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HARTFORD BRAINARD AIRPORT ASSOCIATION NEWSLETTER



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Hartford Brainard Airport Association, Inc. (HBAA)

is a grass-roots organization of general aviation, private and commercial pilots, business leaders and others dedicated to preserving the airport as a valuable community asset and vital economic resource that supports Connecticut's economy and provides significant benefits to the capital city and region. HBAA works to promote the educational opportunities that already exist at Brainard, encouraging city residents to pursue careers in the fields of aviation and aircraft maintenance.

The \$1.5 million DECD Study is underway

BFJ Planning of NYC hosted the first of several upcoming public information sessions on February 16th, a meeting which was very well attended by more than 100 stakeholders, city residents and supporters of general aviation. BFJ outlined the strategy of this important study to determine 1) Environmental contamination and Flood Control issues, 2) Economic impact for maintaining the airport as is or using the property for alternative use and 3) Determine regulatory issues that would impact or hamper closure of the present FAA regulated property.

Timeline for completion of the study will be in October 2023. Opportunities for public input and the reporting of preliminary results will become available with full disclosure along the way, assured BFJ principal investigators Frank Fish and Thomas Madden. Despite the short timeline to complete the work, BFJ promised a thorough and impartial analysis of this important study. They recognize and respect the profound impact that the results of their study will have for the future of Brainard, the South Meadows and the greater Hartford region as well.

The next public information session is scheduled for Thursday, Apr.13 at the Metzner Center, 680 Franklin Avenue, Hartford. Interested public is welcome to attend and comment.

Hartford Brainard Airport Association, Inc. has committed to be deeply involved with all aspects of the study and has offered to supply much needed background information to BFJ to help them achieve the best informed and most comprehensive study possible. BFJ has assured HBAA and the entire community that they are committed to a fair and objective report, no matter where the conclusions might lead.

Please consider a donation to support HBAA's efforts to keep Brainard Airport open:



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City of Hartford Mayoral Race Heats Up Where do the candidates sit regarding Brainard?

With the announcement that Luke Bronin, present mayor of Hartford will not be running for a third mayoral term, the field for a new mayoral candidate has opened. Several leading candidates have declared that they will be running for the post and the first of several mayoral debates was held on Jan. 12 at the Blue Hills Community Center, moderated by former Hartford city councilwoman Attorney Cynthia Jennings.



Eric Coleman



Nick Lebron



Arunan Arulampalam



John Fonfara

Each candidate had an opportunity to voice their opinions regarding important campaign issues. Top of the list was the fate of Brainard Airport. Both candidates Nick Lebron and John Fonfara have long voiced their opposition to the airport, but Eric Coleman had a different opinion. He expressed the strong position that Brainard offers economic opportunities to the city as well as educational opportunities in aerospace technician and pilot jobs to the city's youth. He stated that the city should not only keep the airport open but encourage and enhance the many opportunities that can benefit the city in the long run. Arunan Arulampalam, CEO of the Hartford Land Bank and experienced in economic development would not commit with an opinion but suggested that he wanted to study the issue further.

Both Mr. Coleman and Mr. Lebron have visited the airport and toured the property with HBAA, seeing for themselves the many activities at Brainard. Mr. Fonfara has, as of yet, refused an invitation to visit and Mr. Arulampalam scheduled a tour with HBAA on Feb. 24. HBAA remains available to answer any and all questions the candidates might have regarding the important economic opportunities available that will benefit the city of Hartford as well as the greater Hartford region.



HBAA Editorial Comment:

Brainard Airport: City Asset or Regional Asset? Or both?

Nothing is hidden about the Hartford's City Council's desire to close Brainard Airport. Being a municipal property owned by the Connecticut Airport Authority (CAA) and not the city of Hartford, Brainard Airport generates minimal property tax revenue to the city. Like hospital, educational and state facilities, Brainard is tax exempt.

Once the wealthy Insurance Capital of the World, Hartford continues to struggle financially. As one of the poorest urban regions in the country, understandably, the city leaders would like to increase their tax base. Following their argument, if the city could redevelop the property to establish more taxable property to add to the city's Grand List, this would generate much needed revenue for the city's coffers. In theory, this sounds quite beneficial.

However, there are immediate problems with this argument. Most notable is that the city of Hartford does not own the property in the first place. Even if possible, the maneuvers to transfer ownership to the city would be highly complex, requiring both FAA and state legislature approval. The cost alone of purchasing and remediating the contaminated property (if that is even possible) would be exorbitant. Mixed use development, a proposal put forward to increase the city's grand list sounds attractive on paper, but even if the city were to place offices, upscale shopping, residential units and a marina there, exactly who would prefer to relocate to an industrial region flanked by the trash-to-energy MIRA plant to the immediate north and the waste management MDC facility to the immediate south. The odor alone would make that plan highly objectionable.

If increasing the city's revenue was really the main economic concern, the well-researched **2016 Legislative Program Review and Investigations Committee's Staff Findings and Recommendations Report** offered 10 pages of suggestions of how the city, working with the CAA, could boost revenue to the city and also to the region. Curiously, essentially none of these recommendations have been pursued by either the city, the General Assembly or the CAA.

Property tax is only one method that could be implemented to increase financial benefit to the city. As only one example, the 2016 PRI study suggested that to boost Brainard's value to Hartford, the state of Connecticut could implement a 100 percent Payment-in-Lieu-of-Taxes (PILOT) for CAA-owned general aviation airport property, or at minimum, provide the 45 percent PILOT set in statute, relying at least in part on state subsidy reduction. Or, the CAA and the FBO at Brainard could consider partnering with nearby attractions to offer tour or event packages from Brainard into Hartford. A decade ago, the Aircraft Owner's and Pilot Association (AOPA) brought hundreds of participants to the Hartford Civic Center along with all the financial benefits accrued from the participants who spent their money in Hartford. Brainard Airport does bring significant income into the region, much of which directly benefits the city of Hartford.

Hartford has carefully avoided acknowledging that if the airport benefits the region by its success, this becomes an indirect but substantial economic benefit to the city. Even without implementing any of the many PRI study suggestions, the CAA reported that in 2021, Brainard contributed \$59 million in GDP income for the state as well as supplied 361 jobs for the region. Hartford receives a substantial share of this economic activity.

Brainard can and does attract industry and business activity, promotes educational opportunities to the region as well as the city of Hartford, and concentrates public health and emergency services at the airport to serve the region all of which have positive direct and indirect financial impact that will benefit Hartford. Electric aircraft, increased drone activity and electric vertical take-off and landing vehicles (eVTOL) are all highly profitable up and coming aviation industries and Brainard is perfectly positioned to benefit by this sector's growth.

A wise Hartford city government should not fail to include the exciting and profitable future that will come from the explosion for general aviation in the next decade. A substantial financial opportunity to boost Hartford's economy is here now and will be missed if the airport closes.

Rather than focusing on the city alone, a much wiser path is to recognize the economic value to the region, made possible by exploiting the benefits of a local airport, making Hartford a much more attractive and exciting destination for those who want to partner with the city. Economic success breeds more economic success. Hartford city leaders should not miss out on this unique economic opportunity for the future of all its residents by continuing to call for closing Brainard Airport.

Visit our Web site:
www.hfdbaa.org

For additional information, please contact:
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