

Airport could break even without a major carrier

by Chris Cooke

Margaret Bird fears the city wants to sell Sarnia Airport.

She told First Monday she doesn't see a path forward for the municipal airport which appears to be on life support.

Earlier this year the city committed to propping up the airport for three years while city officials try to convince carriers to re-establish commercial service. But Bird says she doesn't see much happening and is concerned that council is taking a lukewarm approach to a consultant's report calling for a \$19.2 million upgrade.

And Bird's concerns are echoed by Bruce Bond and Mark Seibutis of the Canadian Owners and Pilots Association (COPA) at Chris Hadfield Sarnia Airport.

Both Bond, who is president and Seibutis who is past president believe 27 years of third party operation by Scottsdale Aviation and the city of Sarnia have led to deterioration.

Over the years Mayor Mike Bradley has "bragged" that with Air Canada as a major carrier and Scottsdale as an operator the airport hasn't cost the city anything.

But Bond and Seibutis disagree suggesting for 27 years Scottsdale has "profited off the airport" and is now being subsidized at \$400,000 annually since Air Canada left two years ago.

They say all of this has led to the airport's condition.

Bird has demanded an auditing of Scottsdale's books but has been told details are "confidential". She says she is being questioned by the public about what is going on at the airport but so far hasn't any answers.



Mark Seibutis and Bruce Bond.

In August, COPA hosted a fly in with more than 1,500 people in attendance including Chris Hadfield and his family along with major officials from aviation including a vice president from Porter Airlines.

Bradley was there for conversations along with Economic Development Director Kelly Provost.

"We are making contact," says Bradley.

Bond and Seibutis believe that even without a commercial carrier there are enough COPA members, GA visitors, corporate aircraft, fuel sales and service fees, land usage agreements and new building, to operate the airport at break even.

