

TRIANGLE NORTH EXECUTIVE AIRPORT COMMISSION

Tuesday, August 11, 2015

Minutes

The Triangle North Executive Airport Commission was called to order at 5:30 p.m. by Chairman John Allers on August 11, 2015 in the conference room of the Triangle North Executive Airport.

In attendance were Commissioners: John Allers, Don Lancaster, Taylor Bartholomew, Guy Martin, David Bunn and Phillip Stover. Also, in attendance were Steve Merritt (Airport Manager), Pete Tomlinson (Davis, Sturges & Tomlinson) and Jason Elliott (Michael Baker Engineering). Absent from the meeting: Commissioner Herman Dickens.

The second agenda item was review and approval of minutes from the June 9, 2015 meeting. Commissioner Stover motioned that the minutes be approved as read, with Commissioner Bunn seconding. The motion passed unanimously.

The third item on the agenda was public comments. Chairman Allers called for comments from the public. There were no public comments at this time.

The fourth item on the agenda was the airport operations update by Steve Merritt. Mr. Merritt said with automobile gas prices going down, he's interested to see if prices for airport fuel will go down anymore. We've been holding the price a little higher than what some would expect, but it's worked for us and we've made a profit. Mr. Merritt said we are in the process of getting a new zero turn mower. The one we currently have is about eight years old.

The fifth item on the agenda was the budget update by Steve Merritt. Mr. Merritt said our net operating result was almost \$72,000 and we bought \$188,000 less in gas than the year before. We paid a lot less for fuel and made a very good profit.

Mr. Merritt said he is working with Mitchell Robinson and the auditors to see if we can capitalize the \$1.5 million for Carlina, instead of expensing it all at one time. If we can divide the \$1.5 million over a 30-year period, which would be \$50,000 a year, then with the ad valorem taxes we will receive, we'll have about \$70,000-\$80,000 that can go into a capital fund for some projects.

Mr. Merritt said the month of July is the close-out phase for the budget because Finance is in the process of making sure that all expenses that belong in the previous budget are posted before they completely close it out.

The sixth item on the agenda was application for discretionary funds to support industrial area development by Steve Merritt. Jason Elliott said he is supposed to meet with Phil Lanier (Airport Project Manager North East) tomorrow to discuss this. He's heard that there is \$387,000 leftover from another project and Mr. Lanier is trying to put that toward this project, but he is not sure if that's correct and he will find out more tomorrow. Mr. Merritt said we made a presentation to Mr. Lanier a while back and he said he may have found some money for the airport.

The seventh item on the agenda was update on taxiway construction for former Anne Gordon property by Steve Merritt. Jason Elliott said Bryce Mendenhall is getting bids for extending the water lines. When he gets those, then the County Commissioners will have to approve the contract. Basically, we are ready to advertise for bids and have a couple of outstanding items we are waiting for. Mr. Elliott said someone is coming out to perk the ground tomorrow, so we can get the septic tank permit.

Mr. Merritt said he received a response from the Cascine Plantation, and they say they have no problem with the construction, as long as we put a chain link fence down Bryant Rd. to make sure it's blocked off. Mr. Merritt said this is not a problem.

In other business:

- Commissioner Stover said he had a prepared statement he would like to read in reference to Mr. Bruce Allen's comments at the June 9th meeting. (Commissioner Stover's full statement is attached.)
- Chairman Allers said a meeting was held on July 30th to discuss ways to market the airport and asked Mr. Merritt to discuss this. Mr. Merritt said he and Chairman Allers met with Ronnie Goswick, Richie Duncan, Gary Cunard, Keith Smith, Angela Harris, Matthew Winslow and Don Lancaster to talk about how to make the airport more successful as an economic engine for the county. Mr. Merritt said when Kevin Baker (Executive Director of the Piedmont Triad Airport Authority) was here on July 8th, he said we had a great airport, but we needed to come up with some ways of marketing it. Mr. Merritt said we are going to put a plan together to attend some of the industry meetings and air shows. Another marketing meeting will be held soon and the next Economic Development Commission meeting will be at the airport on September 10th. Mr. Merritt will give an update on the airport during that meeting.
- Steve Merritt said he wanted to let the Commission know that last week, one of Greg Upper's former employees sent an email to Angela Harris about Mr. Upper carrying a firearm and there weren't any signs posted that said "no concealed weapons". Mr. Merritt said Mr. Upper, John Harris and one other person have a permit, which says any wildlife that may cause damage can be taken. Mr. Merritt said the signs are now posted.
- Commissioner Stover said he was looking at the EAA website, specifically the Young Eagles section. He said that Hickory has a Young Eagles event on the second Saturday of every other month, and he was wondering if that is something we could possibly do. Mr. Merritt said he believes we could, but we've had a diminishing amount of pilots who want to do it. Commissioner Stover said maybe we could possibly do it in conjunction with the Pilots Association meetings.
- The next meeting will be October 13th at 5:30 p.m.

With no further business, the meeting was adjourned at 6:10 p.m.

STATEMENT FROM COMMISSIONER PHILLIP STOVER

I would like to respond to the comments made by Mr. Bruce Allen at our last meeting concerning a private conversation between myself and Steve Merritt and his inferences that my actions on this commission were a conflict of interest and were somehow influenced by my business relationships with Mr. Upper.

Mr. Upper has rented a space in my hangar for the past year for which he pays me a little over \$200 per month. Currently there are over a dozen people on the waiting list for hangar space at this airport and if Mr. Upper stopped renting from me, I would have very little trouble filling that space with another tenant.

I have served on this commission for nearly 8 years. As with all members of this commission I am a volunteer and during that time I have not received any financial benefit from that service, quite the contrary serving has cost me considerable amount of my own professional and personal time and resulted in lost revenue from my practice. This is in keeping with my long history of voluntary service to a variety of nonprofit and governmental organizations in Franklin County.

I have always seen myself as representing three constituencies on this commission: first, as a pilot who has based his aircraft at this airport since it opened, I feel that I represent pilots who use this airport. Secondly, as a businessman with a small business on this field I try to represent the interests of other business people who use this airport. Finally and most importantly as a long-term resident of Franklin County I feel my most important constituency is the people of Franklin County. The decisions I have made on this commission have always been and continue to be in keeping with what I felt was in the best interest of all the citizens of Franklin County.

The Skydiving operation at this airport does increase risk and raise safety issues, but so does every other operation at this airport. As with every other decision made in aviation, which is an inherently dangerous operation, the decision

whether or not an operation is in the best interest of this airport is a matter of balancing risk with benefit and taking steps necessary to minimize that risk.

I had severe reservations about bringing the skydiving operation to this airport. Prior to bringing my aircraft to this airport it was based in Raleigh North where there was a long-standing skydiving operation. There I had concerns about how the skydiving operations were being conducted. Also when the skydiving operation first began here at Triangle North, I observed activities that reinforce those concerns. However, since that time I have met with Mister Upper and become aware of the steps he has taken to see that the skydiving operation is as safe as possible. Also, this airport has taken exemplary actions of bringing together the major operators on this airport in developing a voluntary working agreement to simultaneously allow all operations to have adequate access to the airport while maximizing safety. That working agreement has worked extremely well and thus far we have had no major safety incidents involving interactions between skydivers and other operators at this airport.

The skydiving operation also has been a major customer and has significantly contributed to the profitability of this airport and thereby minimizing the cost of operating this airport to the citizens of Franklin County. As a pilot I would like to see the airport restricted to use only by fixed wing aircraft but as a citizen of Franklin County and Airport Commissioner I recognize that the more operations that we have at this airport the better it will be for the citizens of this county which are my first concern.

The National Transportation Safety Board recently expressed concerns about midair collisions. They are concerned that these have increased because of pilots spending more time looking at high-tech equipment inside the airplane instead of observing what is going on around them and not meeting their obligation to see and avoid other users of the airspace. These concerns were raised because of increases in collisions between aircraft not between aircraft and skydivers.

Finally I would like to point out that Mister Allen's comments were based on his inappropriate eavesdropping on a private conversation which he has incorrectly characterized in his comments. That conversation was not for public discourse

and was in no way in violation of North Carolina's Open Meeting Law. Further, this is the same person who when he was an employee of this airport carelessly ran the airport lawnmower under the wing of my aircraft striking it and causing 35,000 dollars' worth of damage and causing it to be taken out of service for over a month. It also resulted in a 10,000 dollar loss to the County, when the airport had to pay the 10,000 dollars deductible. Also while he was an employee, as a Commissioner during that time, I received multiple complaints from several customers of this airport about his discourteous service and I know of at least one who left this airport and took his business to competing airport because of his actions.

