

Washington Island board considers air

By SUZANNE DEE

Fifteen citizens came out to a public hearing May 13 on a request to realign one of the Washington Island Airport's two grass runways in the interest of safety.

The hearing preceded the town's application to the State Department of Transportation (DOT) for financial assistance realignment work. The application, which is preliminary and in no way obligates the town to proceed, arose from a request last summer by the Island's EAA Chapter 982.

Members of the EAA group came up with the idea of realigning the runway with their own funds and volunteer labor. Town supervisors approved the idea, with the stipulation that it would not take any town tax dollars to complete.

After investigating many options, EAA members started pursuing the possibility of using state airport improvement funds to pay for 80% of the project. The remaining 20% would be paid from EAA Chapter funds.

Since a private group could not apply to DOT money, the town had to become the official petitioner to the state. This was done with full knowledge and approval of DOT Bureau of Aeronautics personnel, some of whom are personally familiar with the runway's shortcomings, having flown in to the Island in light planes.

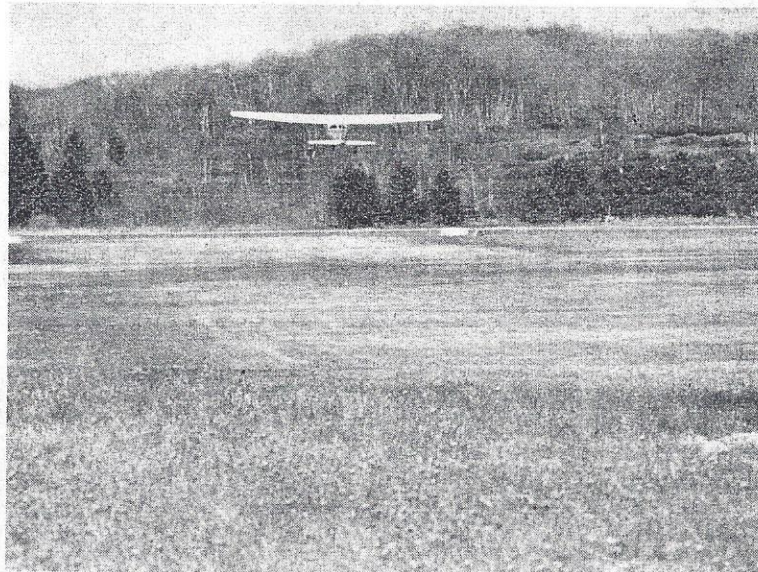
From this sprang the need for a public hearing, the transcript of which becomes part of the town's application to the DOT. Citizens took advantage of the hearing to find out details of the proposal.

Some questions from the audience and answers from Town Chairman Doug Young follow:

Q: What does the project more to the south, occasionally more to the west.

The pilot favored the longer runway, 14-32, for its flatter surface and clearer approaches, but the wind was all wrong for using it. Reluctantly, the pilot chose to land into the wind on the shorter, hilly, Runway 4-22.

Circling out to the northeast to line up for an approach, everything seemed fine. Then, about half a mile from the beginning of the runway, tension in the cockpit began to rise measurably. Wind blowing over the hill east of the runway created turbulence, tossing the light plane up and then sucking it down toward the treetops.



Student pilot Janet Engstrom, at the controls of *Island One*, takes off toward the hill on Runway 4-22 at the Washington Island Airport. The Island town board recently voted to realign the crosswind runway to improve safety.

—Suzanne Dee photo

standing under which this whole process was started was that the taxpayers would not be paying any money into this project. That still stands."

Q: Is this really necessary?

A: "That was our opinion last summer and it is still the same."

The only person to stand and present public testimony was Barry McNulty, who lives on Old Washington Harbor Road. McNulty began by questioning safety and required clearances for the GTE microwave tower.

"This is a testimony hearing," replied Young. "We will not enter into discussion."

[An engineering study made for the Federal Aviation Administration in 1989 and documented in town files states the 114-foot tower, south-

and the people felt, though they couldn't be here tonight, that they only heard about it from the town board meeting (four days earlier). They thought that was sort of inappropriate on the town board's part," Thiele said.

At a special town board meeting held Monday, May 16, supervisors completed the process begun at the hearing. Town Chairman Young again reviewed the events which led up to this juncture.

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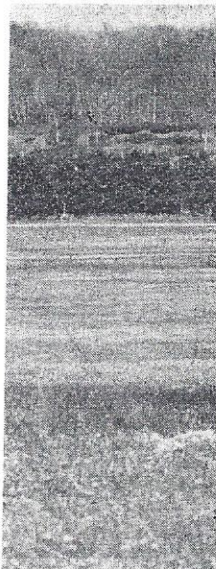
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considers airport runway realignment



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at its own expense last summer. Since that time the EAA investigated many options, including using Air National Guard engineers to perform the excavation.

"And they have come to the town," said Young, "requesting that we petition the state for funding and so that's where we are today. It would mean the Department of Transportation would be putting up 80% of the money and the local EAA chapter will, in advance, be depositing funds to cover the balance of the 20%. It's a possible means that the funds might be available. We won't know until we file (the petition)."

Supervisor Kirby Foss pointed to a 1989 DOT-funded engineering study which included plans for realigning Runway 4-22 and keeping it in turf. He reminded his fellow supervisors that five years ago the town purchased land — the Cauldwell property — in preparation for the realignment.

"That fulfilled our (20%) in-kind," he said. "We could have done (the realignment) at that time with just our signature."

Thiele expressed his objections to the project.

"Of all the airports in Wisconsin that have runways the size of ours or less, they only total 53 and of those 36 are single-runway and 17 are multiple.

"That means two-thirds of the airports in Wisconsin only have a single runway that are equal in size with ours. So the question is: Do we need to have more than we have, or is what we have adequate? If our runway is unsafe, how come we haven't had more accidents?"

Young responded, "The majority of the pilots I have talked to definitely feel it is (needed). These are professional pilots. They normally use the other runway (14-32) and avoid this one (4-22)."

Thiele countered, "Others I've talked to felt what we have is adequate. They've been landing here for many years, never had a problem."

Young and Foss immediately disagreed.

"I could get a pilot in here tomorrow," countered Young,

"and he'd tell you he's had some pretty scary landings on the runway."

"I've heard for many years," added Foss, "the crosswind runway is an accident waiting to happen."

Finally, Supervisor Don Mar made a motion to "petition the (state) Secretary of Transportation to survey to see if we can get monies for realignment of runway 4-22, with EAA chapter to pick the balance." Young and Foss voted in favor and Thiele against.

Facts about the airport

Facts and figures about the Washington Island Airport and a proposed realignment project on one of its runways:

- The airport is 66 years old, having been started by a group of citizens in 1928 and later turned over to the town. It is part of the federal airports system.

- Runway 14-32, which faces southeast and northwest, is 2,240 feet long and slopes downhill 12 feet to the southeast. In 1984, modern lighting was installed on the runway using state and federal aid.

- Runway 4-22, which points northeast and southwest, is 1,684 feet long and slopes 22 feet downhill to the northeast. The proposed realignment would lengthen 4-22 to about 2,200 feet and angle it away from a large hill toward more hospitable terrain.

- When these runways were laid out, airplanes of the day performed differently. Designed to take off from short, unpaved strips, these planes had high-lift wings and their top speeds were around 90 mph.

Today's small airplanes, however, are built for more speed. To get that efficiency in cruise, they sacrifice takeoff and landing performance and thus need more runway to operate safely.

- A typical fully loaded, four-seat light plane could require as much as 2,000 feet to become safely airborne on a 75 degree summer day at the Island airport. Actual performance varies according to aircraft model and the pilot's experience level and familiarity with both the plane and airport.



DR. TIMOTHY KENNEDY



DR. MICHAEL MC FADDEN

