

City of Keene
New Hampshire

AIRPORT ADVISORY COMMISSION
MEETING MINUTES

Friday, July 17, 2015

8:30 am

Airport Terminal Building

Members Present:

Clark Dexter
Robert Bergevin
Rod Thompson
Richard Kasper
Kevin Provost
Joseph Bendzinski
Peter Delaney

Staff Present:

Ed Mattern, Airport Director

Others Present:

Beth Bendel, Monadnock Aviation

Members Not Present:

Doug Green, Chair
Bill Hutwelker
Kris Roberts, Councilor

1. Call to Order

Mr. Bergevin called the meeting to order at 8:30 AM. He welcomed Joe Bendzinski and asked for a roll call. Mr. Mattern welcomed Mr. Bendzinski and stated that he was here when he was a City Councilor.

2. Approval of Minutes – June 19, 2015

Mr. Dexter made a motion to approve the minutes of June 19, 2015. Mr. Kasper seconded the motion, which passed by a vote of 7 to 0.

3. Aerobic Practice Session Update

Mr. Mattern stated that the New England Aerobic Club (NEAC) practice happened on June 15. He continued that he attended their safety briefing. It was the first opportunity they had to fly with the new provisions in place regarding the box, floor, etc. He received a number of complaints and wanted to share them with the AAC. He distributed a handout. He continued that he responded to everyone who expressed concerns.

Mr. Mattern continued that the NEAC requests coming again on August 2. The City Council authorized up to five sessions and this would be their second. They will be processing this request and talking with the NEAC about adhering to the guidelines they had agreed to. When he was here during the session, a pilot strayed further north than what he thought was appropriate but they made corrections and are trying to comply with what they had agreed to.

Mr. Thompson asked how long they were here until. Ms. Bendel replied until 3:00 or 4:00 PM. Mr. Dexter stated that he knows a life-long resident on Matthews Road who has never complained before, but did this time, saying the noise was terrible. Mr. Thompson stated that two airplanes flew over his house and scared him, and he does not scare easily. He continued that they were both tree-top height, and his neighbor saw it, too. He thought they were coming through the house. He wants whoever is in charge of the NEAC to know about this. Mr. Mattern asked what color the planes were. Mr. Thompson replied that he will ask his neighbor. Mr. Thompson stated that if it happens again he will call someone on the spot. Ms. Bendel asked if Mr. Mattern has shared the comments with Wes Liu. Mr. Mattern replied yes, and Mr. Liu will bring it up at the next NEAC meeting.

Mr. Delaney asked what they can do – no longer allow the NEAC to come here? Mr. Mattern replied that there is some perception that this is normal flying activity; some people said this happens every weekend, and he was quick to point out that it is only a few days a year. He continued that he invites anyone to come to the safety briefing next time so they can observe the actual operation. The safety briefings should continue. Ms. Bendel stated that there were a pretty good number of people coming out to watch the planes fly.

Mr. Bergevin stated that about three times in the past 3 or 4 weeks a military aircraft has come over Surry Mountain and turned towards Keene, about 500 feet off the ground, going fast, making a lot of noise. Mr. Mattern replied that a couple times a C-130 has done approaches here but has not landed.

Mr. Dexter asked if there were more or less complaints this time. Mr. Mattern replied more. Mr. Thompson stated that it has been a sensitive issue and there is the issue of the trees so he understands. He continued that he enjoyed watching them fly.

Mr. Bendzinski asked if the City puts a notice in the paper when this event is taking place, for people's enjoyment. Mr. Mattern replied that they can place an ad to say that it is occurring, but the NEAC's waiver from the FAA prohibits them from advertising what they do as an airshow. Mr. Thompson asked if it was on Monadnock Aviation's website. Ms. Bendel replied yes.

4. Airport Master Plan Update – Airport Director

Mr. Mattern reported that they are scheduling the next Planning Advisory Committee meeting, which has been a challenge due to everyone's summer vacation schedules. He continued that they have three prospective dates. It will probably be August 4. The meeting will be in the terminal and open to the public. The primary focus will be how to gather ideas from the general public about the future of the airport and the master plan preparation. They anticipate the whole process will take 12 to 14 months. If anyone has additional questions or wants to attend the meetings, he is happy to provide additional information.

Mr. Thompson replied yes, he wants to know the exact dates. Mr. Mattern replied that they are using online software that allows people to enter their availability and then finds a date that is the best for the most people. He will notify the AAC when a date is set.

5. Public Relations and Marketing Committee Update – Beth Bendel

Ms. Bendel reported that the City Manager created the committee and it consists mostly of people from this commission, and Mr. Mattern, Mr. Moriarty, and herself. She continued that she has been given the opportunity to be the chair. They have met a few times so far and decided on the mission of the committee, which is essentially to market to this airport – to the community around the airport as well as airport users. They have done a SWOT analysis and are now figuring out how to market, to whom, and how to grow it in a way that is consistent with the needs of the community and the growth of the area.

Mr. Mattern added that it is interesting to get a lot of perspectives, and hear thoughts about the airport's strengths and weaknesses. He continued that it is challenging – many of the threats and weaknesses are also opportunities, if you turn it around. The trick is to prioritize and identify where you get the biggest bang for your buck. Trying to tackle everything is impossible. Mr. Thompson asked if the committee is using any part of the information that was already gathered. Mr. Mattern replied that it is on the agenda for Tuesday.

Mr. Bendzinski asked why the airport does not have airshows or balloon festivals, which generated a lot of interest years ago. He continued that the airshow 20 years ago was very successful, with a crowd of people. Mr. Mattern gave a tour of the airport to Planning Advisory Committee members. Maybe they could have an annual open house and give tours to the public. Even the committee members learned new things. Especially now that they no longer have Pumpkin Fest, it would be great for the airport to have a day to generate interest from the public.

Ms. Bendel replied that she has had two airshows, with the latest one in 2013. Mr. Mattern stated that the Chamber of Commerce used to do balloon festivals, as a fundraiser, which were very dependent on good weather and hard to work out – the Chamber lost money and let it go. He continued that airshows are expensive to put on. Mr. Bendzinski replied that there is money left over from the Pumpkin Fest that is not happening.

Ms. Bendel explained that an airshow costs about \$75,000 to put on. The single biggest expense is Fire and Police, then the performers' fees – they get paid even if the weather is bad. She continued that the Chamber stopped the balloon festivals due to the risk of bad weather. She loves putting on airshows and they have had good attendance, but the finances do not work. It is too big of a risk to personally be on the hook for \$75,000 if the event does not raise that money.

Mr. Bergevin stated that the Blue Angels no longer perform for crowds under a certain number of people. Ms. Bendel replied that a couple times, Monadnock Aviation had the Collins Foundation here with World War II aircraft, but they could not earn enough through ticket sales here and go to larger airports instead.

Mr. Bendzinski suggested Mr. Mattern do a story about the airport, or a tour, and air it on public TV. He continued that that many people watch public TV and it would be a way to get the word out. Mr. Mattern replied that the open house idea would cost less money to do, and would be a worthwhile endeavor. He continued that that is something they can pursue.

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Mr. Thompson stated that back in the 1980s and 1990s, this airport was buzzing with private aircraft coming and going, and had a club with 80 people. He continued that there was a lot of money in reserves, and the restaurant was doing well. Now there some hangars empty while others are full but the planes are not moving. He only sees three or four aircraft coming and going each day that he is here. Private pilots used to keep this airport going. Maybe they do not have discretionary income anymore?

Mr. Mattern replied that a new light sport aircraft is now \$250,000 and most people cannot afford that. Mr. Thompson replied that there used to be many small planes here. People from other airports used to fly in for breakfast. They had airshows and many activities – it was a busy, busy private airport, “a playground.” Mr. Bergevin agreed. He continued that lots of people have lost interest. Mr. Thompson replied that it could be that they do not have the money anymore.

Mr. Mattern replied that he agrees, and a bigger problem is that the baby boomers who were doing that flying are getting out of aviation and even passing away. He continued that there are not a lot of young people stepping in. Nationwide, general aviation is seeing a decline.

6 Airport Director Report

Mr. Mattern reported that the RFP for the hangar and office is moving along. He continued that that interviews with the people who submit proposals are scheduled for next week. They are exploring the idea of having a special Finance, Organization, and Personnel (FOP) Committee meeting to move it along.

Mr. Mattern reported that they re-bid for the grant for Snow Removal Equipment (SRE). He continued that they made an award recommendation to New Hampshire Department of Transportation (NHDOT) and they are waiting for NHDOT’s agreement before moving forward.

Mr. Mattern reported that they have been showing the restaurant space and have another interested party. He continued that they are hoping for good news to report. Mr. Bendzinski asked if the food is good and the restaurant has experience. Mr. Mattern replied yes.

Mr. Mattern reported that they are preparing to do a crack repair project, which means they might have interruptions on taxiways and aprons during that time. It will be about \$60,000. It is relatively small as pavement projects go. It is necessary to extend the life of the pavement.

Mr. Dexter asked for an update on the environmental study. Mr. Mattern replied that they are waiting to hear from the FAA and State with permission to move forward with that.

Mr. Dexter asked if the AAC thinks it is a good idea to have Mr. Mattern informally pass on the AAC’s concern about the noise from the NEAC and express that the AAC wants them to follow the rules they agreed to. He continued that the NEAC should know that they are receiving complaints and they need to be more conscious. Mr. Mattern replied that he will do that.

Mr. Thompson asked about the status of 14/32 and about resurfacing by the T hangars. Mr. Mattern replied that they selected an engineer for the design work. He continued that the State and FAA do not want to move forward with that until the master plan update shows where the

new runway will go. It will be about 75 feet (wide) and they can either keep it in the middle, move it north, or move it south, and depending on which option they choose, it will impact other things.

Mr. Thompson asked if there will be a taxiway from the 14 end. Mr. Mattern replied that the current master plan calls for a full length taxiway but the master plan update will consider whether that is cost effective. He continued that that it might not be the best use of limited resources, but they will look at it. Mr. Thompson described a situation he observed the last time he was here with Mr. Dexter, with four airplanes coming and going in such a way that it could have been an emergency situation. Mr. Delaney replied that that is assuming that the planes were not in communication with each other, but they could have been. Mr. Mattern replied that he will take that information from Mr. Thompson into consideration. Mr. Thompson replied that if there was a way to taxi back the first aircraft would have gotten out of the way.

Mr. Bendzinski asked if the 75-foot runway will be in addition to what they already have. Mr. Mattern replied no, it will be a reconstruction of the existing runway. He continued that it does not get a lot of use and is restricted to small airplanes, so the need for a runway 150 feet wide is just not there.

Mr. Bergevin stated that he has been on this committee for many years, and it used to be that anything airport related came to this commission for the AAC's advice about RFPs or projects. He continued that he does not know why the RFP for the hangar did not come here but another committee was formed, comprised of people who do not use the airport much. People in this room have been using the airport for 20 or 30 years. He thinks this other committee was formed to do the AAC's job. The RFP should have come here and he wants to know why it bypassed the AAC. Some people from the commission volunteered to be on the committee and were told no. He asked Mr. Mattern to find out an answer.

Mr. Bergevin asked Ms. Bendel if she has to give some kind of presentation/proposal to the review committee. Ms. Bendel replied that she is scheduled to do so. Mr. Bergevin stated that the presentation should have come through the AAC. Mr. Mattern replied that the City does a great number of RFPs, RFQs, etc., and there are purchasing ordinances adopted by the City Council that outline the processes for them, including who is responsible for conducting them. He continued that the City Manager oversees the process. Typically, when they advertise an RFP or RFQ they are scored based on the written proposal and there is a separate scoring for the presentation and/or Q&A session. The City Manager is charged with creating the process for which those proposals are reviewed, by the appropriate committee of the City Council, and that is what is going on here. It is standard practice for how the City deals with proposals. There are other groups in the City that might have interest in others proposals. The City Manager came here and expressed concern that the AAC had already taken a position on the first RFP. They did not want to confuse the process and wanted to keep it as clean as possible. It could complicate the matter when people had already made up their minds. People from this committee who have not voted on this before are on the review committee, along with City staff. It is not that no one here is qualified. It is to preserve the process and minimize any potential concerns that may be raised over whether the process was fair or not.

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Mr. Thompson stated that it upsets him to hear that the AAC's responsibilities are cast aside because they have opinions. He continued that this matter with the FBOs in Keene has a lot to do with the activities at the airport. The AAC, since he has been on it, has been bypassed almost every time. He is considering leaving the AAC, because he does not feel like he is making any progress on the commission. In the year or so he is been here they have not accomplished anything, other than being set aside. He feels this way very strongly. The AAC has no representation from the City Council. He knows the City Councilor on the AAC has been ill, but they should have another City Councilor filling in on a part-time basis. He continued that the AAC hollered enough to get the City Manager to come here a couple times. Members were told that their vote did not count because Mr. Mattern makes the ultimate decision. He almost walked out then. What is the AAC's function? He asked that a while ago and has yet to receive a response. What is their mission as an advisory commission? It seems to him that they are just here to soften the blow for someone or make someone not totally responsible because the commission is here, but they have not been given a challenge or treated with respect. The decisions the AAC makes have not been acted upon. Recently a decision the AAC made was set aside because it was argumentative in relation to Mr. Mattern's decision. Who is paying attention to the AAC? This RFP situation is just another example. Both FBOs are very important to the airport. Unless things change and that he sees that the commission has a function and a purpose, and that their decisions and advisements count, then he is leaving. Mr. Thompson concluded that he loves this airport and has been here for 30 years but this is a waste of his time.

Mr. Bergevin stated that he has been on and off this committee for over 20 years. He continued that the City Council has listened to 99% of the AAC's proposals up until recently, such as the fuel farm, FBOs, anything the AAC got involved with. He is very unhappy with the recent situation. He does not remember the AAC voting on this hangar issue. All he knows is that it has been taken away from them. Maybe someone does not want to know the true feelings of people who use the airport. There have been a lot of FBOs. They know what is good for the City. He took an oath to do what is good for the City. Everyone on the commission did. Yes, they have their own ideas and thoughts but that is what they are supposed to be here for. He thinks the RFP should come to this committee so they can do the whole thing.

Mr. Thompson stated that his comments were not focused on the RFP. They are much broader. He wants to feel that the AAC is part of what happens at the airport. He wants their collective opinions to make a difference.

Mr. Kasper stated that he agrees with Mr. Thompson and he said what needed to be said. He continued that using the RFP as an example, what the City does is replace people with knowledge with people without knowledge, which is not an improvement. If stakeholders like the AAC members are not consulted, then he agrees – the AAC is completely irrelevant. The City should want people who know the airport, care about the airport, and have strong opinions.

Mr. Dexter stated that he agrees with Mr. Thompson's frustrations. He continued that he feels it, too. He has been here four years. It does not feel like the City Council even knows who they are. The City Council has not asked them to do anything in the past four years. This feels like a waste of time. He wants to hear from the Mayor, who appointed all of the commission members.

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Mr. Bergevin replied that they will invite the Mayor and City Manager for the next meeting. He continued that that they can tell the AAC where to go.

Mr. Bendzinski stated that it sounds like they have a real issue here – a belief that people are ineffective. He continued that that it might be good to go over the AAC's exact mission. He is very happy to have Mr. Thompson here and hopes he does not leave. It sounds like an issue with the commission entirely.

Mr. Delaney stated that he agrees with Mr. Thompson, and with Mr. Bergevin that the recommendations the AAC has made over the course of many years have been recognized by the City Council. He continued that that the issue is the RFP process and that the City Manager is appointing a review committee of his own choosing.

Mr. Mattern stated that there are many committees in the City that the Mayor appoints and many of them are advisory ones like this. He continued that he appreciates everyone's efforts and their expectation that their advice will be taken and followed. The City Council sometimes makes different decisions. That is the reality. With regard to them wanting to know what this group does, more often than not, when he takes an issue to a subcommittee of the City Council, he is asked what the AAC thinks. And he puts what the AAC thinks into the memorandums he gives to the City Council. The City Council *is* seeking the AAC's opinion. Some committees in the City have a greater involvement from their membership, like when things go to the City Council. For example, the library board always has a representative at whatever meeting has an agenda item involving the library. Yes, they have a lot more people, so maybe have a better opportunity to have a representative at the meetings. The City Council appreciates and recognizes when there is someone in the audience recognized as a supporter of the airport. That is important, to raise the profile of this group with the City Council.

Mr. Thompson asked, is not that the function of the City Council member of this group, who has not been here in a long time? Mr. Mattern replied to an extent, but that is just one person. Mr. Thompson replied that the library is very big with lots of people and money. He continued that last night's meeting that Mr. Mattern is referencing was the culmination of a year's worth of efforts. Mr. Mattern replied that it was just an example. He continued that he is not saying the AAC is not doing its job. Mr. Thompson replied that the City Council is not doing its job, by not having a Councilor here. Mr. Bendzinski replied that they are supposed to have one. Mr. Mattern replied that Councilor Roberts has not been well. AAC members replied that they feel badly about that but another Councilor should be here. Mr. Dexter added that the AAC sent the City Council a letter asking for another Councilor to be appointed until Councilor Roberts is well enough to return. He continued that that was a year ago and they have received no response.

Mr. Bergevin asked the Minute-taker to give a copy of these minutes to the City Manager and the Mayor. The Minute-taker replied that he can contact the City Clerk's Office about that. Mr. Mattern replied that the City Manager and the Mayor already get copies of all of these minutes.

6. Adjournment

Mr. Bergevin adjourned the meeting at 9:23 AM.

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Respectfully submitted by
Britta Reida, Minute-taker

Reviewed by
Ed Mattern, Airport Director