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Durango-La Plata County Airport looks at management options

City, county hear pitch on new airport governing structure



Photo by: Durango Herald file

On Wednesday, officials examined options for adjusting the management structure of the [Durango-La Plata County Airport](#).

By [Jessica Pace](#) Herald staff writer

As local leaders explore the future of the [Durango-La Plata County Airport](#), one option is reshaping its governing structure by becoming a regional airport authority.

On Wednesday, city, county and airport officials heard a presentation from John Putnam, a Denver attorney specializing in airport governance, on forming multi-jurisdictional partnerships, such as with New Mexico, as the airport expands.

Wednesday's meeting was informational and did not involve action from any entity.

The local airport has a joint governing structure, with oversight shared by the county and city. A multi-state airport authority structure could be more efficient, but integrating multiple political bodies into one partnership is difficult, Putnam said.

If the airport transitioned from an intergovernmental structure to an airport authority, policy decisions would be made by an authority board. The board would also assume responsibility for deficits, liability and employment and management.

City Councilor Keith Brant said growing the airport into a regional authority could burden administrative staff and equate to more costs.

"It's not an easy concept in financial terms," said Roger Zalneraitis, executive director of the La Plata County Economic Development Alliance. "It can be done, but it's one of those things that is slow to integrate."

If voters approve a property tax increase this fall to fund a proposed terminal expansion, the revenue might be handled differently under an airport authority. The funds could be turned over to the authority board or the county could build the new terminal and lease it to the board to maintain more control.

“The question you have to figure out is, does this make sense?” Putnam said. “The pros are that you form one governing body and know where decisions are made. The cons are that there are real costs to this formation, including staff time. You’re not going to solve all aviation and transportation problems by transitioning.”

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