



Leaders at the Core of Better Communities

2009 Annual Awards Program

Program Excellence Awards Nomination Form

Deadline for Nominations: March 13, 2009

Complete this form (sections 1 and 2) and submit with your descriptive narrative.

SECTION 1: Information About the Nominated Program

Program Excellence Award Category (*select only one*):

- Community Health and Safety
- Community Partnership
- Community Sustainability
- Strategic Leadership and Governance

Name of program being nominated: Blue Ash Airport Park

Jurisdiction(s) where program originated: City of Blue Ash

Jurisdiction population(s): 12,500

Please indicate the month and year in which the program you are nominating was fully implemented. (Note: All Program Excellence Award nominations must have been fully implemented by or before January 31, 2008, to be eligible. The start date should not include the initial planning phase.)

Month: August Year: 2007

Name(s) and title(s) of individual(s) who should receive recognition for this award at the ICMA Annual Conference in Montréal, Québec, Canada, September 2009. (Each individual listed MUST be an ICMA member to be recognized.):

Name: David Waltz

Title: City Manager Jurisdiction: City of Blue Ash

Name: Milton Dohoney

Title: City Manager Jurisdiction: City of Cincinnati

Name: _____

Title: _____ Jurisdiction: _____

SECTION 2: Information About the Nominator/Primary Contact

Name of contact: Kelly Osler

Title: Assistant to the City Manager Jurisdiction: City of Blue Ash

Street address: 4343 Cooper Road

City: Blue Ash State/Province: OH

Zip/Postal Code: 45242 Country: USA

Telephone: 513-745-8503 Fax: 513-745-8594

E-mail: kosler@blueash.com

Goal/Partners

Partnership between the Cities of Blue Ash and Cincinnati in Ohio for a resolution regarding 20 years of discussions relating to the future of the Blue Ash Airport property. The process included assistance from federal and regional partners including: Federal Aviation Administration, State of Ohio Department of Aeronautics and Airport Owners and Pilots Association.

Background

The City of Blue Ash is located in southwestern Ohio, 12 miles northeast of Cincinnati. Blue Ash incorporated in 1961 and has practiced the Council-Manager form of government since its first charter. The City is 7.7 sq. mi. in area and is populated by 12,500 residents and over 2,000 businesses. Blue Ash is largely built-out, but has always encouraged balanced development with a land use motto of – 1/3 residential, 1/3 business and 1/3 public.

The Blue Ash Airport, owned and operated by the City of Cincinnati, occupies 228 acres at the intersection of the city's two most heavily traveled thoroughfares. Classified as a regional, reliever airport, it serves to relieve the Cincinnati/Northern Kentucky International Airport of small, general aviation type aircraft during Cincinnati's peak traffic times. In addition to easing congestion, the Blue Ash Airport addresses such aviation needs as flight training, private recreational flying, and some corporate air transportation.

The Blue Ash Airport is the largest remaining open space within the City of Blue Ash and most of the site is green with the exception of the runway, taxiway, and several support buildings. It is surrounded by business parks and is enjoyed not only by aviation

users and operators, but also by residents and daytime population who pass it on a daily basis. Logging 20,000 to 30,000 takeoffs and landings per year, the airport is a valuable resource for the metro community, encouraging growth in commerce and jobs, providing green space and recreational opportunities, and boosting the area economy.

Problem Assessment

Since the Blue Ash Airport was purchased by Cincinnati in 1946, there have been recurring discussions regarding the sale of part or the entire airfield to generate revenue for the City of Cincinnati. These discussions coupled with Blue Ash's goal to preserve the airport led to Blue Ash City Council's adoption of a resolution in 1987 "expressing the desire of the City of Blue Ash to work with the City of Cincinnati to develop a strategy to maintain the Blue Ash Airport at its present location and provide for the development of portions of the airport property." Two objectives were outlined in the resolution: (1) allow the City of Cincinnati to receive ongoing and growing revenue as a result of development of portions of the current airport site; and (2) maintain the airport at its current site, while providing for the upgrading of the overall image and support facilities of the Blue Ash Airport for the benefit of citizens and businesses of the Greater Cincinnati area.

For nearly 20 years, discussions regarding the future of the airport property went back and forth between the two cities with limited progress. In January 2006 and with airport infrastructure improvements needed in the near future, conversation heightened regarding Cincinnati's desire to sell the airport property. In return, Blue Ash Council again opened negotiations. While Cincinnati did desire to see the airport remain open, the opportunity for additional income made sale an attractive option. However, the prospect for development of the property and the potential relocation of Cincinnati businesses to

Blue Ash kept the property in the hands of Cincinnati. Along that vein, Cincinnati declined an offer from the private sector of \$30 million for the property.

Program Implementation and Costs

Wishing to see the airport remain open and the remainder of the property green, Blue Ash met with Cincinnati in the spring of 2006 to jointly develop a purchase strategy that would be attractive to both jurisdictions. It was agreed that Blue Ash would purchase 130 acres of the 228-acre airport property for \$37.5 million over 30 years and Blue Ash would then develop the property into a park. To ease concerns regarding business migration from Cincinnati to the airport property, the agreement included a 40-year moratorium on commercial development of the property. With this proposed plan, airport operations would need to be reconfigured, with the operations buildings relocated to Cincinnati's remaining 98-acres. The design for the airport reconfiguration had been previously presented as an alternative by the City of Cincinnati. Additionally, the cities continued to cooperatively work together with the Federal Aviation Administration (FAA) and the Aircraft Owners and Pilots Association (AOPA) to secure FAA grant funding and to finalize reconfiguration options. Blue Ash pledged an additional \$2 million of matching funds (to those of Cincinnati) for this effort. The agreement was clearly a "win-win" for all; Cincinnati received new revenue with no competition and Blue Ash was able to keep the airport asset with plans to develop a 130-acre park. The plan was near perfect, the only hitch being the source of Blue Ash's \$37.5 million.

Blue Ash carefully examined the costs associated with this bold venture and evaluated those expenses relative to the City's then current financial position and other pending projects or capital improvements in the years ahead. Blue Ash Council decided to

present to voters a change in the charter that effectively would increase the earnings tax from its current 1.0% to 1.25%. “Issue 15,” was placed on the ballot for voter consideration at the General Election in November 2006. Along with the airport property purchase, the new income would support the expansion of the recreation center, improvements to the golf course, and other capital and recreation enhancements.

Tangible Results

The voters overwhelmingly approved Issue 15, voting 65% in favor! It was clear that the citizen’s wishes were aligned with City Council’s vision. Now that the funding was in-place, Blue Ash and Cincinnati could begin fine-tuning the purchase agreement.

As part of the due diligence process, an environmental analysis of the property was performed and surprisingly discovered lead contamination in the soil. Further research revealed that the site had once been a trap shoot. While this discovery would delay the property closing, it would not discourage two determined jurisdictions who had developed a close working relationship. Another round of negotiations ensued and it was agreed that Cincinnati would pay for remediation costs up to \$1.5 million, Blue Ash would pay for remediation costs over that amount, and the soil would be restored to residential use standards. Once again, the two jurisdictions worked together for the benefit and safety of all.

On August 31, 2007 the Cities of Blue Ash and Cincinnati officially closed on Blue Ash’s purchase of 130 acres of Cincinnati’s Blue Ash Airport property. Perhaps Cincinnati’s Mayor Mallory summarized the importance of the day best, “*The proceeds of the sale will allow Cincinnati to reinvest millions of dollars into our neighborhoods for much needed improvements. At the same time, Blue Ash will build a beautiful park that*

everyone in the area can enjoy. Plus, we maintain the airport as a valuable asset to our region.” Blue Ash City Manager, David Waltz, added that the closing is “proof of the strong spirit of cooperation that exists between Blue Ash and Cincinnati.”

Lessons Learned

Blue Ash had never taken on a project of this magnitude, so the entire process was a learning experience. When any headway was gained, administration would change and take the process back to square one. Upon reflection, it becomes clear that the inability to resolve the issue for 20 years was due to ever changing leadership. It wasn't until the correct match of elected officials and administrators were in place, with similar vision and desire for change that the process was able to evolve from discussions to action.

Moreover, the jurisdictions learned to be empathetic of each others needs. An agreement was not going to be reached until each city was satisfied with the solution. And while the outcome was a win for all, many compromises were made along the way.

Traditional local government roles of serving only one's own community can no longer be practiced. Through this process came a realization that corporate limits are fading. In this project, Blue Ash and Cincinnati worked together to address economic, social, and environmental challenges. Only through regional collaboration will these issues be addressed on a larger scale.

