without that part. It did, however, approve purchasing a spam filter for county servers from the firm.

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- In other business, the board:

- Approved the 2013 Apportionment Report, which includes the 1.5 mills approved by the city of Crystal Falls for fire protection. It will increase the total tax collected by all local units to about \$24 million.

- Granted permission for the IronLine sled dog race to use ORV Trail 16 for this winter's race. Josh Brindle said the race is shooting for 800 fans this year.

- Approved a timber sale for county-owned property near Oss Road. Three bids were received, with Shamco submitting the high bid, \$36,000.

- Agreed to support a continued study by the Northwoods Rail Transit Commission.

Administrator Sue Clisch said Houghton County has entered into a cooperative agreement, specifying there is no financial obligation. "I would like to follow suit with that."

Lind said the effort is aimed at reactivating the rail system in northern Wisconsin and the U.P. "The lack of rail is a major economic problem for us."

- Tabled until next month a request for an annual allocation for the Iron County Historical Museum

- Heard a presentation from Dennis West, president of the Northern Economic Initiatives Corp. No action was taken on a request for a subrecipient agreement.

- Approved an agreement for James Shapy to serve as plumbing and mechanical inspector for the Construction Code office.