

Special Meeting  
November 16, 2011

At the call of the President, Brett Gould, the Joliet Park District Board of Commissioners met for a Special Meeting in the Board Room of the Provena Saint Joseph Inwood Athletic Club, 3000 W. Jefferson Street, Joliet, IL. The meeting began at 3:30pm

Pledge of Allegiance

The Pledge of Allegiance was led by President Gould. He then reminded the Board that there were no action items on the agenda.

Roll Call

Commissioners Present: Gould, Condon, Albritton, Marcum

Commissioners Absent: Schultz

A. Joliet Regional Airport

Executive Director Dominic Egizio said that due to the number of questions asked at the last meeting, he thought it would be a good idea to have a special meeting focused on the Joliet Regional Airport. Rob Waller, representing our airport engineering firm Hanson Professional Services, was introduced and asked to give an overview of the Transportation Improvement Program (TIPs) program.

Mr. Waller began by saying there is a meeting each fall with the State when the TIPs program is presented and then finalized later in the year for presentation and final approval by the State in February or March. The current list that was presented to the Board at their last meeting is preliminary. Everything listed at the top with no priority numbers is already in the program with costs assigned to each project. The projects listed without priority numbers will be our next requests. Funding for the projects come from the State, from local (the Park District), and from Federal. As long as the federal government continues to fund the grant, the Park District gets an entitlement of \$150,000 each year. This money is provided by the federal government at the discretion of the FAA to the Park District through the State of Illinois who is the FAA's agent. The perimeter fencing has been bid and awarded. The runway is currently programmed as well as the lighting project. The State has stepped up to the plate to do the additional 40 feet of runway, making it 100 feet wide. President Gould asked who develops the list and sets the next priorities. He was advised that it would be staff along with the airport advisory committee. Mr. Waller said the program is the Park District's; he just tries to provide guidance. President Gould asked why the gas station land acquisition was moved to near the bottom of the priority list. Mr. Waller said the Park District is mandated by the FAA to keep the airport safe. The list does not indicate that acquisition of the gas station property is not a priority; but it is difficult to determine how to fund the acquisition while continuing to maintain the airport sufficiently.

Mr. Waller said that Mr. Egizio's lobbying in Washington DC was effective in that he brought awareness of the circumstances to Representative Kinzinger's office and to the Washington office of the FAA. It is really a challenge to attract funding for this acquisition because the FAA deemed the project not a hazard to air aviation. For us to convince them they made a mistake and for them to acknowledge it, is a challenge. They give discretionary money each year but it

is difficult to get because the funds have to be split throughout the region. President Gould asked if it would be helpful to keep the acquisition in front of Congress. Mr. Waller said sometimes the squeaky wheel gets the grease and we should continue to pursue it. Mr. Waller said there has been some congressional and FAA interest in the project so we are making some headway. He said it has been his approach to keep the acquisition as an active conversation but also to maintain the airport. The airport has tremendous needs because very little has been done there since the 1980's. While the gas station is a huge priority, the Federal grant says it is our priority to maintain the airport. Commissioner Albritton asked why the FAA said the gas station is not a hazard. Mr. Waller said the builder did not circumvent the process; however, the FAA passed it according to their air space criteria not seeing it as a compatibility issue. FAA does not have the ability to close the business. If they have an issue with proposed construction, they will make the sponsor, in this case the Park District, aware of it and recommend land acquisition. President Gould said that the Board is concerned the FAA will want to close down the airport because the gas station poses a dangerous situation. Mr. Waller said, to date, they have done just the opposite by not supporting the acquisition; however, they are now looking at it more closely. They may get on board to support the acquisition because it has concerned enough people. President Gould asked if the runways will be too short at some point, causing the airport to be closed down. Mr. Waller said the runways are not long enough to serve corporate jet aviation but as long as we continue to serve single engine, private planes, we will be a viable airport. The facility services 120 aircraft, which is substantial. Typically, the regional airports serve 10 to 40 planes. The runway length, while not ideal, is more than adequate.

President Gould asked what would happen if expenses to maintain the airport become too taxing and we can't continue to maintain it. Mr. Waller said this is a common dilemma for general aviation airports. It really depends on what the Park District chooses to do. Receiving more than \$1,000,000 in funding is unlikely unless it is really justified. President Gould said they let us purchase the surrounding properties and then didn't follow through with the gas station. Mr. Waller said it was the FAA's opinion that it was our responsibility as the sponsor to protect the airport, that it was the FAA's opinion that the Park District better purchase the two surrounding lots because we didn't get the lot where the gas station is located. President Gould asked if the FAA gives us an edict, do we have to fund it even if we don't want to. Mr. Waller said the FAA very seldom requires unfunded mandates. He continued that when we signed the agency agreement, it included certain grant assurances, one of which is that money made on the airport has to stay at the airport. Commissioner Condon asked if that means we can't be profitable at the airport. Business Manager Steve Bixenmann said the airport is not self-sustaining. Mr. Waller agreed but added that although we may not be sustainable, we impact the local community. President Gould asked if there is anything that will cost millions of dollars over the next years. Mr. Waller said there is only one project after what is currently on the list and that is the opposite runway end.

Commissioner Condon asked if the Park District ever considered charging more money for services in order to generate more capital. Mr. Bixenmann said there is a market for this service so the pilots can always go somewhere else. Commissioner Condon said she finds it hard to justify spending the money for 120 aircraft which is a small segment of the population. This is taking away dollars from other things we could be doing. President Gould asked if there are ways to make the airport more profitable. Mr. Waller said there is a lot of property at the airport

that is not necessary for aeronautics so we could build on it. President Gould asked if the FAA would let us sell the airport and was advised that we could request a land release but the FAA usually wants the owners to own the land in perpetuity. Mr. Egizio said the airport layout plan has identified a location for some day relocating Park Services at the airport. Mr. Waller suggested waiting until the airport layout plan is approved and then request a compatibility land use. Commissioner Albritton requested a map that illustrates the land that could be leased.

Mr. Egizio asked for Mr. Waller's comments regarding staff's opinion to keep the asphalt at the northwest approach by the gas station. Mr. Waller said this would be a compliance issue. If the Park District does not approve funding for removal of the pavement, it would have to be marked as unusable. If we want Federal money, we must meet their requirements. However, our argument for keeping the asphalt may be sellable. Mr. Waller said we have a large number of projects that have come all at once but the risk of turning down money is that it makes the FAA reluctant for other projects.

Mr. Egizio invited the chairman of the Airport Advisory Committee, Mike Kerwin, to address the Board regarding the airport. Mr. Kerwin said the airport is the most desirable in the area. It is not just a facility used by pilots; there are many public events at the facility. He said he agrees with the direction of the staff. It was his opinion that if the Park District had not purchased the two lots a few years ago, getting the gas station property at some point would be extremely difficult.

Mr. Waller said the terminal facilities are very dated and they should be done in the future. President Gould asked if construction of a new facility would qualify for TIPs. Mr. Waller said it would qualify for the \$150,000 entitlement but in order to get that money, the infrastructure things need to be taken care of first. The current infrastructure is not in place right now for funding of a new terminal. Mr. Egizio asked Mr. Waller to provide information on what the Macomb Airport did to get a new terminal.

President Gould asked what effect Lewis Airport has on the Joliet Regional Airport. Airport Manager Jenny McFarland said Lewis is more corporate, and Mr. Kerwin said the more corporate aviation Lewis gets, the better it is for our airport because we have our own niche.

Commissioner Marcum said the Board and staff need to think outside the box to make the airport profitable instead of closing it.

Mr. Egizio said that staff will recommend the TIPs list be approved at the next meeting but the question is what to do with the northwest end of the runway. Currently, the list shows it to be removed. Originally the Board said the Park District would not fund this project. Staff will make a strong recommendation that we try to save the pavement. Mr. Waller said that if the Board votes against funding the runway asphalt removal, we will be considered non-compliant and ineligible for federal money. President Gould asked what would happen if we take that stand and then don't do any maintenance because the Federal government says we are ineligible for money. Mr. Egizio said the Park District has signed agreements with the Federal government that we would maintain the property as an airport.

Commissioner Condon asked for an explanation of what the Board will be considering and was advised it would be for 2013 and beyond. She asked if the Board should discuss ideas for the unused property to bring in additional revenue. Mr. Waller said the first step, which we have already completed, is to identify those areas and have them approved on the airport layout plan. After that the Park District could request permission to pursue the projects. Mr. Waller will provide an airport compliance manual to the Board that discusses what can be done with the land.

B. Adjournment

A motion was made by Commissioner Albritton, seconded by Commissioner Marcum, to adjourn the meeting. The motion unanimously carried. The time was 5:20pm.

Respectfully submitted,

Dominic P. Egizio, Jr.  
Board Secretary