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CHAMBER'S ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT ARM AND CITY COUNCIL DISCUSS GRAND HAVEN MEMORIAL AIRPORT COMMUNITY COMPACT TO CREATE "OUR AIRPORT FOR THE FUTURE"

Ten-year vision and \$20 million investment to better serve aviators, create a strong financial future and create a transportation and mobility hub for West Michigan.

GRAND HAVEN, Mich., June 7, 2021—Grand Haven Memorial Airport (GHMA) has a 50+ year history serving the West Michigan's Lakeshore and the Northwest Ottawa County community. The Chamber of Commerce of Grand Haven, Spring Lake, Ferrysburg presented "Our Airport For the Future" Community Compact before the Grand Haven City Council, a 10-year vision and \$20 million investment that would deliver significant enhancements to the airport, leverage its recent growth, create additional opportunities for revenue and develop the airport into a multi-modal transportation and personal mobility hub for the region.

As a general aviation airport, GHMA has traditionally served recreational aviators as well as professional aviation businesses and local manufacturers. Tourism and manufacturing are the two leading segments of the Tri-cities economy, and with its location within a walking distance to global manufacturers, and a bicycle ride to downtown, a new Jack Nicklaus-designed golf course and numerous vacation rentals, the GHMA is strategically located to be the transportation centerpiece of the Lakeshore's economy.

During 2019, GHMA saw more than 13,000 airplane operations (takeoffs and landings), a 21 percent increase over the previous year, which is largely attributed to the growth of Skydive Grand Haven as a tourism draw. The "Our Airport For the Future" Community Compact acknowledges this growth direction and plans enhancements and a financial structure that will make the airport safer, more relevant to the community and a welcoming place for visitors, while at the same time bringing long-term financial stability to the airport's budget.

"The founders of Grand Haven Memorial Airpark left us with a wonderful legacy, and its proximity to world-class beaches and our manufacturing industries can make it a vital part of our economic future," said Elizabeth Butler, director of Economic Development Strategic Directions at the Chamber. "The investments and enhancements are contingent on the whole community coming together, recognizing the long-term importance of the airport and creating a future in which we can all participate."

Recommended enhancements bring in new revenue include:

- Additional, new and larger airplane hangers
- Runway extension
- New landing system
- High-intensity lighting
- Overnight facilities
- Food truck parking and restaurant
- Community rental facilities
- Community Transit Hub

Many of the enhancements come at the request or recommendation of aviators who regularly use GHMA, and all are focused on sustainable, reoccurring revenue, safely bringing in more aircraft and planning for the future of land and air mobility.

The investments in the airport infrastructure, whether to rebuild existing assets, realign aviation activity or accommodate changes to anticipated capacity, will be a major source of economic benefit to the Grand Haven region. A study by the Chamber showed the \$20 million investment through the Community

Compact, which increases accessibility and desirability of the airport would create a \$21 million year-over-year, economic impact, ensuring the airport's long-term viability.

Across the United States, almost all general aviation airports, which cater primarily to owners of private planes, have operating deficits that cities must make up for in their budgets. Many municipalities have moved to close their airports entirely, in order to reduce the impact on local budgets. The Aircraft Owners and Pilots Association estimates the nation loses 50 public-use airports every year.

The Our Airport for the Future Compact addresses this problem head-on, to avoid a shut-down of GHMA. Financing for the enhancements could come from a combination of Federal Aviation Administration (FAA) and Michigan Department of Transportation (MDOT) grants, alongside local investment. As reported by airport staff, FAA has funds available for airport construction and expansion, covering up to 90 percent of costs, as funds are available, with MDOT and the city each paying 5 percent of the remainder. To access these grants, the city of Grand Haven would need to ask for a special, 10-year airport millage, which would bring in approximately \$1 million over 10-years.

To make room for the proposed enhancements at the airport and to keep the majority of the airport open the Our Airport for the Future Compact recommends closing the North/South (crosswind) Runway, which averages a small number of operations every year. The land would be utilized for amenities including overnight facilities, community transit hub, "through-the-gate" operations for local manufacturers and expansions of other local businesses.

"The airport can be more than a place for personal aircraft, it can be the gateway for our community and the Our Airport for the Future Compact is a plan to preserve and enhance the friendly, convenient and efficient airport we have today," said Joy Gaasch, president of the Chamber. "By increasing capacity, we can better serve our current aviators, attract new aviators to Grand Haven, as well as new businesses and visitors, all of which generates additional revenue for the airport. A well-executed and successful Community Campaign can be the key to a financially secure airport."

For more than 30 years, the city of Grand Haven has restricted general funds from being directed to GHMA, and for more than 30 years there have been ongoing discussions related to closing GHMA. Although general aviation airports have historically been funded by federal, state, and local entities, it is the private sector, through increased operations, hanger rentals and fuel sales which are allowing airports to define their futures.

"In an era of declining resources and increasingly scrutinized public expenditures, community involvement is our best option to fill an ongoing and increasing gap between the existing infrastructure and the infrastructure that is needed at the airport," added Gaasch.

GHMA enhancements acknowledge the future that is approaching in personal aviation transportation. The Community Compact is designed to identify the best assets of the airport and the community and lean into aviation tourism, and for the first time, include air travel in a regional mobility solution. The result will be better airport operations, benefits for local aviators, growth for the business community and efficiencies for fixed-based operators.

About Economic Development of the Chamber of Grand Haven, Spring Lake, Ferrysburg

The Chamber of Commerce of Grand Haven, Spring Lake, Ferrysburg provides Economic Development services to all five of the local units of government in NW Ottawa County (to be specific, they are the City of Grand Haven, Grand Haven Charter Township, the Village of Spring Lake, Spring Lake Township and the City of Ferrysburg). The Chamber serves as a catalyst of innovation and collaboration across these communities, and seeks to empower business and create a resilient community through collaboration and transparency.

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