

WILLARD AIRPORT GOVERNANCE AND SUSTAINABLE AIR SERVICE ADVISORY
TASK FORCE

December 4, 2014

Bryan Room, Institute of Aviation

Time: 3:30-5:00 p.m.

Location: Bryan Room, Institute of Aviation

Members Present: Steve Carter (Chair), Lori Cowdrey Benso (via phone), Dorothy David, Mike DeLorenzo, Jayne DeLuce, John Frasca, Dwight Miller, Alan Nudo, Laurel Prussing, Seamus Reilly, Chris Schroeder, Dan Sholem, Bill Volk

Others Present: Bill Ferguson, David Foote, Bruce Knight, Bruce Walden, Steve Wanzek

Members Absent: Tom Berns, Deb Busey, William Dick, Karl Gnadt, Bumsoo Lee, Gozen Hartman, Dick Helton, Kristin Williamson

Meeting Summary

Welcome & Introductions

Steve Carter welcomed Task Force members and representatives from News-Gazette, WDWS and WCIA to the meeting. Steve noted this is the 12-month of the Task Force's work and thanked everyone for providing input and questions about the information gathered and shared during past meetings.

Task Force Accomplishments Overview (Consultant David Foote)

David Foote gave the members a presentation with PowerPoint showing an overview of the accomplishments and recommendations of the Task Force with information they learned.

- Lessons learned – myths that were dispelled.
 - o Free parking does not have a major impact on the traveler's decision.
 - o Changing the parking rate has little consumer impact.
 - o Good customer retention in the immediate surrounding area, but less in areas farther away with most leakage to Indianapolis, IN.
 - o Willard Airport operates well within standards of the peer market
 - o There is customer loyalty to Willard Airport.
- Strategic Recommendations
 - o New airport management structure
 - o Create an Airport Advisory Committee that includes community leaders
 - o Make ground transportation more efficient
 - Automate parking
 - Work with Champaign and Urbana to update taxi licensing requirements
 - Continuation of MTD's Airbus and make it more user-friendly for travelers
 - o Build a permanent rental car service facility and car wash.
 - o Long-term plans to protect Willard Airport

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- Perform a land capacity analysis to determine what can be supported by existing infrastructure.
- Work with surrounding jurisdictions to adopt land use controls to protect airport's air space.
- Prioritize land acquisitions for runway protections and development.
- Improve wayfinding and beautification.
- Utilize University of Illinois Foundation to acquire strategic parcels for non-airport related land for development.
- Secure funding for new airport tower
 - FAA has paid for design, but has not allocated funding for the estimated \$10 million project.
- Air Service Development Challenges
 - Number of major airline companies offering service has decreased since 1978. Fewer airlines equates to more competition for additional air service throughout the United States.
 - The possibilities for service to new locations is limited by the competition.
 - Charlotte, NC is the best option for service to the East coast.
 - Orlando or St. Petersburg, FL are the best options for low cost service to a vacation region.
- Establish a community coalition to promote Willard Airport
 - This 501c4 non-profit organization should be run separately from the university and its focus should be on making the airport self-sustaining.

After David's presentation, Steve Carter recommended that the Task Force members use the information provided in the PowerPoint presentation when they discuss the airport with the public. He asked the group if there were any recommended adjustments to the information provided. These are listed below.

Suggestions from Task Force:

- Dorothy David brought a new local campaign to the attention of the Task Force members. She explained there is a separate local group tied to Champaign County Economic Development Corporation that is creating a new campaign called 'You Are Welcome'. The goal of the campaign is to promote accomplishments occurring within the community. This campaign may be something of interest to the university when it begins to look at ways to promote the possible re-branding of Willard Airport.

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- Dan Sholem stated he believes there should be mention of making Willard Airport more recognizable to the international community. He explained how several of his international students comment on not knowing there is the option available so they can fly directly to Champaign-Urbana.
- Alan Nudo would like to see an incentive program for frequent flyers who park at Willard Airport added to any future marketing program. This could be a way to promote the parking and thank customers who repeatedly use Willard Airport.
- Alan also noted the look of the airport could be upgraded cost-effectively by using materials provided by colleges and departments on campus. This would be a way for the college's to advertise while improving the attractiveness of the airport.

Final Review of Strategic Plan

Steve Carter asked each Task Force member to give their feedback on the strategic business plan and whether they support its recommendations.

Feedback from Task Force members:

- Jayne DeLuce does support the report being submitted to Chancellor Wise. She believes the report is filled with useful knowledge and information that will be helpful to promote Willard Airport in the future. She feels the report is very educational in how the airport industry operates and how it affects Willard Airport. Jayne is excited to see a social media campaign to promote the airport and provide awareness of the airport to the public.
- Seamus Reilly agrees with the report and believes it is a good start. The community now has better data to use and several myths dispelled. There are several more items to figure out, especially related to the long-term future of the airport. It is important to understand the airport is a resource and that there are other partner resources in the area that when efforts are combined, there can be numerous benefits. Seamus is glad to see the process get to this stage and believes the report will provide several good recommendations for the Chancellor. While the airport is already well-run and a good asset to the community, the items recommended will tweak the current process in place and possibly bring greater rewards to the community.
- Laurel Prussing believes the strategic business plan is a worthwhile study to review. The hard part will be finding a way to fund the implementation of the recommendations in the plan.
- Chris Schroeder is pleased with the broadness of the strategic business plan. There are several myths that are being dispelled with the report and looks forward to the public

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becoming aware of these in a future marketing campaign. He does wonder how this information can be turned into a positive message without it appearing defensive.

- Dwight Miller stated he struggles with the real end-goal of the Task Force's work. If the end-result is to provide increased service to customers, then how do we get there? He does not see the answer to that and wonders where the funding would come from to get more flights from Willard Airport. Dwight mentioned the recently failed school board referendum to raise fund for new high schools in the community and does not believe the community would agree to financially support the airport. He does not see where this is going in the long-term to make the airport a viable product. There should also be benchmarks listed in the report to know if the work being completed is on track to meet the recommendations listed in the report.
- Dorothy David agrees with the strategic business plan and feels that they first need to know the decisions of the Chancellor before they try to promote the recommendations to the public. The real work can begin in the community after the Chancellor reviews the report and the university determines how it will move forward with the recommendations. For now, Task Force members can continue providing accurate information when in a situation where people are unaware of the facts revealed through the research conducted by the consultants and Task Force.
- John Frasca believes the report is very educational, especially related to the myths about parking fees and the loss of service to local airports such as Bloomington's Central Illinois Regional Airport. John believes there are too many airports throughout the U.S. and this has created a lot of competition.
- Bill Volk stated he supports the strategic plan and that it is a great start with some of the items able to be implemented in the short-term. The Technical Committee's Governance Report does give the act of implementing the recommendations back to the university and feels there is a lot of responsibility on the university to move forward with the recommendations. Bill also believes it is important for the Task Force members to continue talking with the public about the airport and the information gathered. The public sector should be made aware of the recommendations and understand that there is more to do, especially in the long-term. There is good information in the report and it needs to be shared with the public.
- Bruce Knight, Technical Committee Chair, agrees this has been a very educational process and helpful to understand where this airport sits in the market related to other airports. He

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likes the recommendations and agrees this report should be provided to the public in a strategic way. Willard Airport is a good asset for the region and needs to be protected. Improvement is needed and it would be great if that can be done. Implementation is important and once the Chancellor is informed, there should be a written implementation plan that includes specific details on how the recommendations will be implemented and who will be responsible for what portion of the process. Bruce also noted there are multiple moving parts included in the strategic plan. The governance report finalized by the Technical Committee came to the decision that trying to gather property tax dollars to support the airport is not the best solution. Having an airport authority in the long-run is the best option, but it will take a long time to establish an airport authority. Any additional revenue being raised by an Airport Authority should be generated by the revenue created by people visiting the community. Bruce and the Technical Committee see this as a logical way to support and improve Willard Airport.

- Alan Nudo is very pleased with the report and thanked the consultants for their assistance in gathering information about Willard Airport and the airline industry. Their work provided valuable insight into the airline industry and dispelled several myths about Willard Airport. Their work has given community leaders information on how to reduce the leakage to other airports, which relates to Dwight Miller's concerns spoken earlier. Alan believes the leakage does need to be curtailed. He also commented that Willard Airport is a job-generator and is an important factor in the region's economic development. Any company – local, regional or national – that is looking at the area as a potential new site is going to look at the airport and determine how much it will benefit their business. The long-term responsibility or shared responsibility of supporting the airport needs to be finalized. Each faction in the community needs to step up with the financing portion for the airport's future success.
- Dan Sholem stated he is fully supportive. Dan believes continuing to engage on the implementation side is critical to the airport. There should also be focus on the demand side for airport use in the next phase of this process. Travelers, whether domestic or international, should be questions as to what their needs are, what they would like to see change and then determine if the customers' needs can be met.
- Lori Cowdrey-Benso agrees with the report and believes the report provides a plan to strengthen the airport. Lori commented there is a huge need to keep the current carrier and potentially attract new airlines and new flights to Willard Airport.

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Steve Carter remarked it is clear the Task Force supports the Strategic Business Plan as presented. Steve explained he will prepare a brief transmittal letter to send to Chancellor Wise with the two completed reports, the Strategic Business Plan and the Technical Committee's Governance Report. These will be delivered to Chancellor Wise prior to the upcoming holidays. Steve stated some of the comments gathered at today's meeting will help create that transmittal letter.

Preparation for Meeting with Chancellor Wise in January (Mike DeLorenzo)

Steve Carter asked Mike DeLorenzo to provide a summary of the upcoming meeting with Chancellor Wise on January 27. Mike explained the Chancellor wants to meet and personally thank everyone for their time and effort over the past year. By January, she will have had the opportunity to read the reports and will be able to ask the Task Force members any questions she has about the information received. The input given to the Chancellor will provide insight in the decision-making phase. Task Force members will also be given the chance to bring up items they feel are important going forward as she makes her decision on how to proceed.

Mike DeLorenzo thanked each of the members for their time and effort given over the past 12 months to create a detailed strategic plan. He commented that he is involved in several community groups with many of the members on the Task Force and is encouraged by their interest in Willard Airport's success.

Wrap Up & Adjourn

Steve Carter ended the meeting by reminding the group the Chancellor's original charge to the Task Force was to look for ways to improve air service at Willard Airport and how to involve the community in the process. He said the university has operated the airport for 70+ years and even though Willard Airport was originally part of the university's mission, it has become an asset to the community and provides a valuable service to the entire region. It is very likely time for the community to share in directing the progress or forward movement of the airport and to begin providing financial support for its success.

Steve again thanked everyone and adjourned the meeting.

Adjourn 4:22 p.m.

Next Meeting: Time TBD

Tuesday, January 27, 2015

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