

Cascade seeks room for growth

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Flying the friendly skies in and out of Walla Walla is becoming big business.

So big that more space is needed, Walla Walla city and county officials learned at a joint dinner meeting Tuesday.

Doug Winn, Walla Walla City-County Airport manager, told Walla Walla City Council and Walla Walla County Commission members Cascade Airways needs more hangar room here.

"They're looking at basing all their operations in Walla Walla and it's the logical place for them to be," Winn said.

"The little hangar they're in right now just isn't going to cut it."

Winn said the airport management has been looking at different ways to expand Cascade's current facility or move them into another one.

A new hangar of about 33,000 square feet could cost \$700,000 to \$800,000, he estimated.

Possibilities include using a large shelter hangar and heating it or rehabilitating an old maintenance hangar, Winn said.

He said he's working on an arrangement now that could get part of the Cascade operation that's working outside in out of the snow for this winter.

Cascade will be certificated in the near future, making it eligible for government loans, said the airport manager.

The ideal situation would be for Cascade to get a loan to lease airport land and build their own facility, Winn said.

However, sometime next year the city and county might be asked to help put a grant together, he said.

"Hopefully, I think we can work this thing out, but I wanted you to be aware of it," said Winn.

Councilwoman Adele Anderson said she didn't think Winn should be reluctant to bring the situation to officials.

"We don't want to let any of it go that we can keep," she said.

"If it's a matter of a building, I think we ought to do something."

Winn said Cascade is now the third largest commuter service in the nation in passenger revenue miles.

During the first year in Walla Walla after starting service here in 1971, they hauled 14,000 passengers.

Cascade now has 28 flights in and out of Walla Walla daily, with 42,000 passengers expected this year through the terminal, said Winn.

There is a total of 126 Cascade employees — including 70 pilots and 41 mechanics — who generate a \$1-million-plus annual payroll, he said.

Of the 14 airplanes in the system, nine are stationed in Walla Walla.

"They have now decided Walla Walla is the place for them to be in Washington," said Winn.

He said Cascade will have two bigger planes — four-engine types — on line in December and larger airplanes are being planned for commuter service in the future.

But, unlike major airlines which need bigger airports to operate, the commuters will remain technologically small enough to continue serving this type of community, Winn said.

Discussing local airport operations, he said Walla Walla has the only city-county airport in Washington — one that doesn't need tax dollars to remain in the black.

"It's the envy of all the other airport operators in the state, I'll tell you that," Winn said.

He said the airport will probably spend about \$335,000 of its \$366,675 budget by the end of this year and it has a \$300,000 capital-improvements budget.

During the last six years the airport board has made more than \$600,000 in capital improvements and still maintained its operating budget.

Winn said \$125,000 will be spent soon to do major runway repair and other work.