

SONOMA COUNTY AVIATION COMMISSION
Minutes of the February 20, 2025 Meeting

CALL TO ORDER:

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

COMMISSIONERS PRESENT:

Hayssen, Jasper, Jones, McCord, Young. Absent: Jeremy Newton

APPROVAL OF MINUTES:

Young moved with support from McCord to approve the January 16, 2025, Aviation Commission Minutes. Abstained: None Opposed: None All Ayes: Yes. Motion Carried.

AIRPORT MANAGEMENT REPORT:

A. Complaint Update

Stout reported that an adjustment was needed for the December noise complaints, as some submitted complaints via email were missed in the final recording. At the January Commission meeting it was initially reported at 577 complaints and 30 individual complainants for December, the corrected totals are 581 complaints and 32 individual complainants, with 4,664 complaints for the year.

Stout reported, in January there were 497 complaints, compared to 185 in January of 2024, marking an increase of 169%. For general complaints, there were four compared to one in 2024, marking an increase of 300%. There were 43 individual complainants compared to 11 in 2024, marking a 291% increase.

Stout reported, the implementation of a new noise management tool provided by Casper is progressing, with full integration expected within a month. A conversation took place about the transition, during which feedback will be gathered from reporters whose home experienced difficulties with the previous system. Data and flight track migration is underway, and initial results indicate improved accuracy and usability.

Discussion highlighted key improvements, including enhanced differentiation between overflights and local traffic, greater user accessibility across devices, and the ability to prepopulate frequent reports. It was noted that historical flight data can be reviewed, and complaints can be submitted for specific aircraft or general concerns. The platform is also available in Spanish, unlike the previous system.

Costs were addressed, with the new platform totaling approximately \$30,000, including a one-time \$5,000 expense for migration and training. It was noted that this is slightly more cost-effective than the current system. Staff time savings were also discussed, particularly with the introduction of automated transcription for phone complaints,

which is being tested for accuracy, including recognition of slang. The reporting process was described as more streamlined and less manual, contributing to overall efficiency.

The 2024 Annual noise complaints report is set to begin, requiring a few months due to the data transition. A conversation took place regarding the helicopter noise abatement guide for the West Side, during which feedback from pilots was reviewed. Not all suggestions were incorporated, as some were deemed too specific. The goal was to create broadly applicable guidelines for all helicopters using the helipads. The final draft will be published soon.

Hayssen reported after review, 89% of the 581 complaints come from the 5th District, mostly along the RRHED departure corridor, which spans from Graton to the coast. Complaints often cite aircraft flying as low as 2,500 feet, though the minimum legal altitude is 500 feet in rural areas and 1,000 feet over urban areas. The typical departure altitudes range from 3,000 to 8,000 feet, and arrival complaints are fewer, with aircraft reported as low as 2,500 to 2,700 feet. One complaint involved a helicopter flying at 450 feet above the ground. The primary cause of the complaints is the RRHED departure.

Discussion shifted to the Charlie Eight departure as a potential alternative to the RRHED departure. Young mentioned that although people have requested the Charlie Eight route, it often defaults to another route instead. Hayssen explained that using the Charlie Eight route is a complicated situation. There are advantages of Charlie Eight, but it requires operational coordination between Oakland Center, the Tower, and the pilot making the request.

Stout shared that Airport has reached out to airline partners to discuss making the Charlie Eight departure the first choice instead of RRHED. A meeting with the Airlines Dispatch is expected in the coming weeks to push for this change. Additionally, the Airport is working on a draft letter to the FAA with Supervisor Gore, emphasizing that prior to RRHED, Charlie Eight had low complaint levels, and the procedure is published and can be followed to reduce workload.

Young noted that Charlie Eight is typically assigned to smaller aircraft, while RRHED is often given to airlines, suggesting that the FAA system decides the route. Jones shared that airlines tend to file routes as instructed, regardless of preferences. McCord explained that RRHED minimizes controller workload but may not be the most efficient. Jones added that RRHED is rarely used for northbound flights. Hayssen inquired if the RRHED departure could be eliminated, and feedback from airlines about departure selection and route flexibility is suggested to be gathered.

B. Tower Report/Update

Stout reported for December, the Airport recorded 5,534 operations, compared to 5,279 in December 2023, showing a 5% increase. Year-to-date operations were 82,163, compared to 82,710 in 2023, reflecting a 1% decrease.

Benjamin Kingston, the new tower chief, is being briefed on the Airport and is engaged in discussions with the Commission about collaborating on the Runway Safety Action Team (RSAT).

C. Airline Update

Stout reported, in January, there were 52,905 passengers, compared to 38,553 in 2024, marking a 37% increase. January operations were 821 compared to 589 in 2024 marking a 39% increase.

D. Projects Update

- **Runway Work:** Coordination with the Roads Department on the crack fill project is ongoing, and progress is being made.
- **Employee updates:** The hiring process for the second approved operations specialist is ongoing, with three candidates unsuccessful and a fourth under consideration.
- **Approach Feasibility Study:** Comments on the draft responses have been returned to Cignus, and a meeting is scheduled next week to review the final responses to over 350 comments. The Cignus contract currently covers only the feasibility analysis. An update for the development phase will be presented to the Board in May or June. Funding comes strictly from the Airport, as the project is not eligible for FAA funds.
- **Airline Apron Reconstruction:** The April 1st start may be delayed due to Water Board review, with a target of April 1st to May 1st. Submittals are being received, and schedules are being coordinated with the contractor.
- **Airport Restaurant Transition:** A few punch list items remain. The new opening will be announced once they're completed.
- **Airport Organizational Review:** We're working on adding employees and restructuring, with an HR meeting planned in the next 3-4 weeks to incorporate the first phase into next year's budget.
- **Asset Management System:** The security review of the proposed software is still pending due to slow responses from their team, halting further work.
- **Consolidated Rental Car Facility:** Working with Mead & Hunt and C&S on task orders to prepare a bid package for a progressive design-build Request for Qualifications for the facility.

- **Wildlife Exclusion Fence:** Work is on hold until dry weather allows completion of a few remaining items, with finishing dependent on creek drying.
- **Runway 02/20 Alternate Surface:** Progress has been made on the alternate surface, with clear direction from the FAA on three tasks: updating the Airport layout plan, completing an airspace review (to be submitted next week), and finalizing the Tower agreement.
- **Runway 14/32 Preliminary Engineering Study:** A meeting is being coordinated with the FAA to review updates from the design guide published four years ago. The focus is on comparing actual pavement geometry to the guide, addressing costly deviations, and determining if an overlay project will require changes to pavements per design standards.
- **ARFF Building Preliminary Concept Design and Budget:** The project is on hold pending feedback on cost and space eligibility.
- **ATCT Siting Study:** The Airspace review for the project has been submitted, and the FAA needs it to complete their study report. Mead & Hunt will work on the specific sites and finalize the space-related details.
- **FEMA Hazard Mitigation Grant:** The grant for tree removal is still pending.
- **Sustainability Master Plan:** No update.
- **Airport Microgrid:** No update.
- **Hangar Development Request for Interest (RFI):** Meetings with proposers have been held, and term sheets will be developed with several interested parties. This will take about 6 months, with project work potentially starting in 18 to 36 months.
- **Apron E - Helicopter:** Geotech for the aircraft parking apron will be conducted next week, with configurations being developed. Work on concepts is still ongoing. The helicopter parking proposal is being considered between taxiways Quebec and Romeo, south of Apron E.
- **Terminal Area Sidewalk:** Work on the terminal area sidewalk and improvements is ongoing, with plans expanding to include additional parking and roadway upgrades.
- **Building Demo:** A meeting with the contractor is needed to review and update their demo bid. Once finalized and reviewed, the two sheds will be removed.
- **Website RFP:** Waiting on feedback from The County's Information Technology Department (IT).
- **Security System Maintenance Services RFP:** No update
- **Budget Process:** The Airport is working on the budget, focusing on fees. A meeting next week will refine the project wish list, with a draft proposal expected in April for further consideration.

E. Future Board Items

Stout reviewed the list of Future Board items.

ACTION ITEMS: None

DISCUSSION ITEMS:

A. Hangar Maintenance Survey

Stout reported, a survey was conducted with airport tenants to assess maintenance availability. The survey, which closed on January 31st, gathered 50 responses. Stout provided an overview of the specific results.

There was brief discussion on the results. Young and Jones will review the results and come back at a future meeting with recommendations for discussion.

B. Rates & Charges

Stout reviewed proposed rates and charges for the Airport for fiscal year 2025-2026 . Minimal increases were made, including changes to large fire suppression aircraft landing fees, ground lease adjustments, terminal advertising fees, application fees, and badging violation remedies. Some fees, like terminal advertising, were reduced due to low demand. The rate-setting methodologies involve CPI-based adjustments for hangars, tie-downs, and long-term agreements, as well as surveys comparing rates for services like parking and landing fees and appraisals. Specific adjustments include increases in parking fees in the long-term lot, and a transition to a license plate reader system to replace ticket dispensers. Other adjustments include slight increases in airline remain overnight fees, joint use fees for airlines, and Airport staff escort fees. A recent appraisal also led to changes in ground lease rates. The Commission is expected to make a recommendation to the Board of Supervisors on the proposed rate package next month.

Further discussions centered on concerns about the nearly doubling of commercial landing fees, the Commission requesting a revenue impact analysis to understand the cost impact on commercial operators. Jasper requested historic data showing the impact of the old and new rates, highlighting the need to assess how the increase would affect operators financially. Stout acknowledged that the data was not prepared in time for the meeting but agreed to follow up with comparative information at the next meeting. Young pointed out the importance of clear terminology regarding CPI adjustments, suggesting that the 5.2% increase should be presented as deferred from the previous year rather than a standard CPI increase. McCord clarified that the 5.2% increase captures two years' worth of adjustments, with inflation expected to rise again, though

the rates won't go into effect until July 1st, 2025. The CPI data used for this process is based on October 2022 - October 2024 reporting.

OLD BUSINESS: None

NEW BUSINESS: None

PUBLIC COMMENTS

Chris Taylor, a resident of Occidental on Oklahoma Valley Road, submitted a letter prior to the meeting where he expressed appreciation for the efforts made by everyone at the Airport and the positive interactions he has had. The approach of mitigating the issue through Cignus was praised. However, Chris raised concerns about whether proper due process had been followed, particularly regarding the RRHED departure. He questioned if a breach in the process had occurred and whether the FAA had failed to properly notify the appropriate parties. He suggested that the lack of timely notification had prevented proper community notification about the effects of the change. Chris inquired if the conduct of the FAA and the circumstances surrounding the issue had been reviewed.

Taylor raised the possibility of leveraging legal angles regarding the change, questioning whether there was any opportunity for pushback. He referenced his research into federal requirements, particularly the National Historic Preservation Act and Section 106, which mandates that federal agencies consider the impact of changes or projects on registered historic properties. Chris noted that the area has many such properties and that the change could adversely affect them. He inquired if any legal perspectives had been considered in approaching the issue, expressing hope that it would not escalate to legal action but emphasizing the potential relevance of these legal angles.

Brad Albert, a resident of Occidental for 37 years, discussed the operational aspects of departures at the Airport, specifically focusing on the RRHED departure procedure. He explained that while the RRHED departure is commonly filed by dispatchers, it is not necessary for low-density airports like ours, as there are no mandatory departures. Albert clarified that dispatchers, pilots, and controllers often request alternative routes, such as the Charlie Eight departure, due to its efficiency, as the RRHED departure is considered inefficient. He confirmed this information through conversations with Oakland Center controllers, dispatchers, and industry experts. Albert shared an example of an Alaska Airlines flight that filed the RRHED departure but could have easily switched to a more efficient route and noted that the RRHED departure results in additional fuel consumption. He pointed out that using the RRHED departure wastes 220 pounds of fuel, which could lead to significant cost savings if alternative routes are used more frequently.

COMMISSIONER COMMENTS

Young expressed appreciation for Albert's input, noting that the Airport will act on his suggestion. He recommended staying in touch with Albert, as he could provide further insights. Young also shared that, as a non-IFR-rated pilot, he finds Charlie Eight easier due to its direct heading, while RRHED requires more concentration.

McCord, a pilot instructor, prefers the Charlie Eight route for its simplicity, with a heading followed by a vector. He noted receiving strange routing at times, likely due to the Traffic Management System (TMS), which may assign routes based on factors like weather or traffic. He suggested investigating whether the TMS is assigning the RRHED route, despite controllers being open to clearing the other option.

Albert explained that the dispatcher autonomously manages flights and selects flight plans, often choosing a route with a waypoint after Charlie Eight. Once filed, the Santa Rosa Tower contacts Oakland Center for approval unless weather or flight restrictions cause a reroute to RRHED. He compared the RRHED route to a spillway, used only, when necessary, but acknowledged it may never be removed and could take decades to make operational.

Jasper shared that discussions are underway with airlines and dispatch teams to explore making Charlie Eight the default departure route. Stout mentioned organizing a joint meeting with all three airlines' dispatch groups. McCord noted that pilots can request Charlie Eight, which is easier and faster than RRHED. Albert clarified that controllers also find Charlie Eight easier, countering the misconception that they prefer RRHED. Hayssen added that pilots' requests for modifications are usually granted, especially in quiet early-morning airspace. Stout emphasized that the tower doesn't make procedure recommendations, as it's up to dispatchers to file routes. Jones highlighted that airline pilots, especially from larger carriers, are often unfamiliar with local procedures and typically follow dispatch plans. Stout reiterated the focus on working with dispatchers to ensure proper route filing.

Jasper shared that, in a previous meeting, a letter from the FAA explained that the agency typically does not engage with the public on procedural changes, as shifting a procedure could just move the issue to another area. While acknowledging the FAA's challenging position, Jasper praised the Airport's efforts to create new procedures despite the bureaucratic hurdles. He suggested that fighting the FAA on aircraft routings might be unproductive and recommended working with the FAA to address unintended consequences and explore mitigation strategies instead.

Taylor appreciated the efforts but raised concerns about the FAA possibly being bound by an unaddressed act. Taylor planned to investigate further and seek legal counsel to determine if it could be used to argue that due process was not followed. Jasper responded, stating that convincing the FAA about the historic property likely wouldn't lead to a shift in procedures.

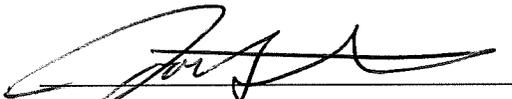
Young asked if Taylor believed a strong case had been made for the economic and environmental benefits of changing procedures, specifically if there was enough data to argue that altering flight routes could save money and reduce greenhouse gas emissions over the year.

Jones discussed the FAA's slow pace, citing an example where his brother's team studied indoor air quality on aircraft for 25 years under an FAA grant but had yet to receive a report. He also noted the FAA's focus on aircraft noise levels through certification, unlike local communities that focus on noise impact. Referencing the Noise and Capacity Act of 1990, he explained that most aircraft today are Stage 5, the quietest classification, and emphasized that the FAA prioritizes compliance with noise standards over assessing community impact.

ADJOURN

Young *moved with support from McCord to adjourn. All Ayes.* Meeting adjourned at 9:25 a.m.

Respectfully submitted,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Jon Stout', written over a horizontal line.

Jon Stout, AAE, CAE
Airport Manger