



Harlingen 'Aerotropolis' wins shovel-ready designation

by Steve Taylor

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HARLINGEN, RGV – In his 2014 State of the City address, Harlingen Mayor Chris Boswell said that when it comes to Valley International Airport, city leaders are “dreaming big.”



**Harlingen Mayor Chris Boswell**

Boswell spoke about the possibility of developing an “aerotropolis” around Valley International Airport and revealed that McCallum Sweeney Consultants, one of the world’s leading site selection and economic development consulting firms, was working on a plan to certify industrial sites around the airport as “shovel ready.”

This week, that certification was confirmed.

“It is big deal and we are excited about it,” Boswell told the Rio Grande Guardian, pointing out that Harlingen Aerotropolis at Valley International Airport (formerly known as Harlingen Industrial Airpark) consists of approximately 479.5 acres of land.

“McCallum Sweeney is the premier site selection firm in the nation. Their corporate clients are a Who’s Who of Fortune 500 companies and global companies. They represent companies like Boeing and Northrup Grumman and many other companies you have heard of. Just to have that certification and to have it by a company as well-respected in the site selection business as McCallum Sweeney means a great deal.”

Marvin Esterly, aviation director at Valley International Airport, agreed, “This certification will set us apart from other sites nationwide and is crucial in attracting businesses,” Esterly said.



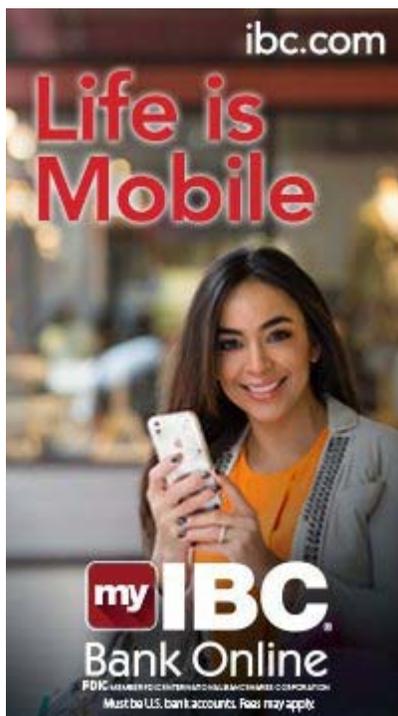
**Marvin Esterly**

Asked when the term "aerotropolis" was first coined in Harlingen, Mayor Boswell said: "Immediate past Chairman of the Airport Board Richard Franke and others attended a conference on the Aerotropolis concept in 2013 and it was presented as a concept at a comprehensive planning meeting on business development in early 2014 and I then noted it in the State of the City."

Mayor Boswell made his 2014 State of the City Address at The Reese in February, 2014. This is what he said about developing land east of Valley International Airport:

"Another area in which we are dreaming big is our airport. I want to recognize the airport board and its current chairman, Richard Franke, for their vision and leadership in moving us toward what other airport hubs around the country have been working on for years. The concept of an aerotropolis surrounding Harlingen's Valley International Airport is a clear possibility for our future. And, while I don't expect airports in the rest of the Valley to stop development any time soon, one thing is clear, Harlingen has the only airport with realistic possibilities of super expansion.

"With 450 acres of undeveloped land around the current airport and another 80 acres in our industrial park, this is another place to dream big. The aerotropolis concept isn't just about airplanes and airlines, it is about creating manufacturing jobs and incorporating other livable elements of the city in close proximity to the airpark. And while we are dreaming, we need to envision ways to link other key assets, such as the Port of Harlingen, the Los Indios Free Trade Bridge, and FM 509, with the airport to enhance our dynamic and thriving economic development engine.



"An important first step has already been undertaken through a partnership between Valley International Airport, the Harlingen Economic Development Corporation, AEP, and McCallum Sweeney, the premier site selection firm in the nation, to certify industrial sites around the airport as 'shovel ready and equipped with the infrastructure needed for development. We will be developing site standards to be completed in 2014. McCallum Sweeney then will be able to offer or recommend Harlingen to companies looking worldwide to develop their business."

On Friday, Boswell explained to the Rio Grande Guardian how McCallum Sweeney's certification came about. "McCallum Sweeney was engaged by AEP to develop a program that will make sites in their service areas, like Texas, shovel ready. All of the information that a company would need to look at in order to decide on a location has been provided to McCallum Sweeney and they have certified the Harlingen Aerotropolis, our 450-acre site to the

east of Valley International Airport, as a shovel-ready site. The certification is good for four years.”

Frank Espinoza, community affairs manager for AEP Texas, said the AEP Quality Site Program was established to increase the number of project-ready industrial sites in communities served by AEP Texas. He said American Electric Power, the parent company of AEP Texas, hired McCallum Sweeney Consulting Services to help develop and manage this process.

“The purpose of the Quality Site Program is to satisfy a growing need from companies looking for sites that are ready to develop, well documented, and free from risk,” said Espinoza. “And I’m extremely pleased to say Harlingen will join a very small list of progressive communities in the nation who have completed this rigorous site certification process.”



Lindsey Myers

Boswell said McCallum Sweeney has identified three sectors that they think would be a good fit for Harlingen Aerotropolis. “They have identified this as a large industrial park because it is more than 250 acres. The three sectors they believe would work well there are aerospace, food and beverage processing and manufacturing, and what they call general machinery, which includes light manufacturing. This is a large array of possibilities.”

In fact, according to Lindsey Myers, senior consultant and director of site readiness programs for McCallum Sweeney, the Harlingen Aerotropolis at Valley International Airport is the first certified site in the entire state of Texas using AEP’s Quality Site Program.

Myers said communities that are seeking to recruit industrial development need to be armed with a wealth of information and data on both their sites and their community. “Companies are not willing to wait for a community to find an appropriate site and determine its suitability for development. That due diligence needs to be completed in advance of a prospect visit,” Myers said.



Raudel Garza

Myers added that after an applicant has completed all the certification requirements, McCallum Sweeney certifies that the property is ready for development, enhancing the marketability of the site, and improving the community's inventory of industrial properties.

Bob Dunkin, chairman of the board for the Harlingen EDC, said the EDC worked closely with the staff at Valley International Airport to complete the "arduous process" of gaining shovel-ready status for the Harlingen Aerotropolis. Dunkin said the EDC team knows the importance of establishing innovative partnerships.

Raudel Garza, CEO of Harlingen Economic Development Corporation, said he was delighted to have secured shovel-ready status for the Harlingen Aerotropolis. "After an approximately year long process of obtaining, engineered plans, environmental studies, and researching site characteristics, staff can now report the completion of the Site Certification Process. The Harlingen Aerotropolis at Valley International Airport is considered a 'Shovel Ready' site. Our Industrial Development Director, Ramiro Aleman, was given this challenge and is to be commended for the hard work in this certification process."



#### ABOUT THE AUTHOR

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