

In last month's column, my message was that 2023 will be a very busy year for the city, and I mentioned some specific priorities. Today, I thought I would focus on the importance of our airport and changes that we might expect in 2023. A brief review of its' history should help us understand the importance of past and future projects that have and will continue to build an airport that links our community to the global economy.

In 1946, the Warsaw City Council established the Warsaw Board of Aviation Commissioners (BOAC). A year later, in 1947, a 117-acre tract of land, at the site of the existing Warsaw Airport, was deeded to the City for the purpose of establishing the 'Warsaw Memorial Airport'. At the official opening of the new airport in 1948, activities included an airshow, crop dusting demonstrations, stunt pilots, passenger rides, and a Bell Aircraft helicopter! The new airport featured dirt runways and no landing lights. It was built with an FAA grant and local funds.

Significant improvements and growth occurred over the next 75 years. A 2,400-foot new asphalt runway and taxiway was built in 1950. Runway lights were added the following year, and by 1956, there were five hangars and twenty-eight airplanes. That same year, forty acres adjacent to the airport were acquired to expand the runway an additional 1,200-feet, which was completed in 1962. The current terminal building was erected in 1966 and added onto in 1982. Eventually, one of two grass runways was converted to an aggregate surface. That new east-west runway was completed with taxiways, improved runway lighting, and new aprons.

The predominant role of the Warsaw Airport is to serve as a hub and base for corporate aircraft of our local industry partners, charter companies, and agricultural services. Additionally, the airport is home to many private and recreational aircraft. In 2006, it was named the Indiana Airport of the Year. The Warsaw Airport was also recognized by Conexus in 2012 for its impact on the local economy in Indiana (ranked fifth behind the four Hoosier commercial airports).

The Warsaw BOAC manages the capital improvement projects that involve airport expansion and safety with FAA Grants. In 2023, the project to lower the powerlines at the east approach of the airport will begin construction. Funded primarily by the FAA, the City will provide 5% of the six-million-dollar project. That project, when paired with the Phase II runway extension, will provide improved access and safety to landing aircraft, especially in less than ideal conditions.

The BOAC must rely on local revenue from property tax and fuel sales to fund operations, maintenance, and capital improvements not supported by the FAA (e.g. hangar and terminal improvements and expansions, resurfacing taxi lanes and aprons, etc.). Funding to provide the necessary facilities and services to meet the needs of our customers is falling behind with the demands of an aging airport.

There is significant economic impact from the airport that benefits the entire county. This past month, the BOAC recommended that the City of Warsaw explore the possibility of dissolving

the BOAC and partner with the county to form an Airport Authority. This Monday, the recommendation from the BOAC will be presented to the Warsaw Common Council for their consideration.

The Warsaw Airport, guided by the BOAC, has been a critically important municipal asset for the past 75 years. It has had a profound impact on the success of our entire community. It is very important that, over the next few months, we consider the future of our airport and envision how it will benefit our community for the next 75 years.