

## FAA hears from citizens about new airport project

Written by

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On Monday evening, March 9, the Salem Municipal Airport Board of Aviation Commissioners (BOAC) and the Federal Aviation Administration (FAA) hosted a public meeting for the purpose of gathering input from the public on the proposed airport project. Several information stations were available for citizens to ask questions and make comments. The event drew approximately fifty people. When given a opportunity to make comments in front of the gathered crowd, only two people spoke out against the project while no one spoke in favor of it. Those comments were recorded and will be transcribed in preparation to be forwarded to the FAA for evaluation

Citizens were also given the opportunity to submit written comments as well. The nature of those written comments were not made available.

The proposed \$22 million project, if approved, is expected to be completed within the next five years. The responsibility of paying the costs breaks down as follows:

95% of the funding will come from the federal government through revenues generated by excise tax on aviation fuel so nationally.

2.5% of the funding will come from the state government through revenues generated by excise tax on aviation fuel sold in Indiana.

2.5% of the fund will come from a local match.

It is estimated that the local match will be approximately \$800,000. Owen Thompson, owner of Salem Speedway, has offered to lease the existing runway facility for drag racing on yet undetermined dates over the next five years at a lease rate that will be equal to or in excess of the local match requirements. Recently, Thompson, through a representative issued a \$20,000 check to the BOAC/City of Salem as a good faith gesture and a first annual lease payment.

Last year, the Salem Common Council and Mayor David Bower withdrew support for the airport project citing the city's expected shortfall due to new property tax laws. However, the majority of the Council and Bower have all publicly stated that if a way could be found to fund the new airport project without the use of taxpayer money, they would be in complete support of the new facility being built. With Thompson's offer on the table, those financial concerns seem to be resolved. However, in the two Common Council meetings since Thompson's money was received no action has been taken by the Council or the mayor to publicly show the support they promised when first backing away from the project last year.

According to BOAC President, Bill Barnett, the final FAA approval is expected sometime before the end of summer.