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PRESS RELEASE

CPA Exploring Options for Saipan International Airport; Placing Transparency at the Forefront

The future of the Saipan International Airport is at the forefront of conversations within the Commonwealth Ports Authority (CPA) as the CNMI looks to the future of infrastructure following the COVID-19 pandemic. Recognizing the “once in a generation opportunity” made available through the national infrastructure development programs that have been created following the response efforts to the pandemic, the CPA seeks to engage the community on its plans for modernizing and upgrading the Saipan International Airport, according to CPA Board Chair Kimberlyn King-Hinds.

In seeking the necessary growth and development of the Marianas’ most-used airport, King-Hinds and the CPA Board believe that “All options should be on the table,” including options for pursuing the expansion of the airport through a Public-Private Partnership.

“Regarding the development and enhancements of airport facilities, Public-Private Partnerships have aided communities across the United States by improving infrastructure and seeking greater gains through increased access to the world,” said King-Hinds. “For revenue-generating public facilities like airports, building partnerships combine public and private resources to more adequately meet the needs of the economy and the public.”

“The honest fact is that the Saipan International Airport needs more than repairs—it requires a complete overhaul to keep pace with changing regulations, safety and security needs, and the changing needs of our community and our economy,” King-Hinds added.

The Saipan International Airport, as it is seen today, owes its creation to public-private partnerships. Today’s terminal facilities were built following the decision of the Marianas District Legislature to invite private firms to bid for the right to an exclusive 15-year contract for duty-free concessions. Duty Free Shoppers, Ltd. won the bid and along with it the partnership to construct the Saipan International Airport, which officially opened on July 25, 1976.

“We can learn from our past and from the decades of cases of Public-Private Partnerships of airports throughout the world to craft a path forward that sees our facilities keep pace with the modern world,” said King-Hinds.

According to King-Hinds, “the challenge of developing modern infrastructure fit for the CNMI economy requires a collaborative approach that leverages both federal resources and the private market to accomplish.”

Going forward, CPA intends to establish a process that examines all possible options for the development of the Saipan International Airport and puts at its core transparency and continual dialogue with the community. CPA is also looking at the establishment of a review committee comprised of community members and stakeholders and the crafting of a process for ongoing public engagement as the plans develop and progress.

For King-Hinds the process is the most important part of any action toward the development of the Saipan airport. “The community has to be involved. It is their airport, and this airport is one of the most critical pieces of infrastructure in the Commonwealth. That is why the community must be involved, educated, and made a part of the process toward defining the future for the Saipan International Airport and our islands,” she stated.

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