

LOCALNEWS

Council asks to continue security at airport

TSA challenges use of private firm

BY LAUREL BEAGER
Editor

The International Falls City Council has asked federal officials to allow the continued use of private officers to provide security at the Falls International Airport.

A challenge of the use of private security officers at the local airport by the Transportation Security Administration prompted the council to adopt a resolution Monday as a follow-up to a letter sent by Mayor Bob Anderson earlier seeking the assistance of U.S. Sen. Al Franken in the issue. Anderson serves as the chairman of the local airport commission.

The resolution, presented by Councilor Cynthia Jaksa, asks the Federal Aviation Administration to grant a waiver to the commission that would allow it to continue to use the private firm, Northland Investigative and Protective Services Inc., for security. The resolution described the shrinking tax base and the burden that would be added to local taxpayers should the airport lose its subsidy for security and be forced to pay an additional \$15,000 per year to the current \$60,000 cost of security.

Anderson said he hoped the waiver was not needed, but believed the resolution could be used if necessary. “We can use this as a back-up measure,” he told the council.

At issue is TSA’s requirement that deputized law officers be present when passengers are screened at the airport. Anderson said it appears there is a push to follow every TSA regulation involving the law enforcement officer reimbursement program, but the private security officers only meet 95 percent of the regulation.

“The use of the private security firm reduces the cost and provides the same level of security,” Anderson said in his letter to Franken. “The firm and the officers have an excellent record and there have been no incidents or security breaches at the Falls International Airport. The airport commission has received no reimbursement for the cost of airport security since October 2012.”

Northland Investigative and Protective Services Inc. employs retired law enforcement officers who are certified by the Minnesota Board of Peace Officer Standards and Training, known as POST, and can carry weapons.

“To have the officers of the private firm meet the regulations in their totality will require they

be deputized and the firm must carry different insurance and the cost born by the local airport commission will increase since the TSA has capped what they will reimburse the airport,” Anderson said in his letter.

Councilor Pete Kalar, a jailer/dispatcher with the Koochiching County Sheriff’s Office, said the current system has worked well.

“Neither the city or county law enforcement have the manpower (to handle the security screening at the airport),” he said. “When there is a problem, they call and we go out. It works fine.”

Anderson said the private security officers do not have the authority to make arrests and contact law enforcement when needed. He said the firm has decided not to seek the authority to make arrests because of liability.

“It has saved the federal government and city and county dollars,” he said.

In related business, the council unanimously adopted a resolution seeking \$3 million from state bonding money in 2014 for airport terminal improvements.

Councilor Gail Rognerud said she was surprised that Anderson announced at an earlier meeting that he had sent a letter seeking the funding when the council nor

the airport commission had adopted resolutions on the issue. Rognerud represents the city on the airport commission.

Anderson said he believed he had been asked by the commission to send the letter. Rognerud said the letter was premature and did follow the appropriate process. Anderson apologized.

Other business

After questions about the minutes reflection of action not to seek wetland information at no cost from a local surveyor on the Donahue property at an earlier meeting, the council agreed to reconsider the July 15 motion. Anderson voted no on the motion.

Rognerud moved to accept the offer to provide the information at no cost to the city and the council unanimously agreed.

Also Monday, the council agreed to provide \$2,500 to an effort that will market the area as a vacation destination with National Geographic Society. The Koochiching County Board earlier agreed to provide the same support.

The effort is being lead by the Heart of the Continent Partnership, a Canadian-American coalition working on cross-border projects that promote the economic, cultural and natural health of the lakes, forests and community.

The project involves a partnership with the National Geographic Society

to create a regional tourism initiative. As a part of the society’s network of geotourism websites, organizers say they believe more people will become aware of the region.

The council agreed to join with Fort Frances to invite the Canadian Ambassador to the United States Gary Doer to visit the two communities. It also agreed to share in the cost, up to \$1,000, of a meal associated with his visit. The measure supports joint efforts between the two border communities to establish a regional destination that would be of mutual benefit.

The council agreed Monday to sell timber from 80 acres the city owns at the east end of County Road 24, also known as the Van Lynn Road. The action calls for a survey of the property and to ask Koochiching County Land Commissioner Dennis Hummitsch to assist the city in the sale.

Anderson said the timber value could range from \$10,000 to \$60,000 and logging would likely occur in 2014 or 2015.

Following a public hearing that drew no members of the public, the council agreed to move forward with bituminous paving, and curb and gutter improvements in the part of Aspen Woods. A portion of the project will be assessed to affected property owners.

Gas prices appear stable

JOURNAL STAFF REPORT

Average retail gasoline prices in Minnesota have not moved in the past week, averaging \$3.58 per gallon Sunday, according to GasBuddy’s daily survey of 2,856 gas outlets in Minnesota.

This compares with the national average that has fallen 1 cent per gallon in the last week to \$3.63 per gallon, according to gasoline price website GasBuddy.com.

Including the change in gas prices in Minnesota during the past week, prices Sunday were 7.8 cents per gallon lower than the same day one year ago and are 25.6 cents per gallon higher than a month ago. The national average has increased 14.4 cents per gallon during the last month and stands 3.3 cents per gallon higher than this day one year ago.

Locally, gas prices in the International Falls area Monday ranged from \$3.72 per gallon to \$3.74 per gallon, according to MinnesotaGasPrices.com.

“Over the last week, the national average has continued to see a ever so slow downward trend,” said GasBuddy.com Senior Petroleum Analyst Patrick DeHaan. “But the downward trend got a shot in the arm last weekend, as we saw the biggest daily drop since April; from July 25 to July 26, the average dropped 1.5 cents. Back on April 13, the U.S. average dropped 1.7 cents from the previous day. Further illustrating the downward trend, five percent of the country was over \$4 per gallon Friday. Last week, 7 percent of the country was over \$4 per gallon.”

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