

# SONOMA COUNTY AVIATION COMMISSION

## Minutes of the May 16, 2024 Meeting

### **CALL TO ORDER:**

Young called the meeting to order at 8:00 a.m.

### **COMMISSIONERS PRESENT:**

Hayssen, Starrett, Young, Jasper, McCord, Jones

### **APPROVAL OF MINUTES:**

*Hayssen moved with support from Starrett to approve the March 21st, 2024, Aviation Commission Minutes. Abstained: Jones. All Ayes: Motion Carried.*

### **AIRPORT MANAGER REPORT:**

#### **A. Complaint Update**

Stout reported that in March there were 203 noise complaints from 26 individual complainants compared to 67 complaints in 2023, an increase of 203%. In February there were 144 complaints from 16 individual commentors compared to 32 complaints in 2023, an increase of 350%. Year-to-date for January through April there were 904 complaints compared to 249, an increase of 263%. General complaints, 2 in February 2024 and 2 in February 2023. In March 2024, there were 4 general complaints compared to 10 in 2023 reflecting a decrease of 60%.

Young inquired about the high number of complaints from Foss Hill Road in Calistoga. Hayssen shared his analysis of the noise complaints overall. He also shared that the Foss Hill Road complaints average at about 4,000 to 5,000 feet above sea level. He noted that the Sebastopol area complaints have been keeping the lead on number of complaints submitted. There was helicopter activity that was reported below 500 feet in the Silk Road area, all other activity reported were above the thresholds for urban spaces.

Stout added that the Airport is seeing complaints from the new Redhead Departure Procedure in the Forestville area. He also shared that the Airport is working to refine Vector reporting to make it more useful as well considering a change of tools for reporting to improve the quality of the data being reported.

#### **B. Tower Report/Update**

Tower staff report: there are 10 Controllers and 2 operatable supervisors. 8 (out of 10) of the line controllers are fully certified. 2 new trainees will be starting soon. Anticipation for a busy June and July with the Spring Jinx, Young Eagles, and Grove events. Traffic also tends to increase during election years.

In February the Airport had 5,549 operations compared to 5,637, a decrease of 2% from 2023. March 2024 had 5,888 operations compared to 5,683 in 2023, an increase of 3.6%. The 2024 year-to-date operations through March there were 16,843 operations, compared to 16,957 in 2023, which is less than a 1% decrease.

### C. Airline Update

In March passenger counts had a less than 1% decrease with 49,507 passengers compared to 49,632 in 2023. In April the passenger count was 56,468 compared to 56,615, also a difference of less than 1%. The year-to-date totals through April were 182,377 compared to 183,512 in 2023. Airline operations we are up about 7% compared to 2023, still less than the operations in 2022.

### D. Projects Update

- **Employee Update:** One of the Airport maintenance workers was promoted into the vacant operations specialist position and the new vacancy in maintenance has been filled with extra help. The new Administrative Aide started April 2nd.
- **Terminal Modernization Project:** The Airport is working on the last items with Permit Sonoma. The toe kick plate on the handrails between concourse A and B in being produced. This is the final item to complete everything for Permit Sonoma.
- **Approach Feasibility Study:** The Airport is waiting for Cignus Consulting to provide more data from their work with the FAA, expected in the next 1 to 2 months. Following that we will start working on setting dates for another round of public engagements to present potentially feasible changes to the approach procedures.
- **Airline Apron Reconstruction:** Phase 1 pricing is complete so the grant finalization for that phase should be complete by August. The project is expected to take place over 3 overlapping phases and be complete by fall, 2025.
- **Airport Restaurant Remodel:** Awaiting permits from Permit Sonoma. A water leak found behind the bar prompted some changes to the overall plans which added to the delay.
- **Airport Organizational Review:** No updates to report.
- **Asset Management System (previously referred to as Accounts Receivable System):** Continuing to work with the developers and testing. The anticipated roll out is this summer. The delay in accepting credit cards is still being worked through with the developer and the County due to County audit requirements.
- **Consolidated Rental Car Facility:** On hold until later this summer. Analysis is being done on whether to use ConRac Solutions or manage the project in-house.
- **Wildlife Exclusion Fence:** The contractor is continuing work. We are still waiting on permitting for the Riparian Corridor locations. Expected completion by early September.
- **Runway 02/20 Alternate Surface:** Still working with the FAA to gain approval. There isn't published guidance, which makes the process more complicated.
- **Airport Admin Backup Generator:** Completed and waiting for PG&E to do the switchovers.
- **Runway 14/32 Preliminary Engineering Study:** Core samples are complete and analysis of that data is underway. Environmental will follow that completion.
- **ARFF Building:** Began meeting with the Sonoma County Fire District on what a joint facility could look like. The process is off to a good start.
- **ATCT (Air Traffic Control Tower) Siting Study:** Kick off meeting in a week. Modeling will be done sometime in September for the potential sites. Endangered species considerations and environmental factors will be a part of the location decision making.
- **FEMA Hazard Grant – Tree Removal Phase Mitigation II:** Continuing to wait for follow-up from FEMA that will solidify the grant.
- **Sustainability Master Plan:** Visioning sessions were completed with staff and other internal parties of about 45 individuals. A Mission Statement and Vision Statement have been

completed. Baseline data gathering is complete and in the review process. Public engagement events are being planned for late summer or fall of this year to continue the work.

- **Airport Microgrid:** No new updates. Still in early stages and working on feasibility.
- **Hangar Development RFI:** There are several interested parties for the development of new hangars. Schandel and Stout are reviewing the draft RFI (request for information).
- **AirportNEXT Survey:** This is a pilot program from Airports Council International. The survey is about 80 questions focused on gaining feedback from airport stakeholders on alignment related to sustainability, services, perception, etc. The survey distribution list is approximately 1,000 individuals from: government, business partners, economic development agencies, tourism, etc. Surveys are out and when the feedback is available it will be benchmarked with other small airports.
- **Runway 14/32 Repair Project:** Repair of the culvert and runway is expected to begin taking place June 24<sup>th</sup>. The Airport will be closed overnight with 2/20 re-opening around 5 or 6am. Both runways will expect to be fully open around 7pm later that day, best case scenario, 5am on the 26<sup>th</sup> is the worst case. 2 bids have been received for the work. We are waiting for the final Board of Supervisors approval of the contract. No flights will be cancelled. American and Alaska will be swapping larger aircraft out for smaller as needed to allow for use of runway 2/20, Avelo doesn't fly on Tuesdays.
- **Temporary Overflow Parking Lot:** With the increased passenger counts, parking is becoming tighter so a temporary gravel overflow parking lot will be created on the corner of Ordinance Road and Airport. The lot will be used for employees and rental cars and create approximately 150 additional parking spots.

Stout reviewed the list of Future Board Items.

#### **ACTION ITEMS:**

##### **A. Establish FY24-25 Meeting Calendar**

Fiscal Year 2024-2025 Aviation Commission Meeting Schedule on the third Thursday of every month as follows:

- JULY 18, 2024
- AUGUST 15, 2024
- SEPTEMBER 19, 2024
- OCTOBER 17, 2024
- NOVEMBER 21, 2024
- DECEMBER 19, 2024
- JANUARY 16, 2025
- FEBRUARY 20, 2025
- MARCH 20, 2025
- APRIL 17, 2025
- MAY 15, 2025
- JUNE 19, 2025

*Young moved with support from Starrett to approve the FY24-25, Aviation Commission Meeting Calendar as written. All Ayes: Motion Carried.*

**B. Appoint FY24-25 Commission Chair and Vice-Chair**

*McCord moved with support from Jasper to recommend that Young continue as Chair with Hayssen as Vice Chair for FY24-25 if they are willing to serve. Young and Hayssen confirmed they are each willing. All Ayes: Motion Carried.*

**C. Cancel June Aviation Commission Meeting**

*Hayssen moved with support from McCord to recommend that the June Aviation Commission Meeting be cancelled. All Ayes: Motion Carried.*

**DISCUSSION ITEMS:**

**A. Commission Packet Materials Review**

Stout shared that connected with staffing changes there has been an opportunity to review processes for reporting and this process review will continue. Considerations for potential changes are consolidating redundant reporting, shortening the timeline on some reporting to year-over-year instead of 5 years, moving some reporting to quarterly instead of monthly, and looking into software to help make the process more efficient. The focus is to keep all of the data while updating the look and feel and potentially gaining staff efficiencies. No changes will take place right now, but the conversation will continue and options for improvements shared.

Hayssen commented on the amount of paper used to print the reports for the meeting and suggested that only the agendas be provided for everyone, and 2-3 hard copy paper reports be available as needed for the meetings. Young expressed agreement.

**B. Airport Land Use Commission**

Hayssen shared that a quorum was gained after an extended period of inactivity and a meeting took place. A special meeting is scheduled for July 1st and the Commission will appoint candidates with the potential for alternates to ensure continued activity.

**C. Fiscal Overview FY24-25**

Paul Hower, Department Analyst, provided an overview of the draft 2024-2025 fiscal year budget, which will be presented to the Board of Supervisors. The total Airport revenue stayed generally flat at \$22.3 million, and the expenditures are just over \$17.1 million and \$7.2 million in assets.

The high cost of the perimeter fence was discussed, and Stout and Hower shared this was due to the comprehensive work needed with fencing extending underground and 3 riparian crossings. Young expressed his surprise with the low cost of salaries compared the size of the operation and shared kudos on running a lean operation.

**NEW BUSINESS:**

Hayssen recommended discussing a new high-density housing project being developed near the Airport.

**PUBLIC COMMENTS:**

No email comments received. Young opened comments to the attendees in person.

Rebecca Purcell asked for information on how the public can apply to join the Airport Land Use Commission and what the plans are for the County Detention Center space. She asked what a reasonable elevation is for flight paths over areas like Sebastopol. She also commented that when the Airport receives multiple complaints from one person it is likely that there are several people in the neighborhood with the same problem who don't know how to file complaints. She suggested knocking on those neighbors' doors to ask if they have issues. Purcell also shared that she doesn't repeat file complaints because she believes that the Airport and Commissioners don't care and consider repeat complaints to have little meaning.

Ann Fitzgerald, a neighbor on Windsor Road and part of the Westside Neighbor Group, wanted to bring attention to ongoing issues with Helico, the Helicopter company, and its disturbances. She echoed Purcell's comment about single complaint sources and used issues with Helico's flight school as an example. She expressed that there could have been better feedback earlier when the school started operating if the low flights were able to be found and there was a better system for collecting the data from neighbors available at that time. This could have prevented some of the frustration from neighbors and the need for them to form a group. She reiterated the need for good data. Fitzgerald also shared that she lives on the approach and landing for helicopters and has specific issues with Helico, other helicopters aren't an issue. As she understands, there is no elevation limit for takeoff and landing per FAA regulations and she shared that she believes that one of her complaints that listed 199 feet elevation for a correlated flight was much lower than that. She shared that the flight school helicopters circle many times within the same time period and wants to know if that is considered one instance for a complaint, or should she report every pass over her house (eg: every 5 minutes). Fitzgerald applauded getting the flight tracker refined. She also asked that the Airport include the Westside Neighbor Group on the agenda and at the forefront of mind until the issue gets resolved with Helico.

Josh Hochberg, from Sonoma Jet Center, complimented the Tower on how it managed several charitable flying events recently. The Tower's operation was spectacular with the level of coordination. The events were great and touched many people. Josh wanted to specifically share that one child said, "It is amazing how one person can change your life".

**COMMISSIONER COMMENTS:**

Hayssen addressed comments made by Purcell and Fitzgerald, stating that their points were well taken and ensuring them that the Commission does care about their concerns. He answered Purcell's question about appropriate flight elevation above Sebastopol stating that most flights are at 3-4,000 feet, which is the standard for safety for a normal flight path. He also directed her to the website where the public can apply to be on the Airport Land Use Commission.

Jasper added that as a citizen oversight board they need to look at the noise impacts on the community and when they see multiple complaints from an address more than 7 miles away and connected to aircraft more than 3,000 feet elevation, there is little that the Commission can do. That information isn't relevant to the noise pressures of the community. He also reiterated that the Commission does care about these impacts and that there are restrictions as to what they can do as he understands it.

Jones echoed what Jasper and Hayssen said and that he lives near an airport and understands the disruptions. That is also why it is important to look at all of the complaints and discern which have validity and which may not be near the Airport's jurisdiction.

Young added that the number of complaints that are coming from a large distance and high elevation can pollute the data being collected where there are true areas of concern that should take focus. Young also encouraged making reports for specific instances so those instances and anomalies can potentially be addressed.

**ADJOURN:**

*Starrett moved with support from McCord to adjourn. All Ayes.* Meeting adjourned at 9:59 a.m.

Respectfully submitted,



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Jon Stout, AAE, CAE  
Airport Manager