Tuolumne County Airports

Benedict Stuth
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TUOLUMNE COUNTY
JOINT MEETING
of the
AIRPORTS ADVISORY COMMITTEE
and
AIRPORT LAND USE COMMISSION

July 5, 2018
6:00 PM

AMENDED AGENDA
Board of Supervisors Chambers
County Administration Center
4th Floor
2 South Green Street
Sonora, California

I. WELCOME AND CALL TO ORDER

II. ROLL CALL

III. PUBLIC FORUM (Forum for members of the public to be heard on issues not on the agenda. No action can be taken on items raised during the Public Forum. Each public comment shall be 5 minutes or less.)

IV. Consideration of approving the minutes from the December 4, 2018 Airports Advisory Committee meeting.

V. Presentation of the Columbia Airport Draft Master Plan.

VI. Presentation of Initial Study in support of the Mitigated Negative Declaration for the Columbia Airport Master Plan.

VII. SET NEXT AIRPORTS ADVISORY COMMITTEE MEETING DATE AND ADJOURNMENT.

In accordance with the Americans with Disabilities Act, if you need special assistance (i.e. auxiliary aids or services) in order to participate in this public meeting, please contact the Airport Office, (209-533-5685). Notification 48 hours prior to the start of the meeting will enable the Airport Office to make reasonable accommodations to ensure accessibility to this public meeting.

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TO: Airport Land Use Commission

FROM: Benedict Stuth, Airports Manager

DATE: June 21, 2018

RE: Columbia Airport Draft Master Plan and Initial Study

SUMMARY

The Columbia Airport Master Plan has been undertaken to re-evaluate the airport's capabilities and role, to forecast future aviation demand, and to plan for the timely development of new or expanded facilities that may be required to meet that demand. The last Master Plan for Columbia Airport was completed in 1997, so this is a timely reassessment of the development direction for the airport. With a sound and realistic Master Plan in place, Columbia Airport will continue to remain an important link to the regional and national transportation systems and will maintain the public and private investments in its facilities.

Tuolumne County is responsible for funding capital improvements at Columbia Airport, as well as obtaining Federal Aviation Administration (FAA) and California Department of Transportation – Division of Aeronautics (CALTRANS) development grants. The Master Plan is intended to provide guidance for future development and justification for projects which the airport may receive funding for through an updated capital improvement program (CIP).

The Columbia Airport Master Plan is of interest to many within the region. As such, Tuolumne County identified a group of community members and aviation interest groups to act in an advisory role in the development of the Master Plan through the formation of a Planning Advisory Committee (PAC). The PAC convened four times during the Master Plan process to help ensure that a realistic and viable plan was developed. In addition, a series of three Public Information Workshops were conducted to allow any and all interested persons to become informed and provide input related to the study process. All material related to the Master Plan is also available via a website dedicated to the study at: http://columbiamasterplan.airportstudy.com.

An Initial Study per the *California Environmental Quality Act* (CEQA) (Public Resources Code [PRC], §§21000 et seq.) and CEQA Guidelines (California Code of Regulations [Cal. Code Regs.], Title 14, Division 6, Chapter 3) has been prepared to evaluate potential environmental effects of the proposed Airport Master Plan.

Tuolumne County is the "lead agency" for this project (CEQA Guidelines, §15367). On the basis of the Initial Study, the County has determined that the project will not have a significant effect on the environment, subject to specified mitigation measures, and a Mitigated Negative Declaration has been prepared. The Mitigated Negative Declaration and supporting Initial Study is currently out for public review and comment. The public review and comment period will close on July 25, 2018.

Before any actual ground-disturbing actions take place, they must be evaluated in subsequent site-specific environmental analyses. Future development at the airport under the proposed Columbia Airport Master Plan would be subject to the *National Environmental Policy Act* (NEPA) *of 1969* (Title 42 United States Code [USC] §§4321 et seq.), CEQA, various federal and state special purpose laws, and FAA oversight and approval, as applicable. In addition, compliance with existing local laws, regulations, and policies would be required of all future development proposals.

RECOMMENDATION

No Recommendation

TUOLUMNE COUNTY
AIRPORTS COMMITTEE MEETING
Groveland Community Hall
18720 HWY 120
Groveland, CA 95321

MINUTES
December 4, 2017

I. WELCOME AND CALL TO ORDER

Meeting was called to order by Chairman Jim Stenger at 11:10 am.

II. ROLL CALL

Karl Dambacher - absent
John Gray - absent
Ed Gregory - present
Steve Martin - present
Karl Rodefer - present
Jim Stenger - present
Greg Thompson - present

Also present were Benedict Stuth, Airport Manager, Kalah Beckman, Administrative Assistant and Craig Pedro, County Administrator.

III. PUBLIC FORUM

The new president of the Pine Mountain Lake Aviation Association introduced himself and thanked the Airport staff for their work.

IV. CONSIDERATION OF APPROVING THE MINUTES FROM THE SEPTEMBER 6, 2017 MEETING

Mr. Rodefer moved to approve the minutes. Mr. Gregory seconded the motion. Motion carried 5-0.

V. STAFF REPORT

Mr. Stuth brought the committee up to date on Airport activities including an update on the progress of the Columbia Airport Master Plan, updated ACIP for Columbia Airport and the Columbia Airport Taxilane Design project. Design for the project is well underway. Surveys and soil testing has been completed and the airport is waiting on results. The Airport is looking into how two hangar buildings will be replaced if the project can move forward. Two hangar buildings will have to be removed to complete pavement reconstruction associated with the taxilanes. Finally, Mr. Stuth updated the

committee on progress on the RTTF issue at PML. He explained that the Airport submitted a draft RTTF agreement to the FAA for review in September 2017. On November 27, 2017 the FAA responded, answering some questions. The FAA said that they will not perform a full review until a complete application packet is submitted. A complete packet includes a draft access agreement, an agreement access fee and an updated ALP. The Airport still needs to submit a fee and an ALP. These items are on the agenda for discussion. The FAA also informed Mr. Stuth that the approval of RTTF is made at the Headquarters level and is no longer a decision that can be made at the FAA regional office.

Mr. Rodefer asked if Mr. Stuth knows who at FAA Headquarters makes the decision and if he can find out.

Mr. Stuth also reported that the FAA informed him that part of the decision for RTTF approval takes into account how many aircraft are based at the airport. Mr. Stuth informed the committee that only 23 aircraft are registered as being based at PML Airport. The FAA told Mr. Stuth that the likelihood of the FAA supporting an airport with so few based aircraft is small. He explained that the FAA is currently in the process of declassifying airports that have a small number of based aircraft that are located near airports that have a larger number of based aircraft. To date the FAA has declassified 30-40 airports across the country in order to consolidate their support of airports.

A member of the public asked what is considered "nearby".

Mr. Stuth answered that airports that are within a 45-60 minute drive.

Mr. Stuth went on to say that he told the FAA that RTTF users at PML represented approximately 70 more aircraft and that they indicated that if those aircraft could be shown to be based at PML it would put the airport in a more favorable position.

The FAA also told Mr. Stuth that deeded access issues at PML must be resolved before RTTF approval would be granted but that some airports have been allowed to move forward with a small number of properties retaining their deeded access. Mr. Stuth said that the FAA did not indicate what the threshold number or percentage would be as there is no approved number but rather at the discretion of FAA Headquarters.

Mr. Rodefer asked Mr. Stuth to get some contacts at Headquarters.

Mr. Gregory asked if the AOPA or any other pilot or airport associations are involved in this issue.

Mr. Stenger said that the Airport Support Network through the AOPA can be contacted.

VI. DISCUSSION OF CONTINUED MAINTENANCE OR REMOVAL OF DEER FENCE AT PML AIRPORT

Mr. Stuth reported to the committee that the issue of efficacy and maintenance of the deer fence is an issue that has continued to come up and the airport would like to have a discussion on what PML users would like to do with the fence. He stated that the number of deer strikes reported to the FAA strike database is two since 2001. One strike was reported before the deer fence was installed and one strike was reported after the deer fence was installed. Based on this data it is difficult for airport staff to determine if the deer fence is actually working. He asked PML users in attendance to please share their thoughts.

Mr. Stenger asked if any committee members have received any input from Airport users on this issue.

Mr. Gregory said that he lives on the end of the runway and that it appears that the deer pass quite freely across the runway and that there is a well-worn path in the grass. He said that it doesn't appear to be stopping any deer but said that people have told him it is because the fence is not turned on.

Mr. Gregory said that he had received comments from one other user that thought that the deer fence was useless and an eyesore.

Mr. Stenger asked for comments from the public.

A member of the public of the public said that he thought the deer fence was quite effective when it was first installed. He said that deer still continued to cross but that it funneled the deer allowing pilots to anticipate where they would be crossing. He said that the deer fence has been in disrepair for a long time and the deer have gotten used to the fact that it doesn't work so they go through wherever they want. This leads a casual observer to say that the deer fence isn't working. He said that if the deer fence is up and running it causes the deer to go around it. He then stated that there are certain insurance reasons why you would not tell your insurance company that you had a deer strike because it would indicate a systemic problem as opposed to a bird strike. He said that many of the "bird strikes" that have happened are actually deer strikes but that pilots have registered them as such to get their insurance to pay for them without raising their premiums because they are based at PML. He said that just talking to PML users they came up with 6 deer strikes that have occurred. He said that if the deer fence is maintained, it is effective.

Mr. Rodefer asked what is involved to maintain the deer fence. Mr. Stuth responded that maintenance requires replacing the posts and restringing the wire. If the strands cannot be reconnected by tying them together then the entire strand has to be replaced. Mr. Stuth said that if the repair required is simple it can take as little as one hour but major repairs can take several days.

Mr. Thompson asked if the airport can provide an average annual cost for maintaining the deer fence. Mr. Stuth responded that it ranges from $1,200 to $3,000 in materials depending on what needs to be done.

Mr. Gregory said another issue is that the fence was never assembled according to the manufacturer's instructions. He said that to be most effective the strands need to be 4 inches apart not the 8 to 10 inches apart that they are now.

Mr. Stenger asked if the initial design for the deer fence was determined by FAA requirements or just by using a general design for deer fencing. Mr. Stuth responded that there is no FAA design for electric fence inside an object free area. The only mention of electric fencing from the FAA is in lieu of a perimeter fence. He said that if you were to evaluate the deer fence against FAA guidelines now that the FAA would not allow it unless the airport obtained a Modification to Standard approval. A Modification to Standard takes about 1 year to obtain and has to be renewed every 3 years. Also, the FAA can deny the Modification to Standard at any time during that process.

Mr. Stenger asked if the deer fence at PML has been grandfathered in and is acceptable. Mr. Stuth responded that there is no grandfathering and that he does not know that the FAA would have allowed the deer fence to be erected at the time it was installed if PML had been an airport that was inspected by the FAA.

Mr. Stenger asked if the deer fence will be a red flag when the County updates the ALP for PML. Mr. Stuth responded that it would be a red flag if placed on the ALP unless you initiated the Modification to Standard.

Mr. Rodefer asked if there is a perimeter fence around PML. Mr. Stuth responded that there is not. Mr. Stuth added that he thinks a perimeter fence was looked at as a possibly before the deer fence was installed but that it was ruled out as unfeasible due to private properties abutting airport property.

Mr. Stenger asked the audience to answer by a show of hands, who is in favor of removing the deer fence. No one responds. He asked the audience who is in favor of maintaining the deer fence and more than half of the audience raise their hands.

A member of the public said that if the fence were constructed twice as sturdily it would be worthwhile. He also said that the fence can serve as a psychological barrier for pilots but he understands that moving the fence isn't an option. The only option is to make the fence sturdier.

Another member of the public said that as a person that flies in in the evenings at PML she has seen that more deer are crossing at the 27 end of the runway and in the middle where there is no deer fencing, so at least the fencing is helping.

Another member of the public said he would rather see the fencing taken down than stay as it is because he has seen deer walk right up to it and walk through because it is not on or broken. He added that the grass and bushes around the airport provide a place for the deer to eat and hide. He suggested that if the grass were mowed down more often there would be fewer deer on the airport.

Another member of the public asked if the deer fence would be an issue if PML airport wanted to qualify for FAA funds. Mr. Stuth responded that in his experience working for the FAA, an ALP with a fence like the deer fence at PML would not have been approved unless the airport got a modification to standard. He said that should the County seek to update the ALP without obtaining a modification to standard, the risk would be that the FAA would tell the County to remove the fence before they would approve the ALP.

VII. DISCUSSION OF ACCESS FEES IN SUPPORT OF RTTF COMPLIANCE AT PINE MOUNTAIN LAKE AIRPORT

Mr. Stuth explained that as mentioned in his staff report, in order to put together a complete RTTF application packet the County and the RTTF users must agree on an access fee.

He discussed the components of a complete RTTF application packet and the methodologies that are acceptable by the FAA for calculating access fees.

Mr. Stuth then discussed the methods that are being considered by the County as described in the memo for this agenda item.

Mr. Gregory asked Mr. Stuth if an RTTF user is somebody who uses the airport with an airplane or if it is strictly the hangars and properties that have access to the airport. Mr. Stuth responded that an RTTF user is any property that has access to the airport through the fence. Mr. Gregory asked if a person had an airplane on the airport and rented a hangar from someone who had a private hangar; does that person have access only because the property owner is paying for the access? Mr. Stuth confirmed that this is true.

A member of the public stated that it is his understanding that the transfer from the General Fund to PML covers salaries only and no actual improvements to the airport. Mr. Stuth explained that the budget for PML includes some salaries and administrative expenses.

Mr. Stenger paused the meeting for a break.

Mr. Stuth confirmed that the member of the public wanted to know how much of the PML budget goes towards projects on the airport. Mr. Stuth stated that in the current budget roughly 10% goes towards regular maintenance and capital improvements around the airport.

The discussion of access fee continued on to Method 2 and 3 as described in the memo.

Mr. Stuth explained that RTTF at airports is being guided by a couple of FAA grant assurances which an airport sponsor must agree to in order to be eligible to accept FAA grant funds. The first being a grant assurance called *Reserving Rights and Powers* which says than an airport will maintain access of all airport property at all times, for safety reasons. Having an RTTF connection, an airport cannot say that they have control over the all of the access points, hence the access agreement, which basically serves as an agreement between the property owner and the FAA with the sponsor (in this case the County) acting as a middle man, making sure the agreement is being followed and those rights and powers are being upheld by all parties.

There is another FAA grant assurance which requires an airport to be financially self-sufficient. The FAA will look at the methodology that will be used to calculate access fees and how that will impact an airports budget. They will not accept an access fee that will result in an unbalanced budget.

Mr. Stuth explained Method 3 as described in the agenda memo.

Mr. Stuth emphasized that any revenue generated at PML stays at that airport.

Mr. Rodefer asked how many RTTF users there are. Mr. Stuth responded that there are 79 RTTF users.

A member of the public asked what the cost would be of doing nothing. Mr. Rodefer responded that the cost of not pursuing RTTF is that the County is limited in what they can do to provide funding. He said the County business model for the airports is that they are an enterprise fund which means that the County does not spend general fund money on the airports. They pay for themselves. The County has been violating that business model but that is what they are trying to get to.

Mr. Thompson asked what Mr. Rodefer means by the County breaking the rules. He asked if this means that the County has taken general funds to support the airport. Mr. Rodefer replied that the County has transferred a small amount of general fund money because PML airport was in a budget deficit over the course of the years. He explained that there are discretionary grants that are available to airports that qualify and that have qualifying projects. He said that PML Airport has not received grants for years and has gotten in a hole. In order to try to get the airport out of the hole, the County has been transferring a small amount to the PML budget and to Columbia Airport to match the grants that it has received from the FAA. The County's goal is for the Airports to be an enterprise fund which means that they support themselves.

A member of the public asked if the $96,000 used as the base budget for PML in the memo is what that airport actually generates. Mr. Stuth responded that PML does not generate $96,000 in revenues that about half of that amount comes from the general fund.

A member of the public commented that their property taxes all go into the general fund. Mr. Rodefer responded that the County gets a portion of the property taxes collected. Mr. Pedro added that the County gets anywhere between 26-30% of the property taxes collected, which goes into the general fund.

A member of the public asked why implementing a local property tax for RTTF users is not viable. Mr. Stuth responded that looking into different tax options for a special district it was discovered that airports are exempt from those kinds of taxes.

Mr. Stenger reiterated that the County is working to get through RTTF so that they can get grant funds for PML once again.

A member of the public asked if it would be possible to use a method somewhere between Method 2 and 3 described in the memo to come up with an appropriate access fee. Mr. Stenger referred to the memo which explains that a compromise between method 2 and 3 is most likely.

Mr. Rodefer asked Benny to explain what the next step in the process for RTTF is before moving on to the next item on the agenda. Mr. Stuth explained that the next step is to review the methods discussed in the memo in conjunction with the public comments to decide how to come up with the appropriate access fees. Ultimately it will come down to picking a method and sticking with it and submitting it to the FAA for review and hopefully approval. If the FAA does not approve it, the airport will have to reassess the method, come up with a new one and resubmit to the FAA. The goal of the airport is to come up with an agreement and fee that can be approved immediately to prevent further delay in potential grant funding.

A member of the audience asked what the County expects as far as participation rates and adds that he previously lived at an airpark that was owned by residence and every property owner in the airport district paid a fee regardless of whether their lots were developed or not. He added that he thinks this is not possible at PML since the FAA requires that the access fees be voluntary. Mr. Stuth replied that an airport district is possible for PML. Mr. Rodefer explained that this would mean that the airport district would have a separate district board that would be elected by the members of the district. The area of the district would then need to be defined and then it would be possible to assess a tax within that district. Mr. Rodefer explained that it would be similar to the Groveland Communities Service District.

Mr. Stuth said that the airport looked into creating a special district but that it is also a very difficult process to get through with the FAA.

Mr. Stuth concluded that the next step is to define what the access fee will be and adding it to the RTTF application packet and submitting it for approval.

A member of the audience pointed out that the biggest battle will be getting RTTF users to sign on with the new access agreements. He said that he recalled having a conversation about how in trying to get access agreements through it might come down to lawsuits and that he recalled that the County found this prospect off-putting and would stop their efforts rather than go to court. He asked if the County has changed their stance on this.

Mr. Stuth replied that he thinks that stance still has some legitimacy and he reiterated the point that the FAA has indicated that the deeded access issue is the key to the whole thing and that they will be looking to the deeded access to be mitigated. He said that the FAA has allowed some airports to get through RTTF with a few users retaining their deeded access. Mr. Stuth said the unofficial percentage that he was told by the FAA that would be allowed was around 10%. Ultimately the decision lies with the FAA headquarters.

Mr. Gregory asked a hypothetical question wondering what happens if the airport generated $240,000 in revenues and only spent $100,000 in a year does that money just disappear. Mr. Stuth replied that money stays in the budget and the bulk of it would likely go into the buildings and improvement account for that airport to be used for airport projects. Mr. Stuth said that a portion of it would likely go towards any grant matches that would come up but that the rest of it would be going into maintenance and improvement of the airport. It would be used to complete projects that need to be done that would not be eligible for FAA grant funding, a new lobby, hangars, etc.

Mr. Rodefer added that the objective is to have each airport support itself. The intention is that one airport does not exist off of the other airport. The intention would be to move that money into the next year's budget and use it for airport maintenance.

Another member of the public asked what will happen to the businesses running out of hangars at PML. Mr. Stuth asked what businesses she was talking about. The person replied that the question is theoretical and added that she thought that was why the RTTF policy existed. Mr. Stuth replied that the RTTF policy exists for a number of reasons and that she is touching on another grant assurance that basically says that no one can benefit financially from a public use airport without an agreement with that airport. This means that people renting out hangars or running business out of their private hangars would have to stop but that it would come down to code compliance to enforce that.

VIII. DISCUSSION OF FUNDING ALP UPDATE IN SUPPORT OF RTTF COMPLIANCE AT PINE MOUNTAIN LAKE AIRPORT

Mr. Stenger introduced the item adding the updating the ALP for PML is part of getting through RTTF.

Mr. Stuth said that the ALP update is the third and final part of a successful RTTF application packet. He also wanted to add that having a current ALP is a requirement for any airport that is federally funded.

In 2006 the ALP was updated for PML but it was never approved by the FAA because the RTTF access was not allowed under law until 2012. According to the FAA rules, an ALP must be updated every 5 years. For smaller airports with little develop this can be stretched to 10 years. The last update for PML's ALP is now beyond the 10 year mark so it must be completed. The FAA indicated to Mr. Stuth during a phone call that they would not consider any application for RTTF until they saw an updated ALP for PML.

The ALP must be redone, not just updated, because in 2013 the FAA changed their guidelines for what they look for in an ALP.

Coffman and Associates was the consultant that did Master Plan for PML in 2006. They are the current consultant for Columbia Airport and they have retained all of the files from the Master Plan update for PML in 2006. Because of this, they will be able to complete the ALP update for as little as possible. They have been asked to prepare a scope and fee and their estimate is that it will cost around $11,000 to complete the update. If the County does not fund the update any progress on RTTF will stop until the ALP is complete.

Mr. Stuth is seeking direction on whether or not this is an expense that RTTF users want to go through. The airports are trying to take a holistic approach to the RTTF issue and if there are a great number of users that will refuse to give up their deeded access making it so PML cannot get FAA approval then should the airport undertake the expense of updating the ALP? Do the users want to undertake the expense and try to get through RTTF or should the airport just stop the effort?

Mr. Stuth said that there is money in the PML budget for the ALP update. He said that about half of the funding would come from the Buildings and Improvements account and the other half would come from salary savings that have come from having a vacancy in one of the Airport Technicians positions since July. Updating the ALP does not guarantee getting through RTTF but it is a required step in order to try.

A member of the audience asked other than being necessary to get through RTTF if there any other benefit of having an updated ALP. Mr. Stuth responded that it is really only an FAA required document.

Another member asked if an ALP is required to do a Master Plan. Mr. Stuth said that an ALP is a component of Master Plan.

Another member of the public asked what projects for PML would be delayed by taking money from the budget to pay for the ALP. Mr. Stuth replied that the next project that the airport was working on was upgrading the pilot's lounge and making it ADA accessible. He said that he is meeting with the Facilities Manager this week to get a cost estimate. He said that this is a project that could be delayed due to lack of funding if the Building and Improvements budget is decreased. He said that the project may be able to be pieced out as money allows instead of doing all of the improvements at once.

Mr. Gregory asked if the vacancy for Airport Technician will be filled. Mr. Stuth answered that the airport is in the process of filling the position.

Mr. Rodefer asked Mr. Stuth to come back at the next committee meeting with a compromise for the access fees and with the specifics of what will not get funded due to the expense of funding the ALP update and how the ALP update will be funded. He recommended that when the Airport is ready to bring those items back that the committee hold their meeting in Groveland again.

Mr. Gregory asked how the airport would canvas RTTF users to find out where they stand on these issues. Mr. Stuth answered that he is still considering how best to approach RTTF users but is considering talking to people individually to get a sense of where they stand and moving forward from there.

A member of the audience asked the chairman if he would consider polling the audience on whether they are for or against funding the ALP. Mr. Stenger asked the audience to show their hands if they are in favor of funding the ALP update at PML. 12/14 people in attendance raised their hands. Mr. Stenger asked if there are those against funding the ALP update. 0/14 raised their hands.

IX. DISCUSSION OF CHANGING THE DATE OF THE FATHER'S DAY FLY-IN AT COLUMBIA AIRPORT

Mr. Stenger introduced the item. Mr. Stuth said that the airport realizes that the Father's Day Fly-In is a historical event at the airport and the airport is hesitant to change the date. This year there were aircraft that were close to being grounded due to very high temperatures and that attendance was greatly decreased because of excessive heat warnings.
Mr. Stenger asked if the airport has any ideas on alternative dates. Mr. Stuth stated that he has no specific dates but would consider earlier in the spring or in early fall.

Mr. Rodefer suggested that there needs to be a committee to discuss the possibility of changing the date including someone from the airport, the chambers of commerce, the state park and a member from the Airport Committee. He recommends the committee is 10-12 people and that they discuss options for the fly-in and to bring those options back to the committee. Mr. Rodefer said that other events in the County need to be considered so that they are not impacted.

Mr. Rodefer said that the Mother Lode Fair is also considering changing their dates due to the heat but they are having difficulties due to being dependent on vendors and such and that the fly-in may experience the same issues.

X. SET NEXT MEETING DATE AND ADJOURNMENT

The next meeting of the Airport Advisory Committee is scheduled for February 12, 2018. Location to be announced.

DRAFT