

Bancroft Airport seeks expansion



Bancroft Community Airport in winter: terminal building with Ornge medical helicopter. TONY PEARSON Special to This Week

By Tony Pearson

Gary Gaudreau and Pat Murdoch, secretary and vice-president of the Bancroft Flying Club, came to Bancroft council last week to brief them on plans to expand the capacity of the community airport. Their hope is that airport expansion will lead to economic expansion.

The airport, owned and managed by the Flying Club, currently has a 2,400-foot gravel runway, as well as a separate helipad owned and operated by Quinte Healthcare to assist its local hospital. Their brief set a goal of having the runway paved and extended to a length of 3,000 feet, with a width of 75 feet (compared to the current 40). They also hope to install a paved ramp and taxiway. Actually, in the long run they'd prefer to have yet another runway (2,210 by 60), which is better lined up with the prevailing winds. Gaudreau explained that the longer and stronger runway would allow the airport to handle bigger planes, and to attract more planes overall.

Currently, the airport is visited by about 300 aircraft a year. About half of these are helicopters, mostly from government agencies. National Defence out of Trenton uses it as a base for search and rescue, as does the OPP. Hydro One brings in helicopters to check its power lines when there's a major outage whose source is in a remote area. Ornge Air uses the helipad to transport patients in critical condition to major medical facilities. And the Ministry of Natural Resources and Forestry brings in helicopters to fight forest fires, as well as to stock lakes and count game.

As for fixed wing aircraft, the biggest day of the year is during Bancroft's Wheels/Water/Wings festival, when around 60 planes land for the fly-in breakfast. But the Flying Club believes there's a lot of untapped potentials. They feel that an improved runway would increase tourist traffic from plane-owning people in urban areas who are looking for a getaway or close access to their cottages. They also feel current urban entrepreneurs might be attracted to locate their businesses in North Hastings if they had easier air access. As an example, they feel those businessmen and entrepreneurs that might look towards the likes of [private jet rental](#) for travel arrangements to Bancroft and other places, may very well see it as an opening for more business.

As it stands, the airport can now handle single-engined planes, and some twin-engined planes as well, notably the STOL (short take-off and landing) Twin Otter and Buffalo. However, they can't handle the popular Beechcraft King Air, which requires 3,000 feet for take-off.

Gaudreau indicated that the Flying Club wasn't looking for money from the town council, but rather support in its applications for federal funding. The club has already obtained a Canada 150 infrastructure grant to fix the hangar roof and floor and improve the facilities in the terminal building, including new doors, windows, insulation, septic, and handicapped washroom. The federal government is contributing \$62,000, and the club is currently raising their half of the expenses. Now they hope to tap into the new round of infrastructure funding to be announced in the federal budget.

Asked about costs, Gaudreau stated that they are working to develop the specifications for a "letter of interest" for construction firms.

A figure in the million dollar range is in the realm of possibility. Gaudreau observed that the work required could certainly be done by local contractors.

Dreaming big, Gaudreau could also foresee new businesses springing to life at Jack Brown field, such as an aircraft maintenance facility (which will have fully trained cdcl fuel tank engineers and aviation repair teams) and charter flights to Toronto and Ottawa. The club has already discussed the project with new MP Mike Bossio, as they had with former MP Daryl Kramp. Gaudreau firmly believes in the economic merit of the proposal as a spur for more investment and jobs in the region, and hopes the federal government will see it that way.