



## **Oklahoma Aeronautics Commission**

**Media Contact: Harve Allen, Director of Communications**

**Phone: (405) 604-6916; Cell: (405) 301-3230; E-mail: [harve.allen@oac.state.ok.us](mailto:harve.allen@oac.state.ok.us)  
3700 N. Classen Blvd., Suite 240, Oklahoma City, OK 73118**

## **NEWS RELEASE**

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### **Runway Improvements at Sallisaw Airport Will Benefit Pilots, City**

**OKLAHOMA CITY** – The Oklahoma Aeronautics Commission recently inspected runway improvements at the Sallisaw Municipal Airport that will help keep the airport viable and provide a safe environment for the pilots that fly in and out of the eastern Oklahoma community.

Commission staff recently visited the airport to inspect the work that was completed on the runway, which included overlaying the existing runway with a new layer of asphalt. The total cost of the project was \$724,000, which was paid through a combination of local, state and federal funds. A majority of those funds – \$367,390 – was provided by the Commission in the form of a grant through its Capital Improvement Program (CIP).

The Commission's CIP provides funding to Oklahoma airports for various capital needs, such as runway maintenance and construction; installation of navigational aids; land purchases; and installation and repair of airfield lights and signage.

"It's vital that our state provide general aviation airports that are both accessible and safe," Commission director Victor Bird said. "These airports are gateways to the world for many communities and can be the deciding factor when business executives search out new locations to expand their companies. These kinds of airport improvements, such as the one recently completed at the Sallisaw Municipal Airport, can play a huge role into bringing more jobs to a community. We are thrilled to play a part in Sallisaw's economic development efforts."

Sallisaw city manager Bill Baker praised the Commission's CIP, stating the runway improvements are critical to the airport's future.

"Our runway got into the condition in which it was cracking and was becoming rough and uneven. Obviously, that was not a good situation for the airport," Baker said. "The Capital Improvement Program is extremely important for Oklahoma communities, and a lot of projects around the state would never get accomplished if it weren't for the program. It could take years to accumulate that amount of funding needed to address these projects. By that time, the problem gets worse and then it costs even more to fix."

Baker said additional improvements to the Sallisaw Municipal Airport are in the budget for this year, including renovating the terminal and adding an automatic fuel pump, which would allow pilots to fill up their aircraft 24 hours a day, seven days a week. He also said the airport has applied for another CIP grant in hopes of having its 4,000 foot runway extended to at least 5,000 feet, the minimum distance needed by jet aircraft to safely take off and land. If approved, the runway extension could be completed within the next three years.

“Right now, we don’t accommodate jet aircraft, and that’s one of the things we’re working on. It will be huge for our airport and community. We have several companies eyeing Sallisaw as a place to expand or relocate. And the first question they ask is if they would be able to land their jets here. Right now, they have to fly into Fort Smith (Ark.) and drive over and that’s pretty inconvenient if you’re a CEO for a company.”

Julie Ferguson, who serves as grants administrator for the City of Sallisaw, echoed Baker’s sentiments regarding the airport’s ability to attract corporations and jobs to Sallisaw, a city that has seen steady growth over the years.

“We greatly appreciate the Commission and their willingness to partner with us in maintaining and improving our airport. These runway improvements are vital to Sallisaw’s growth,” Ferguson said. “Sallisaw’s population has grown 15 percent every decade, and it won’t be long before we hit the 10,000 mark in population. Our city is situated in a great spot – in the center of the nation, nestled alongside Interstate 40, with a railroad that runs through town and the Arkansas River Navigation System right up the road.”

The Commission’s mission is to encourage, foster and assist in the development of aeronautics in Oklahoma and to encourage the establishment and maintenance of airports. This includes the preservation and improvement of the state's 114 public airports in communities throughout the state, which make up the State Airport System, and the promotion of aviation, one of the top employers in the state.