

Waterloo airport board expands options for 'very poor' runway

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WATERLOO — The Waterloo Regional Airport Board has more repair options but still lacks the money to fix its shortest and least-used runway.

The AECOM engineering firm was asked in January to look at alternatives after putting the cost of rebuilding the 5,400-foot-long, 130-foot-wide runway 6-24 at \$5.3 million, while an asphalt overlay would cost nearly \$2 million.

AECOM's David Hughes returned to the board Tuesday with options to shorten the runway to 3,890 or 3,280 feet in length and make it 75 feet wide — a move that would reduce costs but still handle small aircraft of fewer than 10 passengers.

Hughes put the price tag at \$3.4 million or \$3 million, respectively, to reconstruct the runway at those lengths. But estimates for milling and overlaying the runway, a process estimated to last about 12 years, were not included for the shorter distances.

He also noted the cost of sealing cracks on the runway to buy another two years of life would run about \$300,000.

"That's a Band-Aid when you need a tourniquet," Hughes said. "You're putting maintenance dollars out there that are not going to give you a long-term return on your investment."

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Airport Board Chairman Hugh Field said any effort to keep runway 6-24 open will require support the airport hasn't received historically from the Waterloo City Council.

"I think these are all alternatives that aren't very attractive," Field said. "We're going to work through this. We're going to do the best we can."

Local general aviation pilots and Livingston Aviation have urged the airport board to keep runway 6-24 open, noting it is important when strong crosswinds make the other two runways unsafe for small aircraft landings. Waterloo is unique as the only airport in Iowa with three runways.

But runway 6-24, constructed in 1944, is listed in "very poor" condition and is not eligible for federal funding through the Federal Aviation Administration.

Airport Director Keith Kaspari suggested it's not prudent to put additional city money into the runway, which accounts for less than 2 percent of the airport's takeoffs and landings, especially when the airport still needs funding for its other two runways and operations.

Engineering reports have put the cost of repairing the two primary runways at \$21.5 million over the next decade while the airport traditionally gets just \$1 million in federal aid annually for major repairs.

David Deeds, a proponent for keeping the third runway, noted the airport would still face a cost to remove the existing runway.

"In my mind the actual 'do nothing' alternative is not really doing nothing," he said. "It ... is going to cost somewhere north of \$1 million to take it out and fill.

"Your (option to) resurface, reuse for 12 more years is \$1,950,000," Deeds added. "Which one makes more sense? You have a runway you can use for \$1.9 million or you have grass you can mow for \$1 million."



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