

INFORMATION SESSION (and information about the Information Session)

Late in the day on Thursday, July 9th, the new Responsible Authority for the Airport Expansion proposal (a change of RA was made official on June 12) posted a notice and Invitation to Public Participation on the Canadian Environmental Assessment Registry web-site, informing interested parties of an Information Session to be held in Algonquin Highlands – this is the invitation as it appears on the web-site:

Public Participation Notice

Public Invited to Attend Information Session: Environmental Assessment for the Proposed Expansion to the Township of Algonquin Highlands Airport

The Township of Algonquin Highlands is proposing to expand the Haliburton/Stanhope Airport located in Minden, Ontario. The proposed project includes the development of a new runway and other improvements to existing airport infrastructure.

The Office of Infrastructure Canada, invites the public to participate in an information session concerning the federal environmental assessment that is being conducted for this project in accordance with *Canadian Environmental Assessment Act*. The date and location of the session is as follows:

Date	Location	Time
July 23, 2009	Stanhope Firefighters Community Centre North Shore Rd. Carnarvon, ON	7:00pm to 9:00pm

For more information, [or to express your concerns – Muirhead addition] please contact:

Jennifer Clark - Senior Environmental Review and Approval Officer,
Infrastructure Canada
605-90 Sparks Street Ottawa
ON K1P 5B4
Telephone: 613-948-4415
Fax: 613-941-7930 Email:
Jennifer.Clark@infc.gc.ca

There is certainly some cause for hope in this development for those who have concerns about the environmental impacts of the proposal and for those who have been concerned about the lack of public participation on this whole process, but we should all know more about what this session will be, and what we can and can not expect from it; **SO – some background:**

In an Environmental Assessment at the screening level, the RA is not **required** to hold any public meetings at all. To a very large extent, it is due to the loudly and consistently expressed opposition from individuals and Associations like the MBC, Oxtongue Lake and others, through attendance at

meetings and protests, letter writing campaigns and the rest, that we have any opportunity at all to be informed ~ We owe each other thanks and congratulations!

SOME OF OUR PROBLEMS

The date selected for the meeting is a disappointment, as we have requested a number of times that any public meetings on this project should be held at times when the majority of the affected people (the ratepayers of Algonquin Highlands) would most likely to be able to attend. Algonquin Highlands has the highest percentage of “seasonal residents” in the county – perhaps the province – with more than 80% being “cottagers”, so we have always lobbied for weekend meetings. We even have a commitment, of sorts, from our MP to help to assure this...

Since the change of RA, we have been quite concerned about how all of the concerns expressed and information transmitted by opponents since the day that Building Canada *conditionally* agreed to fund the expansion would be treated.

There is also very little in the “invitation” to indicate what, exactly, is the format and purpose of the session.

SOME OF THE ANSWERS

The MBC made a direct approach to Ms. Clark on July 13, to try to get some clarification, with generally positive results – Without direct quotes from a telephone conversation, this is what we can say, for the moment:

THE DATE is recognized by the RA and CEAA as being a problem; the sheer volume of EA’s generated by the Building Canada funding announcements makes scheduling public meetings, or even holding them at all, very difficult – we are lucky, apparently, to be getting a meeting held during the summer. The RA will consider adding a second date on a weekend, but they are not optimistic about the possibility. As a result, they will be making some extra efforts, beyond the bare minimum required, to receive comments and to inform the public at large.

THE INFORMATION AND CONCERNS received to this date and, up to the date of the Information Session, will be included in the files to be considered in the screening; We must continue to let our concerns be known (volume counts) by contacting the RA at the addresses in the notice, above. The MBC will be adding to the technical information available both to the authorities and to the public. Watch this space!

THE INFORMATION SESSION will concentrate on information **flowing from the RA to the public**; there will be some limited opportunity for the public to ask questions **about the environmental Assessment / Screening process**. Other questions and concerns will be received, in writing, for consideration, but this meeting is centered on informing the people about the process.

It is very important (and encouraging, too) to know that this meeting represents only the beginning of a process that will include more “stages” with opportunities for public input - though not necessarily public meetings – and consultation. The stage that is finishing with this session has been, essentially, information and opinion gathering which will lead to the production of a “preliminary scoping report” that will lay out an initial framework for the Screening (what concerns require further study, what steps should be completed, etc.) that will be subject to consultation of some form before a final scoping report that will direct the township to complete any further studies, hire consultants, and meet requirements that may be indicated before a final Assessment Report will be accepted for consideration.

(All of this means, as we have been saying all along, that there is a long and potentially quite expensive road ahead for the people who want a shiny new and essentially pointless runway...and for the people who will have to pay for it - you and I.)

The preliminary format of the meeting will be a summary presentation by the township based on the plan produced last fall (at this point it seems that no consultants will be present) followed by information from Infrastructure Canada, the RA and CEAA officials about the process and potentially about further opportunities for public participation – questions about **the process** will be answered.

This meeting is not about the townships' plans and is not organized or run by the township. The township is not required even to be there, officially, but has accepted the invitation to present their over-view. Whatever feelings or opinions we may have, or questions we might want to pose to the township about what they are doing will not be the concern of the RA or the CEAA at this meeting; many of those questions will be asked and answered in the next phases.

In theory at least, this Information Session is for the township as well as the public; they will be learning what lies ahead as well.

As we learn more about the final agenda for the meeting we will be putting that information out.

WHAT CAN WE ALL DO WITH THIS OPPORTUNITY?

First and most important: **BE THERE!**

Whatever else you might do this summer, wherever you may be and even if you have a traditional dump-the-kids-date-night on Thursdays – **BE THERE.**

You might not be able to get any answers about some of your concerns and you will not be allowed to rant and get stuff off your chest, (we have promised to do what we can to keep this to a minimum) but you will learn what has been going on, what will happen next and what we will all be able to do to keep the pressure on this side of the battle.

Showing, by our physical presence, that we are committed to our opposition **will** have an effect!

BE PREPARED – Have a question or a concern *ready*. Have something written out with your name, address and phone number on it – there will probably be very limited, if any, chance to make specific points out loud, but the RA must accept written information and add it to their files for consideration.

Have a look through this site if you want a point to put forward, what the heck.

BE THERE EARLY – There will be a number of people outside the Community Center at least half an hour early, **quietly and politely** demonstrating our commitment – waving the odd sign, singing the odd song... It will make an important impression on those who have to pass us on the way in, AND it is the only place where a demonstration is acceptable; ONCE WE ARE INSIDE, WE SHOULD CONCENTRATE ON BEING INFORMED.

WE HAVE ACHIEVED A GREAT DEAL, BUT THERE IS STILL A LONG WAY TO GO – IT SEEMS THAT WE HAVE CONVINCED THE FEDERAL GOVERNMENT THAT WE SHOULD BE HEARD ON THE ENVIRONMENTAL QUESTIONS, BUT WE STILL NEED TO CONVINCE MOST OF THE COUNCIL THAT WE SHOULD BE HEARD ON ALL THE OTHER ISSUES!