



Levy County Board of County Commissioners

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To: The Board of County Commissioners
From: Mary-Ellen Harper, County Manager
Date: May 20, 2025
Subject: Cedar Key Airport

Commissioners,

During the April 8, 2025, Board of County Commissioners (BoCC) Meeting, the Board directed me to work with staff to investigate the county's current obligations and future options related to the George T. Lewis Airport in Cedar Key.

Background

The George T. Lewis Airport (KCDK) in Cedar Key, Florida, is a general aviation airport owned and operated by the Board of County Commissioners (BoCC). It is a small, single-runway airport, with the runway (5-23) measuring 2,302 feet in length and 75 feet in width. The airport is situated on 52 acres of land and is located 11 feet above mean sea level.

Current Operations

Historically, Levy County has tasked the Road Department with managing grants from FDOT and completing improvement projects as well as routine maintenance. This ancillary task is in addition to the Road Department's primary responsibility of maintaining County Roads dedicated to the public, including grading, paving, resurfacing, mowing, and tree trimming and removal on County Right-of-Way. The management of airport grants and the implementation of projects have created an additional workload on BoCC Staff, which has caused the BoCC to request an overall evaluation of the operations of the George T. Lewis Airport.



Commissioners

Charlie Kennedy, District 1

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County Staff met with FDOT and the County's Airport Consultant, Passero, on May 14, 2025. Levy County has a "REDI waiver" for the George T. Lewis Airport, which means that we are exempt from local match requirements for grant programs within Florida's Rural Economic Development Initiative (REDI). This initiative aims to support economically distressed rural communities by providing coordinated assistance from state and regional agencies. The waiver enables the FDOT to fund projects at the George T. Lewis Airport without requiring a local matching contribution.

Options

FDOT was very clear that the state's position is that the BoCC owns the George T. Lewis Airport and can do whatever it wants with it. That said, it is the state's preference to see the airport continue to operate as an airport, but that is entirely up to the BoCC. Options include:

- Continuing to operate the airport
- Closing the airport
- Transferring the airport to another local government
- Selling the airport
- Maintaining ownership of the airport and leasing out the operations and management of the airport to a third party.

Typically, if a local government wanted to close an airport that received funding from FDOT such as has been in the case with the George T. Lewis Airport, FDOT would review the previous 20 years of grants and make a determination of what value, if any, they wanted reimbursed for any or all of the projects. The FDOT representatives who met with county staff suggested that if the state were to request reimbursement, the primary focus might be on the \$1.7 million grant to pave the runway; however, this would be up to leadership to determine how much, if any, of the funding would need to be repaid.

Future Considerations

It is my opinion that George T. Lewis Airport has untapped potential for Levy County. With the recent in-sourcing of Economic Development and the creation of the Economic Development and Tourism Division, the BoCC has prioritized innovative economic development and growth for the county while intentionally preserving our natural resources. The George T. Lewis Airport, with its zero-match funding source from FDOT, presents an incredible opportunity for Levy County that has not been leveraged to its full potential. I believe that instead of the airport being managed by the Road Department, that our Division Director of Economic Development and Tourism would be better positioned to create a master plan for Economic and Development and Tourism that includes the George T. Lewis Airport as a focus area. The County's new Grants Coordinator could manage grants related to the airport, and I see potential value in the Parks and Recreation Department becoming involved in the airport's improvement projects, maintenance, and general operations.

There is an agenda item from the Road Department on this agenda asking the BoCC to accept funding for a grant for a generator at the George T. Lewis Airport. This grant must be received before May 30, 2025, or the BoCC will lose this opportunity.

In advance of that agenda item being brought up for discussion, I would suggest that by changing the way the BoCC manages the airport, there may be some fantastic economic development and tourism-related opportunities for Levy County. I would ask the BoCC to consider accepting the generator grant from FDOT to avoid losing the funding, and allowing me time to meet with all of the BoCC staff that could potentially be involved in this exciting opportunity to develop a vision and plan for the George T. Lewis Airport. This vision and plan would then be presented to the BoCC for further discussion and consideration.