

Mayor sacks Air Board

Written by

Wednesday, 22 April 2009 00:00 - Last Updated Wednesday, 22 April 2009 12:11

The Washington County Edition received a copy of a letter dated April 14, 2009 and signed by Salem Mayor David Bower. In the letter, the mayor cites Indiana Code and reasons for removing members of the Salem Board of Aviation Commissioners (BOAC) as of the date of the letter.

The specified reasons for the mayor's actions are as follows:

1.As a member of the Air Board, you have participated in decisions to incur project expenses for the new Airport Layout Plan prior to the award of any FAA grant therefor.□ Consequently, the City of Salem, Indiana has been threatened with litigation in writing because the expenditures have not been paid.

2.As a member of the Air Board, you have participated in decisions to continue to incur project expenses for the new Airport layout Plan without having finalized the terms of a proposed lease or sale with Owen Thompson, Thompson Promotions, Inc., or any other entity to which Owen Thompson is a majority owner, which is intent to be the funding vehicle for the local match of the development of the new airport.

3.As a member of the Air Board, you have not acted to protect the City's financial interests in the collection of hangar rent from the fixed based operator which had remained delinquent for a period of at least 12 month.

4.This is an apparent lack of mutual trust and confidence between the Board of Aviation Commissioners and the elected officials of the City of Salem, Indiana.

When asked to comment on the letter and the stated reasons for the mayor's actions, all five BOAC members said that they were not surprised with the mayor's decision considering recent developments over the new airport facility and efforts by the BOAC to broker a deal with Salem Speedway owner, Owen Thompson for the lease and eventual purchase of the existing airport facility once the new airport is operational. Four of the five "former" BOAC members indicated that immediately after being removed from the board, the mayor asked each of them to serve on the newly appointed BOAC; this came as a surprise for all five.

This latest action in the negotiations between the BOAC, the mayor and the Salem Common Council over the new airport-speedway expansion project plays out as negotiations are at a critical juncture between the BOAC and Salem Speedway owner, Owen Thompson for the lease and eventual purchase of the existing airport facility.

In a Tuesday, April 14 interview with Bower and Common Council President Wally Turkhorn, a lack of trust that the BOAC members have acted in the best interest of the community was pointed to as the major reason for the action.

In lieu of a sitting BOAC, Bower and Turkhorn were scheduled to meet with Federal Aviation Administration officials in Chicago on Friday, April 17 to discuss options and find out what financial obligations the city might be under in regards to the possibility of terminating the new airport project.