

December 6th Board of County Commissioners' Meeting
Report on Airport Discussion Topic

Written by Dieter Meun, CVVC Secretary /Treasurer

Commissioner Johnson announced that Airport Manager Jim Braswell will leave Douglas County as of February 22, 2008. The Airport Manager position will not be filled immediately. Assistant County Manager, Michael Brown will assume supervision of airport activities.

When the airport agenda item came up, Commissioner Johnson set the rules. It was explained that this discussion was intended to be just that, a -very necessary- discussion among the Commissioners. He noted that the open meeting laws prohibit this discussion to take place other than in a public forum. No questions or comments from the public during the discussions. The public would get a chance for some comments or questions at the end (when that happened, each commentator was allowed no more than 3 minutes, carefully timed and enforced by Commissioner Johnson). Dan Holler and Michael Brown provided some input, but Mr. Holler did not give testimony in a formal sense.

There was little or no chance for the public to rebut anything more than maybe one or at most two hot topics, and then very, very briefly! My feeling from the discussions was that Commissioners Johnson, Brady, and -to some extent- McDermid had gotten the picture anyway. Commissioner Kite persisted with statements like "it is necessary to keep the airport an economically viable enterprise" and "...an engine for growth in the Carson Valley" (without being specific on anything). Commissioner McDermid feels that the Airport Master Plan should include a section considering economic development issues that should mesh with the County Master Plan.

The main discussion was on when the Airport Master Plan would be ready if further public meetings were held and additional changes in the Master Plan draft were made (estimate May or June '08), whether getting the Ordinance on the November '08 ballot was still doable (deadline for submission of the text of the Ordinance is March 6, 2008, after which phrasing the pro and con arguments for the ballot is done; that is, at a time when the Master Plan is not yet finished, which makes it problematic to assure that these items are fully in sync!). It was emphasized that finalizing the airport layout plan is a crucial element, which is what the FAA uses as a key document to evaluate, analyze, and decide on all airport matters that come before them. If something is not included or clear from that map, no dice!

No firm resolution about additional public "workshops" with AMPWG and consultants (proposed 1 @ Tahoe, 2 or 3 in the Carson Valley); costs are still being looked at but there appears to be the possibility that the FAA will provide the money for the master planning cost overrun that this would entail. There was discussion about filling the one vacant "at large" position on the AMPWG, plus concurrence to add two more at large positions. Mr. Holler called for candidates for those three AMPWG positions to step forward ASAP (December 14 deadline for applications).

It was decided that the runway pavement load bearing capacity study will be repeated to once and for all "validate" that number. It is seen as crucial to both the development of the master plan and the ordinance. It was noted that, again, this makes the completion schedule of master plan and ordinance very, very tight (read: "realistically forget about the November '08 ballot, it is not doable, it will have to be November '10"). Commissioner Johnson reiterated several times that previously '06 had been promised and that it "confuses" the Douglas County residents if it is put off again. He feels that they should try very hard to get it done for the '08 ballot. Reference was made to the group that worked so successfully on the Resolution. It was noted that an effort toward a first draft of the ordinance is already ongoing by community volunteers.

Several times Commissioner Johnson mentioned that the coming period is "critical" because so many items in key documents are still unfinished or undefined, and the basis for actions or decisions is very unclear. Until resolved, how does one deal with items such as adding or renovating basic infrastructure (water, sewer, other utilities), the airport capital improvement plan, etc. Although it was not entirely clear, I believe the eventual decision was to make no decision about '08 vs. '10, but to re-visit this next February and decide then whether the '08 ballot can be achieved.

There appears to be a wave of proponents for east side development for soaring in particular, not just voices from the soaring community, airport businesses, county staff, but also among the Commissioners. The World Air Games 2011 are mentioned by the Commissioners again and again as "a major opportunity to promote soaring here" and "a tremendous economic boost for Douglas County (the Carson Valley and Tahoe both would be heavily involved).

Some discussion involved possible changes in the AAC. It was observed that the charter for the AAC is too specific regarding how many representatives of which interested segment are to be appointed. Changing this requires replacing the current charter. Commissioner McDermid asked Mr. Holler to find out how AACs are handled at other airports, who is on it, how often do they meet, and what are the specific function responsibilities that are described in their charter (several Commissioners -

especially Mr. Kite- talked about "reigning in" the AAC here and mentioned the AAC getting into areas that were none of their business). It was emphasized (McDermid) that the AAC should meet more often, coordinate better with other county functions such as the Planning Commission. In general, Johnson asked the public to submit applications for AAC membership so that adding more at large members could be considered.

At the end of the discussions about the airport, Commissioner McDermid asked for a study to be done that would provide clarity about the economic significance of soaring at Minden-Tahoe airport, what its status is, what the future prospects are, how to make it grow, and where the necessary funding would come from.

In my three minutes of public comment I tried to urge the Commissioners to make sure that all interlocking items are looked at together and comprehensively. First, are there any conflicts between the May 2007 Commissioners Resolution and the existing (1993?) airport master plan, current ACIP and current CIP (being revised and both due for approval by the Commissioners in January!), and the current airport layout plan? These are being used by airport management for near term action until revisions of these documents are approved. Secondly, the proposed [now being revised] master plan, the new ACIP and CIP, the revised airport layout plan, and the proposed new ordinance have to be scrutinized carefully together and for concordance with the Commissioners Resolution. County and airport staff, the AMPWG and AAC should determine now whether there are conflicts between specific items in the current documents and the Commissioners' May 2007 Resolution, action on such items should be stopped for now and plans regarding them should not go forward until the new Master Plan, derived ACIP and CIP, airport layout plan, and associated ordinance are completed. The January ACIP and CIP approvals should be deferred accordingly. Each of the new or revised documents also should be tested for concurrence with the letter and intent of the Commissioners Resolution.

John Morgan (President of the AAC and of the Minden Airport Association) is satisfied with role of the AAC as advisory to airport management but wants to see the length of membership increased. He also advocated strongly that the county should again get involved with construction of T-hangars.

John Garvin asked that the draft ordinance he had previously distributed to the Commissioners be acknowledged and added to the minutes of this meeting.

Mike Wendling of the Minden-Tahoe Airport Business Owners Association (13 members; formed in April 2007) presented a statement about AAC and airport governance. The statement was signed by most members of the group; two members refused to sign; one member was unavailable. As I recall, they want the AAC made up only of people who are in business at the airport (they and only they know what is needed to optimize functioning and development of the airport; no community representation at all is needed), and the AAC should report to the airport manager. They are ticked off that recommendations by them are agreed in the AAC, concurred by the airport manager, but then not followed up by the Commissioners. They believe they and the airport manager should be able to make decisions.

Ted Wallace emphasized that voters should decide on any issue involving increases in airport capacity or traffic with a "yes" or "no" vote. No second runway should be installed. No taxpayer money should be used for the airport.

Steven Swabacker noted that today's discussions clearly showed that much information needed for well-reasoned decisions is currently just not available. He advised to keep focusing on the three most important decision segments:

1. Due process, which begins by carefully listening to Douglas County residents;
2. Protection of the airport from unwanted changes;
3. Governance, which includes those governmental and management structures necessary to assure and empower the preceding two items.

Steven also emphasized that the airport master plan drives all plans and actions at the airport. Therefore the current focus should properly be on the master plan.

Rod Wohlman (?) noted that, perhaps dated, information show that powered aircraft at Minden-Tahoe airport outnumber gliders by almost 3:1. He feels that this should be reflected in the number of AAC members representing each interested group.

Wayne Ferree encouraged increased use of the AAC as an advisory body to the Board of County Commissioners (BoCC). Conversely, the AAC should receive more direction from the BoCC.