

Council decides against airport advisory board

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A city council consensus found it is not in favor of moving forward with an airport advisory board. The council discussed the topic at a special meeting on Monday.

“I have learned a lot in the last week or two by talking to citizens and airport staff, and the one thing I was really taken aback by was I didn’t know anything about our airport,” councilwoman Lin Chapé said. “As we move forward, I think we should have quarterly updates and would like to do that to keep us informed, and as issues arise, we can at least feel fairly intelligent and informed.”

Prior to the discussion, Johnson Aviation President and Airport Manager Ethan Nasalroad addressed the council about the airport’s recent history and plans for the future.

“In 2005, the city completed a \$2.2 million renovation of the airport and facilities,” Nasalroad said. “As the following years unfolded, the importance of the facilities as an economic tool became even more paramount.”

Nasalroad spoke about the loss of Maytag as the largest customer of the airport but through the city’s determination to market what Newton has to offer and the addition of the Iowa Speedway, the airport has been able to maintain its excellent service and continues to grow and expand to fulfill the needs of the community.

“Your return on investment right now is \$157 per \$1 invested,” Nasalroad said. “This airport is still poised to handle the next Maytag while maintaining a strong return on tax payer investment.”

Newton Development Corporation Executive Director Frank Liebl also addressed the council about the importance of the airport to the NDC’s efforts.

“We are blessed to have the airport we do in this community. There isn’t a single request for proposal that goes out to a prospect that doesn’t highlight the airport,” Liebl said. “Many times as we give tours to companies that are thinking about relocating here, one of the first places we take them is the airport and we talk about what we have out here.”

Liebl spoke about Phoenix Investors, which bought Maytag Plant II, and is currently working on renovations while consistently using the airport. He said PI management has have remarked several times how easy it is to come to Newton, land and in five minutes be at the building.

“If it isn’t broke, there is no need to fix it,” Liebl said. “We’re just very fortunate to have such a great facility in town.”

Councilwoman Miranda Kulis agreed that through her work, an airport was always very important to employers.

“When they were looking for places they wanted to have an airport and have had very good success and service with this airport,” Kulis said.

She agreed that having a quarterly or semi-annual update on the airport would be beneficial to both the council and the public.

Councilman Craig Trotter continued those sentiments, adding the updates should be part of a formal process for the airport and the city.

“I like the fact that we can try to come up with some sort of process to get voices for the individuals,” Trotter said. “I think that does need to be formalized some how and if the city needs to do that. I think it is a great idea. I am not in favor of the board but I think there needs to be a way to voice it and be heard.”

The council also started discussions on the process of searching for a new city administrator by setting up a timeline for a consultant search. While city administrator Bob Knabel has not given an official retirement date, he did announce his intentions to retire in the next three to nine months.

As the only council member who served during the last search, councilman Steven Mullan explained the process the council used when last hiring a new city administrator.

“You look at their record. They are all highly qualified from the League of Cities, who have screened these companies,” Mullan said. “You look at their proposals of what they are going to do for you, for us. They will also have a price and then you examine that material and make a determination which one is going to do the best job for us.”

Administrative services manager Katrina Davis gave a list of qualifications and questions the city can request from potential consultants. Those included the company’s background, success rate, references, the procedure they will follow, if they do background and reference checks and screening and what their fee for services are.

The council decided to have all RFPs sent out by Sept. 1 with a due date for return set three weeks later.

The meeting closed with councilman Jeremy Biondi making a motion, which passed, for the city to request from the Newton Convention and Visitors Bureau their financial statement including liabilities ending June 30. He added that formal council action has not yet been taken regarding allocation of the 2016-2017 budget funds to support community marketing.

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