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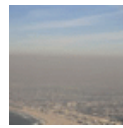
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Residents won't have to cede homes to airport

By MICHAEL ANDERSON
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Though it can be noisy, living just across the street from Southeast Iowa Regional Airport doesn't bother Bill and Sue Roberts, and they've put themselves to work on an extensive renovation of their old house.

Some nights they go out and watch the planes coming in for landings at runway 36, at the southernmost end of the airport.

"We love to watch the airplanes come in when they light up the runway at night," Sue Roberts said. "It's beautiful, kind of like Christmas."

When they bought their home in 1993, they didn't know their home was situated within runway 36's protection zone, which Federal Aviation Administration regulations require to be clear of occupied residential structures or other concentrations of persons. Since finding out, the Robert's have discussed the issue at numerous public meetings over the years, and it wasn't always clear whether they would be able to keep their home.

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"When we bought our property we had no idea this was going to be an issue," said Sue Roberts. "That's why it was such a shock to find out they might take it."

The Roberts own one of four properties within the runway protection zone. They received the good news Thursday night that the FAA will not require them or their neighbors to vacate their homes.

The Southeast Iowa Regional Airport authority made the announcement during a meeting to update its master plan. Jerry Searle of Ankeny-based Snyder and Associates said the airport must indeed pursue purchasing the properties, but only when the owners are willing to sell.

"We agreed that when these properties become available for acquisition, the airport owner has to make a good faith effort to acquire those properties," Searle said.

As is, the land acquisition agreement would require the FAA to pay for 90 percent of the purchasing cost, with the SE Iowa Regional Airport paying the other ten percent.



"You're saying that the FAA is willing to wait until properties become available to acquire them? Are they going to be willing to wait 10, 20, 30 years?" Sue Roberts asked.

"That is part of our plan," said airport director Mary Beard. "As long as that plan is in place, that is what it will be."

Dr. Taylor and Dr. Sliwinski

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Beaird added it was possible the FAA could change its position in coming years, but for now residents in the RPZ are in the clear.

"Every indication is that they are willing to wait," Beaird said.

Bill and Sue Roberts were pleased with the outcome.

"Last year we didn't think we had a choice," Sue Roberts said. "It sounds like the FAA is willing to be fair and help us relocate if we need to."

Runway 36's protective zone has been an issue for residents of the area at least since the late 1970s. Tom Greene of Summer St. bought a home within the RPZ in 1977. He remembers men in suits knocking on his door the next year and telling him they were going to seize his home.

He said the FAA has backed off substantially since then, but the issue remained unresolved since it was brought up again in a master plan meeting in September 2010.

Snyder & Assoc. has worked with the airport to update its master plan since 2008 at a cost of \$80,000. Searle led the presentation of the update Thursday night.

He said the thresholds for runways 30 and 18 were set to be displaced 500 and 600 feet respectively. He also mentioned several improvement projects scheduled for this year, including refurbishing the airport's storm sewer system and reconstructing a taxiway near runway 18.

"What's interesting is this runway was constructed in 1944. The original pavement that's out there today has been there since 1944. That is absolutely amazing, to have pavement last that long," Searle said of runway 18, which he added will nonetheless eventually need to be reconstructed. "If you can go 65 years with the same pavement, you must have been doing something right. So you guys have been doing a good job of maintaining this over the years, but again, fire a warning shot across the bow. It isn't going to last forever."

The FAA is currently in negotiations to purchase a vacated property in the runway 36 protection zone. Residents will be watching closely to see what kind of price the FAA offers the owner for the property.

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