

MINUTES

Beaufort County Airports Board

January 8, 2026 | 10:00 am | Meeting called to order by Chairman Chris Butler
[Video and Transcript](#)

ATTENDANCE

Present: Chris Butler, Jim Starnes, Howard Ackerman, Rich Sells, Leslie Adlam Flory, Thomas Sheahan, Mark Bailey, Nick Mesenburg, and David Nelems

Non-voting Members: Brian Turrisi and Dr. Eli Roth

Absent:

County Staff: Jon Rembold, Airports Director; Stephen Parry, Deputy Airports Director; Jeremy Mathes, ARFF Chief; Brandon Chavis, Airport Manager; Brian Cronin, Airports Finance Manager; and Rocio Rexrode, Airports Senior Administrative Specialist.

Beaufort County Council Liaison: Tom Reitz

Hilton Head Island Town Council Liaison: Melinda Tunner

Public: Judy Elder, Talbert, Bright and Ellington, Inc.

AGENDA ADOPTION

The January 8, 2026, BCAB meeting agenda was adopted with unanimous consent.

APPROVAL OF MINUTES

Howard Ackerman made a motion to approve the November 13, 2025, meeting minutes. Leslie Flory seconded the motion. All were in favor, and the motion passed.

PUBLIC COMMENTS

County Council Member Tom Reitz offered brief remarks, reflecting on the past year's activities and emphasizing the importance of collaboration. He reaffirmed his commitment to supporting the Airports Board and working together to achieve shared goals.

New Board Member Introduction: Dr. Eli Roth was welcomed to the Beaufort County Airports Board. He introduced himself, sharing his background as an aviation medical examiner, and expressed enthusiasm about contributing to the Board's initiatives.

DIRECTOR'S REPORT

General Overview: Jon Rembold provided an overview of the holiday season and outlined upcoming projects for the new year. Special mention was made of the Airport's plans to celebrate the nation's 250th anniversary, with visible patriotic themes expected throughout the facility.

- **TERMINAL UPDATE:**

Jet Bridges Update: Rembold reported that the jet bridges arrived from Utah on approximately eight to nine trucks carrying the main bridge sections, support materials, and rotunda components. Several of the loads were oversized, with some sections nearing 100 feet in length, requiring the trucks to be routed onto the airfield to avoid tight roadway turns. Prior to entering the secure area, the shipments were staged at the gate and screened by law enforcement, including K-9 units. All jet bridge components are now on site, and installation is scheduled to begin this week.

Construction Update:

Rembold reported that the terminal project is approximately 70% complete. He noted that while the exterior of the building appears nearly finished, significant activity continues inside. He said that at one point, approximately 16 different trades were working simultaneously, including the installation of fixtures, HVAC systems, and interior doors equipped with electrical components for alarms and access readers. The TSA screening area remains one of the most time-consuming sections, with crews pouring terrazzo floors.

Rembold also highlighted the terminal's architectural character, describing the exterior as relaxed and welcoming, with a non-governmental, almost country-club aesthetic. Landscaping has begun, with erosion control measures in place and crews actively working on designated areas. The project remains on track, and biweekly meetings with contractors continue to monitor progress and address any schedule adjustments.

- **PROJECTS UPDATE:**

ARW Hangar Sitework: Steve Parry reported that significant progress has been made on the hangar site work. He explained that extensive grading has been completed and much of the recent activity has focused on installing underground stormwater systems. While the site may appear inactive at times, substantial work is underway below ground to prepare for future construction. The team is currently addressing potential change orders, and Brandon Chavis was commended for his excellent project management. The anticipated timeline for completing the site work phase is around March, which will mark a major milestone and allow the airport to move forward with hangar development.

ALP Master Plan: Parry reported that he and Jon Rembold traveled to Atlanta to meet with the FAA regarding proposed options for the ALP Master Plan. The team is preparing to present these options to the community at the next ALP update. Additional work remains before the community presentation, but a meeting is expected to occur soon.

Saint James Baptist Church: Parry reported that HXD has officially closed its involvement with the Saint James Baptist Church project. The Town and County have taken over responsibilities, including

property purchase, church relocation, and associated reimbursements. HXD will no longer be involved in these matters.

Airfield Drainage: Parry reported that this long-running project is nearing the construction phase. The drainage inlets, including cement inlets and aircraft-rated grates, have been ordered, with an estimated 10–12 week manufacturing timeline. Once all materials arrive on-site, construction will proceed quickly. This upgrade is a key step in improving airfield drainage, particularly following the reclassification to Class Three standards.

ARW Runway: Parry reported that the new runway installation is substantially complete. Only minor finishing touches, such as painting and clean-up, remain before the project is fully finalized.

ARW Partial Parallel Taxiway: Parry reported that a notice to proceed has been issued for surveying, geotechnical work, and permitting activities required before design and bidding. The partial parallel taxiway will improve operational efficiency by reducing aircraft back taxiing. Work is progressing alongside the relocation of the air system to accommodate future hangar construction.

Automated Weather Observing System (AWOS): Parry reported that the AWOS system is being relocated to clear the area for hangar development. Efforts are ongoing to ensure the system is operational while accommodating construction requirements.

- **DEPARTMENT UPDATE:**

Santa Fly-in: Rembold reported on the success of the Santa Fly-In event held in December at ARW. Organized by Marlene Myers and Brandon Chavis, the event attracted a large number of children and families, creating a festive atmosphere at the airport. Santa's arrival by airplane provided a unique and memorable experience for attendees. The event was well received by the community and highlighted the airport's commitment to engaging local residents through creative, family-friendly activities. Rembold expressed appreciation for the team's efforts in planning and executing the event, noting that it was a significant highlight during the holiday season.

A Hero's Welcome: Parry explained that the HXD team received a message from a grandson requesting assistance for his father, a World War II veteran, 100 years old, who was flying in on Christmas Eve and needed help deplaning. The team immediately mobilized, with Marlene Myers taking the lead in coordinating support from the American Legion, the Military Officers Association, and local volunteers. When the aircraft arrived, the veteran was greeted onboard, assisted off the plane, and honored with a water cannon salute. Passengers shook his hand, and the American Legion presented him with a Warrior's Quilt. Additionally, a vintage Cadillac Eldorado was arranged to transport him and his daughter, creating a memorable experience. The veteran, who turns 101 on February 2, was deeply moved, and the family expressed immense gratitude. Jon praised Marlene

and the entire team for their efforts, noting the event showcased the airport's commitment to community and service.

AIRPORTS' BUSINESS UPDATE:

IJA Airport Terminal Program Grant Application: Rembold reported that the airport submitted a grant application under the Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act (IIJA), formerly known as the BIL. This is the final year of the program, which provides funding for terminals and towers nationwide. Approximately \$100 million was set aside for airports of similar size, with the submitted application focused on Phase Two of the terminal project to advance completion and ensure the building functions as a fully operational system. Additional grant opportunities are being pursued.

United Airlines is increasing ORD frequency during the season: Rembold reported that United Airlines has announced increased seasonal service to Chicago O'Hare (ORD). This expansion reflects the airline's excitement about the upcoming terminal opening and is expected to enhance the airport's traffic and connectivity in the coming years.

Airport Leadership met in Atlanta with the FAA ADO Team: Rembold reported that airport leadership met with the FAA Atlanta ADO Team on December 18. The meeting included representatives from environmental, planning, and regulatory departments. The team discussed proposed ideas for the Master Plan, and follow-up internal coordination will continue prior to presenting options to the board and the stakeholders committee. Rembold noted that the meeting was productive and that FAA staff showed positive engagement.

1. Airports First Quarter Financial Update (Brian Cronin):

Cronin reported that **HXD** experienced an increase in revenues compared to the previous year, primarily due to higher grant reimbursements and airline cost recovery fees. Rental income also improved, while parking revenue declined because the automatic gate system was not operational. This issue is expected to be resolved soon, which should boost parking income. Expenses were slightly elevated due to a water leak and a malfunctioning control of automatic LED lighting on the airfield. Capital equipment purchases included gate motors, air bags, and a runway painting machine. Interest income was strong, with \$151,000 earned in the first quarter and projections of approximately \$200,000 for the year. Staffing challenges remain, with several positions unfilled, impacting payroll and budget forecasting. After adjusting for capital expenses, Hilton Head Airport showed an operational surplus of roughly \$300,000, reflecting effective expense management. Brian emphasized the need for a balance sheet in future reports to provide better visibility into cash reserves and liabilities.

Cronin reported on the financial status of **ARW**, noting that operations remain stable and aligned with budget expectations. The airport continues to manage expenses carefully while supporting

infrastructure improvements aimed at long-term growth. He emphasized that resources are being utilized effectively to sustain operations and prepare for future development needs. Overall, ARW's financial position reflects prudent management practices, with efforts focused on maintaining efficiency and supporting strategic projects without imposing additional financial strain.

UNFINISHED BUSINESS

There was no Unfinished Business.

NEW BUSINESS – ACTION ITEMS

1. **GRANT ACCEPTANCE (HXD) - RECOMMENDATION TO APPROVE A RESOLUTION TO ACCEPT SCAC GRANT IN THE AMOUNT OF \$42,625.00 FOR AIRPORT APPROACH TREE MITIGATION**

Rich Sells made a motion to approve a recommendation to approve a resolution to accept a SCAC grant in the amount of \$42,625.00 for HXD Airport Approach Tree Mitigation. Leslie Flory seconded the motion. All were in favor, and the motion passed.

2. **GRANT ACCEPTANCE (ARW) - RECOMMENDATION TO APPROVE A RESOLUTION TO ACCEPT SCAC GRANT IN THE AMOUNT OF \$46,775.00 FOR AIRPORT WEATHER OBSERVING SYSTEM (AWOS) RELOCATION**

Howard Ackerman made a motion to approve a recommendation to approve a resolution to accept a SCAC grant in the amount of \$46,775.00 for Airport Weather Observing System (AWOS) Relocation. Thomas Sheahan seconded the motion. All were in favor, and the motion passed.

3. **WORK AUTHORIZATION (XD) - RECOMMENDATION TO APPROVE TALBERT, BRIGHT, AND ELLINGTON WORK AUTHORIZATION 2119-2503 FOR AIRPORT WEATHER OBSERVING SYSTEM (AWOS) RELOCATION**

Leslie Flory made a motion to approve a recommendation to approve Talbert, Bright, and Ellington Work Authorization 2119-2503 for Airport Weather Observing System (AWOS) Relocation. Jim Starnes seconded the motion. All were in favor, and the motion passed.

CHAIRMAN UPDATE

The Chairman provided an update, highlighting the significant progress the airport has made over recent years. He noted improvements south of the Broad and praised the ongoing personal engagement efforts, including the Ambassador Program led by Leslie Flory, which adds a unique touch to the passenger experience. Reflecting on the overall accomplishments, the Chairman acknowledged that while some projects have taken longer than anticipated, the Board and Staff have made substantial strides. He expressed confidence in continued progress over the next decade, commending Jon, Steve, and the entire team for their support and contributions. The Chairman concluded by expressing pride in the group and enthusiasm for the projects and discussions planned for 2026.

1. Finance Committee

Members: Howard Ackerman (Chair), Chris Butler, Rich Sells, Tom Sheahan, and Brian Turrisi.

It was noted that a budget meeting for the fiscal year needs to be scheduled to review forecasts and ensure that deadlines for submissions to Council are met.

2. Passenger Service Committee

Members: Leslie Adlam Flory (Chair), David Nelems, Jim Starnes, and Tom Sheahan

Leslie Flory provided an update on the Ambassador Program. Interest from residents in joining the program is increasing, driven by current Ambassadors promoting participation. She recommended enhancing training this year due to the expanded terminal and higher passenger volumes.

Discussions are ongoing regarding the optimal positioning of Ambassadors, staffing levels for each day, and the implementation of a structured system for managing lost and found items.

3. ARW Facilities Use and Improvement Committee

Members: Chris Butler (Chair), Mark Bailey, David Nelems, Jim Starnes, and Nick Mesenburg

The committee reported continued progress on hangar development and related infrastructure improvements. No additional updates were noted beyond ongoing project work.

4. HXD Airport Improvement Committee

Members: Brian Turrisi (Chair), Howard Ackerman, Rich Sells, and Chris Butler

Tree Issue: Submission to the FAA regarding tree concerns has been completed, and resolution is expected soon.

Urban Nature / Environmental Concerns: Ongoing concerns exist regarding dust and debris from operations on the east side of the airport, including grinding and crushing of materials. The committee emphasized potential impacts on aircraft engines and public health. Coordination with the Town, code enforcement, and Airport staff is necessary to monitor permits and ensure compliance.

5. Government Affairs Committee

Members: Rich Sells (Chair)

It was reported that ongoing efforts are being made to maintain contacts in Washington, D.C., including outreach to former contacts to navigate current challenges.

Discussion: Town Council Member Melinda Tunner and other committee members discussed ongoing concerns regarding dust and pollution occurring on the east side of the airport near the hangar area. The issue involves stone grinding and crushing operations, which were initially conducted without permits and later permitted through revised approvals. The committee expressed concern about the potential impacts of fine airborne particles on aircraft engines, operational safety, and public health. Committee members noted

uncertainty about whether all current and future permits have been appropriately reviewed or communicated to Airport staff. It was emphasized that the Town and Code Enforcement need to be aware of potential violations and should document inspections and monitor compliance to ensure accountability. The discussion highlighted the need for continued oversight to prevent serious incidents involving airborne dust and mitigate health

Request – Board Participation in Chairman’s Testimony: The Chairman noted that he will be testifying before the House Natural Resources Committee on water access on January 13, and that Board members are encouraged to attend. Potential meetings with South Carolina representatives, including Nancy Mace and Russell Frye, were also mentioned.

PUBLIC COMMENTS

There were no Public Comments.

ADJOURNMENT

The motion to adjourn was made at 11:07 a.m. It passed unanimously.

NEXT MEETING

February 5, 2026 | 10:00 a.m.

TBD