

Elected officials, community leaders and many others joined with the Washington County Board of Aviation Commissioners last Wednesday to celebrate the beginning work on the new airport in Salem.

The ground breaking was to set in motion work being done to complete a 3,000 foot runway.

Once that is completed, the current airport will be sold and the remaining 2,000 feet of runway can be added at the new location.

There were many thanks as Salem Mayor David Bower led the ceremony.

He especially thanked the board, most of whom he placed in their positions, and their many hours of work that went into making Wednesday's event a reality.

"This project really polarized our community," Bower said, "Either you were for it, or against it. There was no middle ground. These board members understood that I wasn't against it, but if we were going to move forward it was going to take funding. They took the time to increase funding and with the help of the county we are many steps ahead of where we were."

Bower said the airport will be a huge asset for our community and said 80 acres are available for economic development.

Board members, Bob Woodward, Ronnie Floyd, Jason Cockerill, Danny Habermill and Mark Dewese were all given opportunities to speak at the event.

All of them thanked one another and board attorney John Mead.

"I've learned a lot during this process," said Habermill. "Mayor Bower put together a good group who works well together. John (Mead) really helped us out. We are cohesive and that is shown by what we've accomplished."

Woodward understands that there is still a lot of work to be done, but homes some of the more stressful work is a thing of the past.

No one spoke more passionatley about the current and new airport than the Airport Manager Lowell DePoy.

He said there is always an emphasis on hospitality and that helps to seperate Salem's airport from others.

“Our hospitality is not just from me it’s from the entire team,” Depoy said.

Depoy also mentioned the free museum that is on sight and he hopes that will be moved and more of the community would come to support it.

He closed by talking about the need for the new airport.

“I talked to two executives last year,” he said. “They told me they won’t even consider a city that doesn’t meet the airports needs. They need a bigger runway and if it’s not big enough, they won’t consider it.”

Ken Temple won the bid and actually started work shortly after winning the bid removing trees.

He said some people still doubt that it will happen.

“I was out there working and someone stopped and told me I was wasting time because it won’t happen,” he said. “It’s happening, I am doing the work.”

Temple thanked the BOAC and said when his company wins the bid, a lot of the money stays in the local economy.

In an earlier interview with Corey Harper of Butler, Fairman and Seuert, a civil engineering firm out of Indianapolis he said that phase will include paving, runway lighting and removing a tower that was once owned by AT&T.

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