

Hon. **Sam Lindsey**, Mayor
City Council, City of Willcox

101 South Railroad Avenue-Suite B
Willcox, Arizona 85643

November 1, 2009

**City of Willcox
Airport Ad-Hoc Advisory
Committee**

Rod Keeling-Chair-Pearce
Cynthia Rozinski-Stine- Vice
Chair-Cochise
Robert Smith-Pearce
Louise Walden-Willcox
Harley Smith-Willcox
Kurt Edelman-Willcox
Pete Erickson-Willcox
Richard Frank-Willcox
David Walters-Willcox
Walter Clark-Willcox
Gene Moreman-Willcox
Delcie Schultz-Willcox
Kathy Smith-Willcox
Phil Stratton-Willcox
Richard Searle-Cochise

City Staff

Pat McCourt-City Manager
Sherry Lynn Van Allen
Dave Bonner
Jeff Stoddard

Dear Mayor and Council,

Resolution 2008-83, passed and adopted by the Willcox City Council on December 15, 2008, created the Willcox Airport Ad Hoc Committee to examine the opportunities and the challenges for the city and to make a recommendation to the council as to the possible acquisition of the Cochise County Airport, located just northwest of the city.

The committee was formed from city and surrounding community volunteers, and held its first meeting March 4, 2009 with support from city staff. The committee met once a month throughout the spring and summer, conducted a community "town hall" that allowed citizens to participate in the process and voice their support or opposition to the acquisition, and concluded the committee's work on July 23, 2009, with a unanimous vote of the committee to recommend to the council to acquire the airport from the county.

While the report attached will explore the issues in more detail, the committee's recommendation to the council is based on two major factors. First, the acquisition will have both long-term and short-term economic development benefits to the city. The long-term opportunities center on the expansion and improvement of the airport aviation related services as a transportation asset to the city and the future development of a 270+ acres of business/industrial uses that would add significantly to the employment and tax base of the city. The short-term benefit of the acquisition is the message the city will send to the business community and potential business relocation prospects that the future development prospects for Willcox have been substantially improved by the decision.

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Second, there is a significant revenue stream attached to this airport. The FAA has informed city staff that the Willcox Airport has an annual grant commitment of \$150,000 that could go a long way in creating city capacity to successfully manage and develop the airport. One of the most important issues identified by the committee was the question of the city's capacity, financial, staff, equipment and infrastructure, that might not be sufficient to meet the challenges of the acquisition. While this grant funding is limited to capital costs and improvements, this revenue stream from the FAA should mitigate these concerns and possibly open opportunities to the city departments to expand department capacity that will benefit their ongoing city operations.

Clearly, the airport will continue to exist and function if the county retains ownership. The county has done significant improvements to the airport over the past decade, driven by federal and state transportation grants, but have done little to attract economic development, employment and tax base to the facility. If the county retains control, the next 20 years for the airport and its impact on Willcox will likely be similar to the previous two decades.

The best argument for the acquisition is the City of Willcox will do a better job. Over time, the city can take actions that will add benefit to the city, something the county is unlikely to do. The county is willing to transfer the ownership to the city through agreement at no initial capital cost to the city. That's over 900 acres, 270 developable business/industrial acres not in the flood plain, for no cost to the city. Property that can be under full city control without the necessity of annexation. However, to be clear on the costs, the airport currently is running a modest operating deficit that the committee believes could be mitigated or eliminated without major changes to airport management. If the transition period of transfer of ownership is structured correctly, much of the operating deficit might be resolved before the city takes on full possession of the facility.

The most significant obligation the city will accrue, is the role of local sponsor of the airport. As the sponsor, the city will be responsible for the long-term operation and maintenance of the facility as part of the national aviation system. This obligation is federal, and while significant, it is instructive to examine the county's experience, where 95%+ of all improvements over the past years have been grant funded.

Finally, as chair of the committee, I would like to take this opportunity to thank all of our committee members and city staff for their hard and diligent work in this effort. Committee member Kurt Edelman deserves special recognition for his work on our power-point presentation. Louise Walden provided operational information. Staff members Sherry Lynn Van Allen and Jeff Stoddard provided tremendous logistical and technical support to the committee. And thanks to the leadership and guidance of City Manager Pat McCourt and Cochise County Supervisor Richard Serle.

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Sincerely,

Rod Keeling, Chair
Willcox Airport Ad Hoc Advisory Committee

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