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Alternate 2/1/05 airport plan offered

*Info meeting
on Island gives
residents
opportunity
to voice opinions*

By Paige Funkhouser
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Residents in both the opposing and favoring camps of the Washington Island airport realignment plan were given another opportunity to speak their minds at a special Town Board meeting Thursday night.

No formal action was taken; the meeting was only a forum for the presentation of petitions, written statements, and oral comments by those concerned with the changes the Town Board is proposing to make to the airport.

The Town Board passed a resolution in August outlining the basic steps the runway realignment project will take, including: the realignment of the NE/SW runway 10 degrees to the north, extending it to 2,250 feet from its current length of 1,250 feet; obtaining necessary "avigation easements" over the realignment area; and the installation of lights to improve safety at the airport.

"Avigation easements" is a term for the airspace rights the state plans to buy from private property owners to allow airplanes to fly over their land.

Since the August meeting, a group of concerned Islanders has formulated what they describe as a compromise plan to that of the town and Wisconsin Department of Transportation.

The alternative calls for the crosswind runway to be extended to 1,840 feet instead of 2,250; for the runway not to be aligned with the farm museum or town center; for the runway to continue as it is currently being used — only during higher velocity crosswinds — which would reduce the frequency of usage and new impacts of the proposed WDOT plan; and for the runway to dodge the hill at the southwest corner of the airport, which would create a flatter runway than the existing runway.

At the meeting, questions were raised about costs, elevation of the runways, even about birds that might flock to drainage areas the proposed runway realignment could create, causing a potential hazard. However, the board was unable to answer the majority of questions. Town Chairman Gordon Jaeger said the town would not know the answers to most of the questions regarding the design specifications until after engineers had made the necessary studies and calculations.

After audience members voiced their opinions, Jaeger said he would report back to the town as the engineering work progresses, and that he sees no objections to forwarding the proposed compromise plan to the WDOT.