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Runway not cleared for takeoff

County: no decision reached on expansion project

By Susan Ketchum
Staff Writer

RICHMOND HEIGHTS — Cuyahoga Development Director Paul Oyaski denied Friday that a decision has been made about a proposed runway expansion at the county airport.

His statement came after Willoughby Hills Mayor Kenneth A. Lorenz an-

nounced he had learned the runway would expand into his city, across Bishop Road. Lorenz claimed on the city Web site that he had met Jan. 25 with Kevin Delaney, who began as airport manager a week earlier.

In the message, Lorenz said "based on recommendations, the airport will most likely increase the length of the runway into Willoughby Hills by 900 feet, and

extend the safety zone into Willoughby Hills by an additional 1,000 feet. Expansion would go into the Airport Greens Golf Course and beyond."

The project would involve building a Bishop Road underpass for traffic, and the purchase of residential property.

However, Oyaski said that is just one of the proposals being discussed. Two
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separate studies are under way, including a safety study and development of an airport master plan.

"No decision has been made about runway expansion," he said.

Lorenz' announcement came as a surprise to Richmond Heights city officials. Lee Gase, economic development director, said he had been told any report on the airport master plan was at least a couple months away.

"We've been expecting something like this. We've just been waiting for the other shoe to drop. But we'll support Willoughby Hills on this."

The city had opposed the other option, which would have extended the runway to the west across Richmond Road, and necessitate moving the road and power lines.

"That would be so expensive. It would mean moving the road and power lines," Mayor Daniel Ursu said.

City officials have consistently fought against larger jets and more noise at the airport.

Council President David Roche said, "It's about maintaining our quality of life."

A meeting on the airport will be held Feb. 27 at the Willoughby Hills Community

Center. Oyaski said the county airport must meet current Federal Aviation Administration standards, especially for pilot safety.

"We need to make sure the airport is meeting the needs of the flying public, and longer runways are needed to accommodate larger jets," he said.

Still ahead for the study are an environmental analysis, a cost and benefit analysis and public hearings. Oyaski said the County Commissioners will make the final decision, which must be approved by the FAA.

"Then Congress has to come up with money to fund it. This will be a long, long discussion for many years, he said.

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