

TOWNSHIP OF READINGTON

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ADMINISTRATOR/MUNICIPAL CLERK

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Solberg Referendum Date

Vita Mekovetz, Administrator\Municipal Clerk of Readington Township, recently presented the Readington Township Committee with petition asking that the \$22 million dollar bond issue be put to a public referendum. New Jersey Bond law dictates that when such a petition is received signed by 15% of the number of registered voters that voted in the last Assembly election, the bond issue must be subject to a public vote.

Ms. Mekovetz has confirmed that the Hunterdon County Board of Elections has agreed to assist in holding a special election on Tuesday, May 16, 2006, for the purpose of asking voters to ratify a \$22 million dollar bond ordinance recently passed by the Readington Township Committee. The ballot for this special election will ask voters if they are in support of bond ordinance #04-2006.

The Committee voted unanimously to pass this bond ordinance following a public hearing held on February 21, 2006 after explaining that the bond ordinance provides the Township the ability to raise money for acquisition the of open space of the 726-acre Solberg Airport property for preservation and for acquisition of the development rights on the airport, and after hearing over three (3) hours of public comments from the many citizens in attendance.

The Committee has maintained that an acceptable preservation proposal for Solberg Airport and the surrounding open land must maintain the existing licensed runway length at it current length and must provide the assurance that any future development of the airport property will not have a negative impact on Readington's quality of life. The proposal must also be acceptable to the taxpayers of the Township.

Readington and the Solberg Family will be continuing negotiations and the Township's most recent offer was for the purchase of approximately 625 acres of open space surrounding the airport, and for the development rights on the airport itself, for \$22 million dollars. Both the Readington Township Committee and the principals of Solberg Aviation agree that the ownership of the airport itself should stay with the Solberg family, and that the Township's goals of preserving the airport and controlling its growth can be accomplished by purchasing an easement only on the airport itself.

The final cost for the average household has been estimated to be \$55/year for the first three (3) years. Thereafter the cost would be an estimated \$60/year with the benefit of State funding, or in the unlikely case of no funding, \$165/year. Readington has had successful meetings with State Green Acres representatives and is confident that State Open Space Preservation funding would offset the final cost to taxpayers.

The Township Committee will be calling this special election as part of an ongoing effort to involve the public as much as possible in the decision-making process with respect to this important issue. The Committee held a special informational meeting on the Solberg Airport issue on January 17, 2006 at which time legal, aviation, financial and planning experts gave presentations and were available to answer questions. The transcript of this meeting, and the slide presentations presented at this meeting, are available at the municipal building or on the Township's website, Readingtontwp.org.

Mayor Gerry Shamey stated "I am of the opinion that a positive vote on the bond issue will send a message to the owners of Solberg airport that the citizens of this Township want to resolve this issue in a fair and equitable fashion. A positive vote will allow the Township to raise the money to effectively negotiate a fair purchase price, both for the owners of the airport and for the taxpayers. In the six (6) weeks ahead it will be important for residents to become fully informed on the Township's choices. I will, to the best of my ability, clearly and accurately explain the airport issue and the meaning of this vote as we move forward."