

# Airport a 'game changer': county

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Investing in Red Deer Airport will pay off believes Red Deer County Mayor Jim Wood.

Council approved an agreement to provide \$235,000 annually to the airport on Tuesday.

Both the county and City of Red Deer have shown their faith in the airport's potential by increasing their annual support from \$180,000 in 2014.

"The fact is the airport is a game changer for our community," said Wood. "I know there's potential for some of the travel to come from Edmonton and Calgary to Red Deer."

Wood said announced plans to extend the runway to allow for regional passenger jet service has caught the eye of airlines.

"I believe there are huge opportunities."

A thriving airport will also pay dividends for the county. It could help ongoing efforts to diversify the local economy by luring aviation-related businesses to the airport, he said.

Coun. Connie Huelsman said, while there are ups and downs in the economy, the county must keep its eye on the future and the airport will play a role.

Also speaking in favour of the funding was Coun. Christine Moore.

"I think that we need to play a part in setting (the airport) up for success," said Moore.

Heather Gray-Surkan, county corporate services director, was asked if the county's investment was likely to be offset by additional tax revenue as the airport grows.

"I do believe in the airport and I do believe in the potential for that area," said Heather-Surkan, who is very familiar with the airport's business plan having sat on its audit committee.

While investment carries some risk, the county is already seeing returns from residential growth.

County manager Curtis Herzberg said the airport has a plan that has mapped out what needs to happen for it to stay viable and to "stand on its own legs."

The runway expansion was a critical step to that end.

Work is planned to determine how the area south of the airport could be developed.