

SONOMA COUNTY AVIATION COMMISSION

Minutes of the October 17, 2024 Meeting

CALL TO ORDER:

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

COMMISSIONERS PRESENT:

Hayssen, Starrett*, Young, McCord, Jones
*Starrett's last meeting on the Commission.

APPROVAL OF MINUTES:

Young moved with support from Hayssen to approve the August 15, 2024, Aviation Commission Minutes. September Aviation Commission was Canceled.
Abstained: None Opposed: None All Ayes: Yes. Motion Carried.

The agenda was adjusted to move discussion item A. AirportNext survey results before the Airport Managers Report.

Discussion Item A: AirportNext Survey Results

Tom Ruth was introduced by Stout to present the survey findings. The presentation introduced *Airport Next*, a tool for airports to assess and improve stakeholder alignment and infrastructure. Ruth emphasized the expertise of his team, including co-founder Paul Ouimet, who developed the assessment models, and data scientist Alex Debell. The *Airport Next* framework focuses on two critical success factors: robust infrastructure and strong stakeholder alignment, which together aim to drive airport growth and efficiency.

The survey, developed with input from around 100 airports, includes 45 statements on infrastructure and 35 on stakeholder alignment. It gathers responses from airport staff, industry professionals, and community members. In a pilot phase involving 24 North American airports, the survey collected 2,600 responses and 209,000 data points. Sonoma County Airport's survey had 131 responses, with 40% from the community, 46% from industry, and 14% from airport staff.

Scores range from 0 to 5, with mid-threes indicating strong performance. Sonoma County Airport scored slightly below the average for Tier 1 airports in both infrastructure and alignment, showing strong collaboration with federal, state, and local governments. General aviation responses were favorable, but airlines scored lower across airports, indicating potential areas for improvement.

For infrastructure, Sonoma County ranked 17th of 24 overall and 8th in its tier, excelling in transportation access and security, though retail, food services, and technology services scored lower. For stakeholder alignment, Sonoma County ranked 20th overall and 9th in its tier. Government alignment scores were high, while community alignment scores were slightly lower, with feedback noting issues like noise and service value.

Sustainability scored generally low, but economic sustainability received higher ratings, reflecting the airport's economic impact. Stakeholders also expressed a desire for better customer experiences, more airline routes, and greater community support for tourism.

Ruth summarized that while Sonoma County Airport ranks slightly below average in stakeholder alignment and infrastructure, it excels in government support and economic contribution. Key strengths include convenient access and satisfactory air service, while challenges remain in retail services and facilities. Ruth underscored the importance of effective communication between airports and government for economic growth.

The survey's 87% completion rate indicated substantial engagement, and Ruth explained that the "government" category included federal, state, and local entities. Confidentiality policies prevent sharing specific rankings of other airports, but Sonoma County ranks in the top 40% for government alignment.

Debell added that minor strategic adjustments could significantly improve Sonoma County's standing, as scores are closely clustered. The survey's balanced feedback helps pinpoint areas for growth. The session concluded with a summary of the survey distribution.

Airport Managers Report

A. Complaint Update

Stout reported a significant increase in noise complaints since the last meeting, with August complaints rising to 366 (up 208%) and September reaching 497 (up 288%). This brought the total for the year to 2,834 complaints, compared to 743 in the previous year, marking a 281% increase. He noted no feedback received from Commissioners on the Annual Noise Report and mentioned that the final report will soon be published and sent to the Board of Supervisors.

Young asked Hayssen for his thoughts on the complaints. Hayssen observed that 98% of complaints in August and September came from Districts 4 and 5, while complaints from other districts decreased. He highlighted that there were no minimum safe altitude violations recorded, noting that many complaints were from aircraft flying at altitudes of 5,000 feet or higher, with specific instances of Avelo flights at 5,375 feet. A hotspot for complaints was identified near Graton, which he linked to a specific departure route.

Stout shared that the American Association of Airport Executives would hold an annual noise conference, where staff members would explore best practices and potential software solutions for noise management. He mentioned Casarez's work on a tool called Power BI, aimed at improving data analysis and providing residents with more detailed noise reports.

Aivaliklis emphasized the need for better technology to streamline report production, which currently relies on manual processes. Young highlighted the importance of detailed data in understanding noise issues, sharing his personal experience of noise levels in downtown Windsor, where he noted that while he could hear departing jets at around 1,600 to 1,800 feet, the noise was manageable.

Hayssen countered with his observations from West County, citing recordings from family members that showed noticeable noise from aircraft, particularly Alaska and American Airlines departures. He mentioned plans to demonstrate the issue by flying the departure route with an aide from Supervisor Hopkins office to illustrate the geographical impact.

Stout reiterated the potential of the Power BI tool to provide clearer visual data on noise complaints and their correlation with flight patterns, noting the tool could help represent complaint areas graphically. Aivaliklis remarked on the striking nature of the visual data generated by this tool.

Finally, Stout reported a decrease in general complaints, with only 2 in August the same as 2023, September had 2 compared to 6 in September 2023. Year to date a total of 31 complaints received compared to 48 for last year, down 35%.

B. Tower Report/Update

Stout reported July operations, down about 3% from 8,233 to 7,972. August, down about 10%, from 8,528 to 7,666. Year to date 54,637 compared to 55,743, down 2%.

C. Airline Update

Stout reported a significant increase in passenger volume, with August numbers reaching 73,917, up 28% from the previous year, and September at 68,608, up 10%. Year-to-date, at 539,402 passengers, a 15% increase compared to 471,032. Stout forecasted a total of around 700,000 passengers for the year this summer, now with projections for October to December suggesting a final figure closer to 720,000 to 725,000. Load factors are averaging around 74% to 75%, slightly higher than the previously anticipated 70%.

Hayssen noted that the parking lot was unusually full, resembling a holiday weekend. Stout explained that October is typically busy due to peak tourism and noted recent additions of flights, such as Alaska's Las Vegas route and Avelo's new Ontario route. He mentioned that last weekend was particularly busy, requiring accommodations for over 200 cars in overflow areas. To address parking shortages, plans include relocating terminal employees to create more space and negotiating for additional parking spaces with a leaseholder, Cornerstone.

Young inquired about the lease duration for Cornerstone's parcel. Stout responded that the main lease ends in 2027, with a potential extension of 6 to 9 years. There have been discussions about possibly negotiating for part of the parcel to be returned early to free up land for future use. Dell commented on the underutilization of the area, and Stout noted that these discussions were prompted by recent parking challenges.

D. Project Update

- **Board of Supervisors Presentation Update:** The Airport provided an update to the Board of Supervisors on Tuesday, covering activities and budget matters, as it had been about 18

months since the last report. The update included a packet detailing ongoing projects, airline updates, and a request for two additional operations specialists. Stout mentioned discussions about the governance of the Commission, which has not been reviewed since 1976. The board had raised questions about the Commission's structure, prompting research into how similar-sized airports handle their advisory boards. Stout indicated that findings would be ready in about a month and would be shared with the Board of Supervisors for further direction. Jones commented on the challenges of merging the Airport Land Use Commission (ALUC) with the Aviation Commission, noting that the two have different functions and regulatory requirements. He emphasized that the ALUC oversees development at all county airports, making a merger difficult. Hayssen echoed Jones's sentiments, having also reviewed the ALUC regulations. He urged for the filling of vacancies on the ALUC, stressing the need for diverse community representation beyond just pilots. He noted a recent informal meeting where they struggled to achieve a quorum, highlighting the importance of revitalizing the ALUC with qualified applicants. Jones clarified the composition of the ALUC, detailing the representation from various groups, while Stout mentioned that the ALUC had not met quorum recently, preventing appointments from being made. Young inquired about the need for a selection within the Commission, and Hayssen confirmed there were several individuals being considered. Stout concluded by indicating that more updates would be provided as discussions with the Board continued.

- **Runway Work:** The runway has been closed for the past couple of nights for rubber removal, a maintenance procedure required every 18 months. The work was completed last night. In addition to rubber removal, crews painted runway and taxiway markings and repaired a delaminated section of pavement, which was temporarily patched over the weekend. The removal of the damaged pavement took place two nights ago, and they plan to wait 30 to 45 days before proceeding with further grooving work.
- **Employee Updates:** The recruitment process for two new operations specialists will begin now that the board has approved the allocations. The team will collaborate with HR to post these positions. Additionally, they are also working with HR to fill the Airport Real Estate Manager position, as Schandel's last day is February 4th. All necessary paperwork is completed, and they are just waiting for the posting to be released.
- **Approach Feasibility Study:** Outreach meetings were held on October 2nd and 3rd in Sebastopol and at Vintner's Inn, attracting significantly better attendance than the previous year, with a total of 200 attendees both online and in person. The comment period is still open until October 20, 2024. After the comment period closes, the team will review and prepare responses, with meeting materials to be made available on the website. A video of the meeting will be uploaded soon, pending resolution of some technical issues. While the meetings focused on approach feasibility, there was also discussion about departure procedures, particularly the RRHED departure. The team hopes to present to the board in early 2025, depending on the volume of comments received, to initiate the full design of the recommended procedures and begin developing the Fly Quiet Program.
- **Airline Apron Reconstruction:** The phase one contract is being finalized and has been reviewed by the contractor, with hopes to complete it by the end of this week. The goal is to present it to the Board for approval by December 10th. This process is taking longer than expected to complete the necessary revisions, which will kick off the first phase of the work.

- **Airport Restaurant Transition** The restaurant is continuing its remodel, focusing on the interior. While they haven't started on the new entrance yet, they expect to complete the renovations in about a month. The patio has already seen significant improvements.
- **Airport Organizational Review** While preparing for the Board and outreach meetings, there hasn't been time to focus on the staffing plan. The goal is to present some concepts for a five-year staffing plan to the board by the end of the first quarter.
- **Asset Management System** Still troubleshooting some issues with the system, as it's not as user-friendly as we would like. There are various complications that need to be addressed, and we're working on getting everything fixed to meet our needs.
- **Consolidated Rental Car Facility:** The Airport has met with rental car agencies to explore options for fuel tanks and potentially bringing the project under the airport rather than Conrac Solutions. This could lead to cost savings, as their borrowing rates are around 14%, while state loans are about 5%. We currently have 30% plans and aim to reach consensus on the preferred path forward with all operators by the end of the year.
- **Wildlife Exclusion Fence:** The Airport received our permits for work in the creek channels, and contractors are currently on-site, aiming to finish the fencing by the end of the month. Once completed, we will conduct a sweep of the Airport and collaborate with the FAA on our wildlife hazard plan. This will allow us to eliminate wildlife inspections for every commercial airline operation, saving about 8 hours of staff time a day. Hayssen inquired about a reported aircraft thief in the area, and Stout explained that the incident occurred near Airport Creek by Windsor Road, where a section of fencing was not closed due to prior vegetation clearing. This area had been considered a natural barrier, but after clearing, it was exposed. The fencing work should be completed soon.
- **Runway 02/20 Alternate Surface:** There has been some progress from the FAA, as they are still reviewing our request and have asked for additional information. Stout has been in discussions with Commissioner Jasper about how to implement this for next year, and he's collaborating with the Flight Standard District Office and Airport District Office. With this movement from the FAA, I'm anticipated that we'll achieve full approval soon.
- **Airport Admin Building Back Up Generator:** Currently finalizing the punch list.
- **Runway 14/32 Preliminary Engineering Study:** In early November, there will be a design kickoff meeting with Mead and Hunt to analyze soil borings and field surveys and review new FAA design standards. Potentially will need to address two taxiway connectors A3 and A4, which do not meet the new standards. Adjusting them could raise significant environmental concerns related to Goldfield habitat, with mitigation costs potentially reaching a million dollars per acre.
- **ARFF Building Preliminary Concept Design and Budget:** The Airport is currently awaiting approval from the FAA regarding the eligibility of spaces in the ARFF building. This review is crucial, as it will determine the allocation of costs and help us maximize FAA funding for the project.
- **ATCT Siting Study:** The FAA held virtual meetings in September and have a final SMS meeting scheduled for Monday to move forward with site selection analysis.
- **FEMA Hazard Mitigation Grant- Tree Removal Phase II:** The Airport received some information requests from FEMA regarding the tree removal grant and will be responding to them.
- **Sustainability Master Plan:** The draft Sustainability Master Plan is nearly complete, and public outreach is scheduled for November 15th to gather feedback before finalizing the plan.

- **Airport Microgrid:** Microgrid project is on hold while the team focuses on the sustainability master plan.
- **Hanger Development RFI:** Request for interests were published, opening opportunities for potential development on seven available sites. Hayssen expressed difficulty finding specific information in the provided documents, prompting Young to offer to email further details. The discussion included concerns about environmental issues related to parcels 5 and 6, particularly regarding drainage and wetlands, which could impact development costs. Schandel shared plans for an informational meeting on October 25th, followed by a tour for those without airfield access on November 8th or 9th, with responses due by December 16th. The team is actively seeking to broaden interest in the project by reaching out to various stakeholders, including tenants at the airport and local chambers of commerce. Schandel acknowledged the need for broader outreach to ensure potential developers, like wineries, are informed. Suggestions included posting with the North Coast Builders Exchange and using social media and newsletters for promotion.
- **Apron E- Helicopter and Aircraft Parking Apron:** No new updates
- **Terminal Area Sidewalk and ADA Improvements:** No new updates
- **Apron A- Remote Parking Apron:** No new updates
- **Building Demo:** In discussion with SHPO (State Historic Preservation Office) and waiting for demolition debris management plan and habitat conservation plan development info to move forward.
- **Website RFP:** No new updates
- **Security System Maintenance Services RFP:** No new updates

Stout reviewed the list of Future Board Items.

ACTION ITEMS:

None

DISCUSSION ITEMS:

B. Limited Maintenance Providers/Access

Young reported that he and Jones are working on a brief questionnaire intended for the ad hoc committee, which he forgot to send out earlier. He delivered it this morning and plans to finalize it soon to gather information on any issues the Committee members would like addressed. Young acknowledged the oversight, while Jones mentioned he also contributed to the delay due to being out of town for three weeks. They will continue to look into it.

C. Jail/Road Yard Update

Stout reported the Airport has contracted an appraiser to prepare a fair market value calculation. Once the appraisal is complete, they will coordinate next steps with the County Executive. Director Hovertsz expressed anticipation for the appraisal, hoping it will help resolve the issue permanently. Stout added a suggestion from the Supervisors potentially placing a convention center there, emphasizing that it should be at market rate.

OLD BUSINESS:

None

NEW BUSINESS:

McCord inquired about the follow-up for the airport presentation, suggesting it might include best practices. Stout clarified that the details of the follow-up haven't been finalized, but it could involve a management practices report. He mentioned he would forward any relevant information to the Commission and include it as a discussion item. Stout noted that his presentation contained less information than his report, but it could address some of McCord's questions more thoroughly.

PUBLIC COMMENTS:

No email or chat comments received before or during the meeting. Young opened comments to attendees in person.

Anne Fitzgerald, representing the West Side Airport neighbors, raised several points regarding airport operations. She inquired about the proposed helipad for helicopter practice, noting it wasn't mentioned in project lists or budgets at recent Board of Supervisors meetings. Stout clarified that a public meeting for the sustainability master plan is scheduled for November 15th. Fitzgerald also asked about the noise abatement program, questioning whether there was an actual committee involving community members. Additionally, she expressed concerns about Helcio's frequent helicopter flights over her neighborhood, requesting a video demonstration of the noise and disruption caused by low-flying helicopters. The video was played without sound, Stout offered to email it to the Commissioners for further review.

COMMISSIONER COMMENTS:

Hayssen shared that KTVU Fox News reported a 50% increase in traffic at Charles M. Schulz Sonoma County Airport this year, highlighting good revenue flow and improvements made. He expressed surprise that, despite our sustainability efforts, the Airport rated below the mean in sustainability metrics. Young noted that this rating reflects public perception, and he questioned the survey's outreach and response rate. Hayssen agreed that better publicizing of their initiatives could improve perceptions. Stout acknowledged that while they have effectively promoted solar projects, other sustainability initiatives, like upgrades to LED lighting and alternative fuels, have not received as much attention.

Young expressed his thoughts on the recent survey, noting that his comments were reflected almost verbatim. He found the 0 to 5 scale limiting and preferred a 0 to 10 scale for a more nuanced assessment. He also emphasized the importance of reviewing the Aviation Commission's charter, pointing out that the Board of Supervisors often fails to seek input from the Commission and that their past suggestions have been met with criticism. Young felt that this criticism, especially a personal attack he experienced, highlighted a lack of collaborative spirit from the Board. He urged the Board to consider the Commission as a team member and to genuinely listen to their advice.

Hayssen noted that at the Board of Supervisors meeting, one Supervisor provided positive feedback regarding the projects, which he appreciated. Starrett remarked that given the revenue generated by the airport, the Board should be pleased. However, Jones pointed out that the airport's status as an enterprise site limits the ability to re-purpose space for other uses. Young added that resources are sometimes being diverted, complicating the situation further.

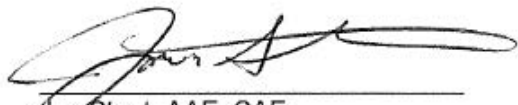
Jones praised Stout for his effective presentation at the recent Board of Supervisors meeting regarding Airport developments. He also raised concerns about the terminal facilities, noting that as a frequent traveler, he has observed the departure lounge becoming crowded during peak flight times. He suggested that as air travel continues to increase, it would be prudent to consider plans for managing the additional passenger load to avoid falling behind in accommodating growing traffic.

Stout explained that when the terminal was extended, plans were made for future growth, including relocating the fire station to accommodate expansion. Although a conceptual design for a future terminal exists, there are no finalized documents yet since the extension was completed only last August. He noted ongoing discussions about parking and the need to revise the general plan, which currently limits daily departures. Stout confirmed that the airport averages about 14.7 departures per day, with fluctuations throughout the year, and acknowledged that airline scheduling can lead to crowded conditions during peak times, particularly in the morning.

ADJOURN:

Hayssen moved with support from Jones to adjourn. **All Ayes.** Meeting adjourned at 9:37 a.m.

Respectfully submitted,



Jon Stout, AAE, CAE
Airport Manager