

Viewpoints



Moving closer to goal with new airport progress

The writer is chairman of the Panama City-Bay County International Airport and Industrial District.

By Joe Tannehill

With 2007 half over, I'd like to bring some perspective to where we are in the process of relocating our airport. There's been a lot of activity this spring, and we are moving ever closer to groundbreaking.

The Airport Authority board, along with our executive director, have been actively managing an extremely complex process — a process that has been proceeding on several parallel tracks. I want to thank each board member for his tireless efforts on behalf of the people of Bay County.

We've been managing the environmental track, which will culminate in the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers' issuance of the Section 404 permit — the final permit we need before we can

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this board, and previous boards, have been committed to protecting West Bay as part of the overall effort to relocate the airport. That goal is now very much in reach.

We've also been moving forward on a financing track, securing funds from the state and the FAA and negotiating the land donation agreement with the St. Joe Co. At the same time, we've been managing the sale of the existing airport property. We are making excellent progress on the sale of this property, and in the end I think we will have completed a deal that benefits the citizens of Bay County.

We are moving forward on a construction track. Earlier this year we hired KBR Inc. and PBS&J as our project/construction manager and our lead design firm, respectively. On Thursday, we received bids from six pre-qualified companies for the site

airport. We feel good about where we are in this process as well.

And we are moving forward on the air service track, meeting with airlines, marketing our community and working very hard to bring more competitive air service to our community.

We're getting a very good reaction in the meetings we are having. It's up to us to deliver an airport. When we do, I'm confident we'll be able to earn better service with a state-of-the-art facility and a runway system that works for the airlines.

Until now, each of these tracks has been on its own schedule. But over the next few months we're going to see them come together,

accelerate further.

This community has been grappling with the issue about what to do with this airport for nearly 12 years. It's been a long, detailed process — a process to which hundreds of people have devoted thousands of hours.

I would respectfully submit that through the hard work this community has put in, we've actually got it right. We are poised to execute the plan we put in place — a plan that was built on the West Bay Sector Planning process.

We are about to build an airport that will meet all federal safety and design standards, an airport that will serve our community and

beyond.

We're about to build an airport that will provide us with an economic development platform virtually unmatched in the state, and in the nation.

We're about to build an airport that will allow us for the first time to aggressively compete for better air service.

And perhaps most importantly, in the process of building this airport, we have crafted a deal, as detailed in the West Bay Sector Plan, to protect 40,000 acres around West Bay — the entire watershed. That's unprecedented.

We have an extraordinary opportunity here, and we will not waste it.

Make no mistake, we are moving forward. This project is going to be a success. We are committed to it. And each member of the Airport Authority board will honor the faith our fellow citizens have placed in us by doing this job right, in accordance with Bay County values and for Bay County's future and the future

