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Tuesday, November 30, 2004

Commissioners protect airport's right to expand

By Bill Gisel

AUBURN — An ordinance that protects the future expansion of the DeKalb County Airport and discourages incompatible land use within 1.5 miles of a runway was adopted by the county commissioners Monday.

As an amendment to the county's zoning ordinance, the measure should help to achieve the goals and objectives of the recently adopted Comprehensive Plan, according to zoning administrator Sally Rowe.

The DeKalb County Plan Commission recommended the ordinance Nov. 17 and forwarded it to the commissioners for adoption.

Commissioner William "Chuck" Ort pointed out that the federal government has invested heavily in the airport, insuring further expansion at some point in the future.

"We are no longer just a little residential airport," he said.

Airport manager Russ Couchman said it has been his experience that airports tend to attract residential development, due to the availability of better roads and municipal services.

"It is equally important to not only protect the airport, but to protect people who might be harmed" by the presence of the airport, Couchman explained. "The only way to be a good neighbor is to go in this direction."

The ordinance requires that new residential development not be permitted within a 1.5-mile radius of the runway centerline unless a deed restriction waives the right to remonstrate against the expansion of the airport "in perpetuity."

Noise associated with the airport, the potential for devaluation of property and creating a new area most at risk of airplane crashes are other reasons cited as justification for the ordinance.

The wording of the deed restriction "shall clearly state that the DeKalb County Airport plans to



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add a crosswind runway and to expand the existing runway, all of which will result in larger aircraft and more aircraft utilizing the airport," the ordinance says.

The deed restriction becomes a covenant on the recorded plat of subdivisions partly or totally within the restricted radius.

Aviation board member Brad Stump said without the ordinance, there is nothing to force a developer of a subdivision to tell unsuspecting buyers that an airport is located close by.

Also Monday, the commissioners asked Larry Wheeler of EW Systems, Spencerville, to prepare an agreement under which he will study and recommend a strategy for the county to follow in regard to implementation of a state-wide emergency radio system.

The action comes on the heels of two requests by tower companies to locate communication structures on sites on the county farm and near the intersection of C.R. 35 and S.R. 8. The commissioners are questioning the need for or advisability of locating county communications systems on one or both towers, and if so, what kind of legal requirements should be implemented to protect the county in the event the towers are sold to other investors or companies.

Wheeler has served as an adviser to the sheriff's department for a number of years, said Sheriff John Dennis. His company provides communications services worldwide.

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