BOARD OF COUNTY COMMISSIONERS

WORKSHOP: REGARDING WAKULLA COUNTY

AIRPORT LAYOUT PLAN

July 17, 2012

The Board of County Commissioners in and for Wakulla County, Florida met for a Workshop regarding the Wakulla County Airport Layout Plan on Tuesday, July 17, 2012, with Chairman Alan Brock presiding. Present were Commissioners Randy Merritt, Lynn Artz, Jerry Moore, and Mike Stewart. Also, present were County Administrator David Edwards, Assistant County Attorney Bethany Burgess and Deputy Clerk Evelyn Evans

This workshop is for the purpose of allowing discussions regarding the Wakulla County Airport Layout Plan.

2:00 p.m. The Workshop was called to order by Chairman Brock and the order of business will be for the Airport Committee to provide a presentation, Ochlockonee Bay Alliance to provide a presentation, Citizen Input, and discussion by the Board.

Wakulla County Airport is approximately 15 acres and the property is narrow and does not meet the FDOT minimum licensing standards. The airport license was extended to August 31, 2012 and the runway has to be widened or the license will not be re-issued. The Airport is not in compliance and must meet current FDOT standards. FDOT issued a special license in 2003 and this is how the Airport has been operating.

On June 19, 2006 the Board approved a Resolution in support of upgrading the Airport and FDOT provided a 100% no match grant of $78,000 for an update of the airport layout plan. Since that date there have been no projects identified that were provided to FDOT for approval.

On December 5, 2011, the Board adopted an Ordinance providing for an Airport Committee and approved a Resolution selecting a Membership on January 10, 2012. The Committee was tasked with overseeing Airport administration, improvement, and operations, including, but not limited to, the areas of Airport safety, strategic planning, applying for grants, implementing improvement projects, daily airport operations, collecting approved fees, preparing and overseeing airport budgets, preparing and providing reports to the Board as to Airport-related activities and operations. At the first meeting the committee was met with opposition to the airport improvements by residents on Surf Road regarding a proposed land acquisition.

Wakulla County Airport has and continues to be an asset to the county without any expenditure in County taxes. The airport was donated to the county and FDOT has committed to funding the necessary improvement projects without any financial burden to the County.

The airport is also an asset in the way it subsequently fostered a small 100 lot fly in community called Tarpine. The Tarpine residents have mowed and maintained the airport, purchased tractors to mow, install lighting, irrigation, fill dirt, seeding at their expense and paid the electric bill. Most of the Tarpine residents moved here because of the airport and there are approximately 22 homes in Tarpine.

The Ochlockonee Bay Alliance is not in support of the Airstrip Expansion and they asked for the Board to consider if the costs are justified and is Tarpine the right location. Another concern is State funding is not guaranteed and commits the county to fund unknown future expenses. Current budgeted funds are insufficient to support the expansion and the cost liability for the expansion is not justified. Operating costs are a drain on the county resources, future liabilities are a major concern, and funding for the project is in question. Before buying land to more than triple the airport size, and build improvements, alternative sites should be considered. They feel that the BOCC should cease support of the present airstrip.

There was a large crowd present for this workshop and around forty people were given an opportunity to be heard either for or against the airport.

The Board members commented about the long term ramification of accepting funds and does not want Wakulla County to constantly fund this. FDOT says there are no strings attached to the funding. The majority of people in Wakulla do not mind having an airport, but don’t want to fund it. There was talk about dissolving the committee and letting the Board decide how to proceed. They would like to see some recommendations from the County Administrator on overseeing this.

There being no further business to come before the Board, the meeting was adjourned by order of the Chair at 4:40 p.m.