

Mayne Island Heliport Update

17 January 2006



Night-time Emergency Helicopter Medical Evacuations have resumed on Mayne Island effective 13th January 2006. This resumption is on a temporary basis until the heliport is fully renovated and brought up to Transport Canada standards. Once the heliport has been certified by Transport Canada we consider there would be no cause for any future suspensions providing that we do the maintenance of the flight path as required, and satisfy Transport Canada's operating regulations. The renovation is expected to take at least 5 to 6 weeks.

There are a number of myths and incorrect statements circulating in the community which I would like to address indirectly and then directly.

Firstly, our heliport was never authorized for night-time helicopter flights. The Helijet air ambulance pilots simply flew them because there were no alternatives. This was a commendable and noble effort on their part and since finding this out I have thanked Helijet for these past services on behalf of our community.

Secondly, there has been a succession of "growths" which have occurred over the years, namely:

- "Growth" in the size and weight of the helicopters providing air ambulance medevacs;
- "Growth" in both Transport Canada's and BC Ambulance Service's regulations;
- "Growth" of trees;
- "Growth" of safety concerns expressed by the helicopter pilots; and, ultimately
- "Growth" of frustration on the part of the authorities in not being able to get sufficient changes made to our heliport and flight path in a reasonable period of time.

All of these "growths" contributed to the eventual suspension of night-time medevac flights last month. Some of these concerns were expressed in Transport Canada report written in 2001.

I asked the Chief Pilot for Helijet International to list the primary causes for the suspension order he issued. In no particular order these were:

- Proximity of trees along the "flight path"
- Proximity of trees at the Health Centre
- Proximity of trees behind the heliport

- Complete lack of “Lead-in” lighting to the heliport

Of secondary concern was the “S-shaped” course of the flight path.

To blame the suspension solely on “two trees in the middle of Dean and Titia’s field” was incorrect and unfortunate. These two trees are at the outer edge of the current flight path and their removal would not have been sufficient for restoration of night-time medevacs..

The temporary solution that we have reached with Helijet and BC Ambulance Services is as follows:

1. All medevacs will be attended by the Fire Department who will:

- Place temporary lights on positions laid out in the MacKay’s field to define the landing or “lead-in” direction,
- Place a fire engine in a driveway across Fernhill Road and illuminate the two trees near the old tractor with a spotlight,
- Illuminate the large cedar tree in the MacKay’s field adjacent to the Heliport,
- Communicate directly with the pilot over a VHF radio channel during landings and take-offs, and
- Receive and pass to the Improvement District on any safety concerns expressed by the pilots

2. Four trees immediately adjacent to the Health Centre have been cropped or removed. The two cropped trees (now at about 1/3 of their original height) exist in the MacKay’s field. The two removed trees are on Improvement District land.

An alternate landing site on Blair Ledingham’s airstrip at the end of Wilkes Road has been inspected by Helijet and would be used in the event that the Heliport was unavailable (perhaps due to construction, during the renovation period).

The long-term plan for the Heliport is, briefly, to consist of the following items:

1. The Heliport will be managed and operated by the Mayne Island Improvement District. It will be brought up to a standard so that it can be certified by Transport Canada for day and night medevac operations.
2. The flight path will be rotated counter-clockwise by about 8 degrees to permit a “straight in” landing approach. This has the main benefit to us of positioning the majority of the flight path over public lands, i.e. that of the Improvement District and those of the School Board. A long term agreement will be negotiated with the School Board for the maintenance of the flight path over their lands.
3. Trees will be cleared, i.e. topped, cropped or removed, to Transport Canada standards over the next three to four weeks. The Improvement District will also remove dead and dying trees on School Board lands to improve safety of the school grounds.
4. Permanent directional lighting to Transport Canada standards will be installed on Improvement District property immediately adjacent to the Heliport and on the MacKay’s property.
5. New permanent lighting of the heliport landing area will be installed to Transport Canada standards.

6. The propane storage tank at the Health Centre will be relocated.
7. Trees in the general area of the Heliport, but not within the heliport limits or on the flight path, to be permanently lit at night as requested.
8. The light standard in the Medical Centre parking lot will be removed.
9. Additional warning lights and area lights will be installed on the Medical Centre, Ambulance Station and Fire Department buildings.

The Improvement District is also using this as an opportunity to implement recommendations of the Provincial "FireSmart" program and so will remove all potentially flammable trees around essential emergency service buildings. All trees on the Improvement District property will be progressively removed and the areas re-planted with more suitable shrubs and plants. The Garden Club has agreed to help in the development of the re-planting plan. The removal of trees around the Health Centre and Ambulance Station is currently ongoing and nearly complete. Logs suitable for timbers are being recycled for use by the Mayne Island Lions in their current project to rebuild and enlarge the Dinner Bay "cook shack". Wood suitable for firewood is being salvaged by the Fire Fighters' Association and by the parents group (PAC) at the Mayne Island School. These groups will sell the firewood to further their respective community and school activities. Chips will be provided to the Garden Club for use at the Felix and Emma Jack Park project.

I have been given valuable help and assisted by many individuals, groups and agencies in the quest for resumption of night-time medevacs and a long-term solution for the community. I want to thank them all for their efforts and will do so in more detail as we near the end of the project. The spontaneous generosity and community spirit shown by everyone has made a difficult task much easier. I would like the community to note that I have had good relations with the MacKays and have secured their assistance and agreement in resolving a number of issues for the short- and long-term without difficulty. Please also note that the MacKays have provided their bucket truck without charge for tree topping, cropping and removal for as long as we need it.

I trust that everyone in the community can take comfort in the overall effort. Should you have questions or comments then please contact me at 539-5698 or email me.

Jim Marlon-Lambert

Chair, Mayne Island Improvement District

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[Heliport Memorandum, 2006](#)