

Airport ground-breaking planned for Wednesday, March 19

Written by George Browning
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Projects that once seemed like they would never be a reality in Salem are coming to life. First it was the Salem Truck Route or Bypass, then there was a major announcement about a Walmart opening in the fall of 2015.

Now another project that came under initial scrutiny, a new airport in Salem, looks more like a reality than it ever has.

In fact, a ground-breaking ceremony will take place on Wednesday March 19 at 3 p.m.

The ground breaking is for the first stage of the project, which according to Board of Aviation Commissioners (BOAC) President Ronnie Floyd will include grading and drainage.

“They will clear the trees and put it down to grade and there is quite a bit of drainage that will go in there for the water flow,” he said.

This phase also acquires three key parcels of land from two different owners.

Floyd said he and the rest of the BOAC are excited to see the progress finally translating to actual work being done.

He credits the movement to a switch in the project’s engineers. The BOAC hired Corey Harper of Butler, Fairman and Seuert, a civil engineering firm out of Indianapolis in January of last year and that group got the ball rolling.

Harper said he and his firm helped acquire a \$3.7 million grant last year, which will allow for this stage of the work to get done.

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Three million of that will be construction costs and half a million was used for land acquisition.

Harper said his firm came in and took a different approach.

“We came in and looked at it (the project) from a different perspective,” he said. “Instead of focusing on one issue and one concept we looked at it from a different approach and we started on a different end and were able to get the project moving faster than if we would have started on the west end.

“We started the west, where the previous focus was on the east. By moving the attention to the west, we only had to buy three properties from two owners. With the other end we needed to acquire 17 pieces of property before they could even break ground.”

“It’s been a long time coming,” Floyd said. “We changed engineers and got the community behind it and things came together. There was a lot of persistence and everyone pitching in to make it happen.”

Floyd was appointed to the board by Mayor David Bower. He admits he had reservations about the idea of a new airport, but had a change of heart as he got more involved in the project.

“When I came on the board I had some doubts,” Floyd said. “After seeing what was going on and seeing there is a need for it those doubts went away. We had a survey last fall that showed a new airport will be a valuable tool, so there is no doubt it will benefit our community.”

Floyd said after breaking ground on the 19th that portion will be finished late this year.

At that point attention will turn to the paving.

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Harper said he expects paving to begin as early as the spring or early summer of next year (2015).

“The grant will come in later this year for that work,” he said. “So it will just be a matter of when the grant comes and when things will get started.”

Harper said that phase will include paving, runway lighting and removing a tower that was once owned by AT&T.

Floyd said he sees no reason for current momentum to stop on this project.

“We were at an annual conference in Plymouth last October and we had a meeting with the FAA (Federal Aviation Administration) and INDOT’s aviation department and they assured us they are committed to this project,” Floyd said. “As long as we keep our match money, they assure us the funding on their part is there.

“Right now we have enough in that match to open up the 3,000 runway.”

Once the 3,000 foot runway opens in 2015, the current airport can be sold, which will provide the remainder of the money needed to extend the runway to 5,000 feet.

“That will give us the rest of our match to add 2,000 feet to the runway and we will have a 5,000 foot runway,” Floyd said.

The FAA will put up 95% of the grant, and the Indiana Department of Transportation has agreed to fund 2.5% of the 5% the airport’s 5% requirement.

Board member Bob Woodward has said in a previous article the county stepped up and agreed

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to fund \$225,000 from economic development for the airport.

“It’s been great for our company,” Harper said. “To pick up a new client and to be able to get their project moving has us ecstatic and we’re glad to be part of it.”

Corey said while his firm had a lot to do with helping get the ball rolling he said no one should forget all the work by all the people who went to make this happen.

He said one of which was the BOAC attorney John Mead of Mead, Mead and Clark.