



Business Council of Westchester launches Coalition for Westchester Airport

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Rye Brook, NY The Business Council of Westchester (BCW) has launched the Coalition for Westchester Airport, uniting a broad range of businesses, labor organizations, educators, nonprofits and residents in support of one of the county's most valuable assets.

“Just as the BCW led the charge to build the new governor Mario Cuomo Bridge, we are now focusing on another crucially important element of Westchester's transportation and economic infrastructure—the Westchester County Airport,” said Marsha Gordon, president and CEO of the BCW. “We are representing the interests of the traveling community, the business community and the neighboring community, to make sure that all interests are heard, respected and balanced. The future of Westchester County Airport is at stake, and we all have a stake in the airport.”

During a news conference at the BCW headquarters, the coalition urged residents to learn the facts and sign an online petition at CoalitionforWestchesterAirport.org. The petition will automatically be sent via email to county executive George Latimer and members of the Board of Legislators. The coalition also announced the start of a robust informational campaign that will roll out across the county in coming weeks to continue to unite stakeholders.

“The airport is crucially important to attract and retain a wide spectrum of businesses that bolster the local economy and strengthen the tax base,” said John Ravitz, executive vice president of the BCW. “The airport also is a valuable tool for workforce development, and directly and indirectly employs thousands of people in diverse industries. Yet the airport is under threat. The last thing we want is for Westchester to take 10 steps backwards because a relatively small but well-organized group of opponents has mobilized and dominated the discussion.”

Coalition speakers included Deb Milone, executive director, Hudson Valley Gateway Chamber of Commerce; George Kleros, senior vice president, strategic event & fleet support, Jet Support Services, Inc. and Westchester Aircraft Maintenance Association board member; Lauren Rones-Payne, general manager HPN, Million Air; Chris O'Callaghan, managing director, Jones Lang LaSalle; Sean Meade, president, Westchester Hotel Association; and Frank Williams, executive director, White Plains Youth Bureau.

The Coalition for Westchester Airport has already attracted support from a diverse group, including but not limited to the following companies: Accreditation Guru; AllShows; Altium Wealth; Business of Your Business, LLC; Cappelli Organization; D&M Electrical; Federated Insurance; Hilton

Westchester; Hudson Valley Gateway Chamber of Commerce; JDM Benefits; Madison Approach; Maier Markey & Justic LLP; Mastercard; Million Air; Nicholas & Lence Communications; OLA Consulting Engineers; Red Oak Transportation; Robert Martin Company, LLC; Singer Law; Statewide Abstract Corp; Thalle Industries; Walison Corp.; Westchester Aircraft Maintenance Assoc.; Westchester Hotel Association; Wilkes Law Group; and York International Agency, among other individuals.

To add your company to the coalition, please email your name and logo directly to IRamos@thebcw.org or visit CoalitionforWestchesterAirport.org.

The Coalition is calling on the county to support an approach that provides high-quality air travel while protecting the environment and respecting the airport's residential neighbors. The Coalition does not advocate for enlarging the airport, but does call for making reasonable enhancements that would improve the airport's existing services and facilities, stating that a public/private partnership would work well in Westchester.

Westchester County Airport has been successfully operating for 70 years, always under private management selected by and reporting to the county. A public/private partnership – as had been extensively studied under the previous administration and representatives of the Board of Legislators – would bring in a partner with a proven track record of addressing many of the noise and environmental concerns. The county would still retain overall control of the airport, and no expansion or major changes could be undertaken without a vote of the Board of Legislators. No expansion has been proposed.

“The 2017 Request for Proposal process for a proposed public/private partnership required an in-depth study of the issues confronting the airport and its operations. The current Chairman of the County Board of Legislators, Benjamin Boykin, and the chair of its Infrastructure Committee, MaryJane Shimsky, were on the review team and are familiar with these studies,” Ravitz said. “As part of the ongoing review process, we recommend that the information in the RFP responses be examined by the current board. Included in them are practical and effective ways of addressing many of the issues surrounding the airport, including concerns about environmental and noise protections.”

Deb Milone, executive director of the Hudson Valley Gateway Chamber of Commerce, said, “It is time to put aside the hysteria and misconceptions being spread and focus on the facts. The Public Private Partnership will improve the airport's infrastructure and environment at no cost to the county taxpayer, as well as unlock trapped revenue from the airport and provide the county with a long-term revenue stream that can be used to fix our highways, improve our parks and provide essential services.”

George Kleros, senior vice president, strategic event & fleet support, Jet Support Services, Inc., and board member of the Westchester Aircraft Maintenance Association (WAMA) said, “Westchester Aircraft Maintenance Association AKA (WAMA) is one of the first business aviation maintenance organization formed in the U.S. It has been on this airport for almost 60 years promoting safety and

support through educational information and training seminars provided to the aviation community. The members are made up of aviation professionals to include maintenance technicians, pilots and aerospace companies and aviation support services. This airport has been a home for our members for decades. It supported thousands of jobs and created many opportunities for individuals and businesses. These are well paying jobs that support families and help the local business that surround the field. It's important to realize having an airport of this caliber able to support light to moderate commercial service, business aviation and general aviation makes for a unique advantage for businesses and the community in Westchester County. The combination of air, rail and highway present the perfect infrastructure balance of easy access for the community and business traveler. Airports, especially regional airports are not being built in the US. This asset can't be replaced, preserving what it offers is essential to the financial health of the county."

Sean Meade, president of the Westchester Hotel Association and general manager of Cambria Hotel, said, "Every general manager who is a member of the Westchester Hotel Association values the importance of the airport to the hotel industry. It is imperative that everyone working together continues to make the airport as strong as it can be so that as the hotels continue to recruit businesses for conventions and other events, we can point to the airport as a strong attraction to come to Westchester – boosting not only hotel spending, but overall tourism spending as well. In fact, Westchester's travel and tourism industry continues to grow, hitting a new record last year of \$1.9 billion. Visitor spending in 2017 directly and indirectly supported 24,527 jobs in Westchester – which is 5% of all jobs in the county. The lodging sector in particular was up 2%, with spending over \$424 million. The importance of the airport as an economic asset for Westchester County cannot be overstated."

Chris O'Callaghan, managing director, Jones Lang LaSalle, said, "The airport is an incredible asset to our existing business community. If we don't invest and enhance our airport, businesses and individuals that rely on it, will continue to leave. The commercial real estate industry in Westchester has been decimated over the last 30 years by the loss of thousands of jobs. The downsizings by major corporations pushing efficiencies by relocating jobs to lower taxed, lower cost states has resulted in no new speculative office development in 30 years. The supply of office space has been reduced by eliminating office buildings that have become completely obsolete. We expect this trend to continue due to the age of our supply, and the lack of acceptable amenities provided. Office buildings sell for 30%-50% of replacement value just because of lack of demand and rents that only support that percentage of value."

Frank Williams, executive director, White Plains Youth Bureau, said, "There is great demand for workers in the Aviation field, and the Westchester County Airport is absolutely essential for workforce development. This includes airplane pilots, mechanics, maintenance, operation managers, customer service workers, Engineers, Air Traffic Control and more. Last year, James Parker, a retired airplane pilot, donated a Flight Simulator to the Youth Bureau. This gift has enabled us to create a new, exciting and prosperous career path for our youth, and the response has been incredible. It is worth noting that according to recent studies, over the next two decades 87 new pilots will have to be trained and ready to fly a commercial airliner every day in order to meet the demand. At the same time, more than 42% of active U.S. pilots at the biggest carriers will retire over

the next 10 years. Our hope is to continue to strengthen our partnership with airport, conducting field trips, engaging personnel to speak to students and providing internships. Our long-term goal is to develop a certified, full-fledged Youth Flight Academy Program with the goal of getting our youth one step closer to careers in Aviation.”

Roger Woolsey, CEO, Million Air, said, “Million Air is very committed to our neighbors in Westchester, and are making the community investments to lower noise, reduce unnecessary flights, support quieter operations, all while creating high quality jobs, and providing a beautiful gateway for our visitors and base tenants alike.”

One of the county’s largest and most influential business membership organizations, The Business Council of Westchester is committed to helping businesses market, learn, advocate and grow. In addition, The Business Council of Westchester is actively involved in reviewing federal, state and county legislation and regulations in order to assess the potential impact on the business community and to influence the outcomes through advocacy when the business community’s interests may be affected. It also acts as an information resource for the business community and government leaders at all levels.

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