

# CITY OF PORTAGE

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*"Where the North Begins"*

## MEMORANDUM

To: Common Council  
From: Aaron J. Jahncke, P.E., Director of Public Works/City Engineer  
Subject: Master Plan Recommendation  
Date: January 20, 2021

### **Background:**

After two years of planning and multiple presentations at the Ad hoc Airport Technical Advisory Committee (TAC), Airport Commission and the Common Council. The TAC and Airport Commission recommended that Alternative 1A, the safety and compliance option be considered by the Common Council.

In 2016 the City of Portage began the Exhibit A project with the Wisconsin Bureau of Aviation. At the time we were told that this project would not obligate us. "Obligate" means that once the City receives funding from the Federal Aviation Administration (FAA), for capital improvements to an airport, the City is required to operate the airport in compliance with FAA regulations for the life of the capital improvement. During a January, 2020 meeting, the FAA responded that the Portage Municipal Airport was obligated. The BOA provided all of Portage's recent airport projects and the FAA determined that the Exhibit A Survey federally obligated the Airport. The four grant assurances the project triggered were 23 – Exclusive Rights, 25- Airport Revenues, 30 – Civil Rights, and 31 Disposal of Land. These four grant assurances last as long as the airport is owned and operated as an airport.

**Exclusive rights** – Is that the as long as the airport is operating as an airport that it sole use is an airport.

**Airport Revenues** – Airport Revenues shall be used at the airport. Seeing that our expenditures are greater than the City's revenues, we comply with this assurance.

**Civil Rights** – That the Airport doesn't discriminate based on race, creed, religion, and etc.

**Disposal of land** – If the City decides on building a new Airport that the sale of the existing Airport Land is used to fund the building of a new airport.

There are three basic outcomes of our Master Plan.

1. If the City decides to improve the existing airport site and stay at the existing site nothing new happens in terms of these four obligations. Accepting future entitlements for construction would further obligate the airport.
2. If the City decides to move the airport we would have to use the sale of the land to build a new airport.
3. If the City decides to close the airport. This action would still require congressional approval but because the Master Plan identifies our deficiencies this could be supported by the FAA. The airport would cease operations and the grant assurances would disappear.

### **Analysis**

There were basically five options that result in the three basic outcomes that the Airport Commission considered before their recommendation to council.

- The recommended option from the Airport Commission is Option 1-A the Safety and Compliance option. This option fixes the safety deficiencies at the current airport but also limits the length of the runways to less than what it is now. Leaving the airport at its current site will not allow runway

expansion to 5,000 feet. This option will cost the City an estimated \$659,458 (in 2020 dollars) over the next ten years.

In this option, the City would then accept our entitlements for construction. In the first 10 years, the City will use their federal entitlements for the reconstruction of runways, taxiways and parking lots. Acceptance of these entitlements would obligate the Airport for the useful life of those improvements. The useful life for pavement construction defined by the FAA is 20 years. In Option 1A the City also has some property to acquire but we are acquiring that property through an 80/20 cost share split with the Bureau of Aeronautics (BOA) so the City does not obligate the Airport for perpetuity. After the initial 10 years, the City would then consider the possibility of adding hangars. If hangars were added using the entitlements that would further obligate the airport for an additional 40 years after the completion of the hangars.

- Close the existing airport site. Given the deficiencies and compliance issues this option would allow the City to close the airport instead of spending the money to fix the issues. This option may be possible given all of the issues at the airport and the close proximity to neighboring airports. This would need FAA approval and would end all of the airport's current obligations. Closing the airport would remove the City from the NPIAS and would not allow the City to look at new airport sites.
- New Airport Site Study: Scenario A. City staff and the BOA would have to discuss funding this with the FAA. If the FAA did not approve the new site study in early 2021 the City would have to discuss whether to adopt Option 1A or to close the existing airport site in spring or summer of 2021.
- New Airport Site Study: Scenario B. If the new site study was approved and if the new airport site could not be found due to a variety of reasons the City would have to reopen the discussion, 2-3 years later, on whether or not to close the airport or complete the Safety and Compliance Option. Due to the 2-3-year site search timeline the City would have to implement some of the safety and compliance measures. The short-term cost that that the City would expend is estimated at \$454,958. City Staff and Airport Commission would carefully select safety and compliance projects that would not further obligate the airport during the site search study. The Airport Site Study would cost around \$500,000 but the City has existing funds at the BOA that would cover the City's share.
- New Airport Site Study: Scenario C. If a new site search was approved by the FAA the study would take 2-3 years. If a site could be found and FAA would approve the site, the cost of building a new airport would be approximately \$44,900,000 and the City's share of this would \$6,800,000. Most likely the Airport would be located outside of the City limits and would have to be City/county or city/another municipality airport. The City would be looking at locating an Airport to the northeast or east of the City off of HWY 33 to meet distance requirements of other GA airports in the vicinity. See the attached service area map. The City would also have to spend the \$659,458 over the next ten years to make its current airport safe and compliant (Option 1A) until a new airport could be built. Most likely the construction of the Airport would take 20 years.

**Fiscal Note:**

As noted above.

**Recommendation:**

The five options are highlighted above.



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Aaron J. Jahneke  
Director of Public Works/ City Engineer

**Attachment(s)**

Service Area Map  
C-47 Presentation to council