

MINUTES

Beaufort County Airports Board

February 5, 2026 | 10:00 am | Meeting called to order by Chairman Chris Butler
[Video and Transcript](#)

ATTENDANCE

Present: Jim Starnes, Howard Ackerman, Rich Sells, Leslie Adlam Flory, Thomas Sheahan, Mark Bailey, Dr. Eli Roth, and David Nelems

Absent: Chris Butler and Nick Mesenburg

County Staff: Jon Rembold, Airports Director; Stephen Parry, Deputy Airports Director; Jeremy Mathes, ARFF Chief; Brandon Chavis, Airport Manager; Brian Cronin, Airports Finance Manager; Marlene Myers, Airports Business 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.; and Jimmy Banton, Operation Patriots FOB Executive Director

AGENDA ADOPTION

The February 5, 2026, BCAB meeting agenda was adopted with unanimous consent.

APPROVAL OF MINUTES

Rich Sell made a motion to approve the January 8, 2026, meeting minutes. Tom Sheahan seconded the motion. All were in favor, and the motion passed.

PUBLIC COMMENTS

There were no Public Comments.

DIRECTOR'S REPORT

1. Flying Frog 5k/10k and First Annual FrogFest (Marlene Myers)

Myers presented details of the upcoming Flying Frog 5K/10K and Frog Fest scheduled for April 18, 2026, at ARW Frogmore Intranational. The event will benefit Operation Patriots FOB, a nonprofit supporting veterans and first responders. Marlene explained that the event has expanded to include a 10K race and a music festival featuring nine bands and multiple food trucks. Sponsorships totaling \$7,400 have been secured, and registration remains open at runsignup.com. FAA has been notified, and the runway will only be closed during the race portion.

Operation Patriots FOB Executive Director, Jimmy Banton, spoke about the organization's mission to combat veteran and first responder suicides through outdoor recreation and peer engagement. The

nonprofit has served over 45,000 visits in five years with zero suicides reported. Board members expressed strong support for the organization and discussed potential future partnerships.

Winter Storm Update: The Director reported that the recent winter storm had minimal operational impact at HXD. The airport closed briefly, just after 1:00 a.m. on Sunday, but conditions improved quickly. Although temperatures remained low throughout Sunday, there were no HXD-related cancellations. Any disruptions over the weekend were due to weather at other airports, particularly Charlotte, where snowfall affected inbound aircraft from other regions. Our runway was closed for a short period, but it thawed quickly and reopened without issue. General Aviation operations resumed on Sunday, and full commercial service returned on Monday. Overall, the storm's effects were limited, and the airport was considered fortunate this season.

- **TERMINAL UPDATE – Jon Rembold:**

Jet Bridges Update: The Director reported that installation of the new jet bridges is progressing well. This is the first time Hilton Head has had jet bridges, and initial walkthroughs and inspections have been completed. The equipment is the newest available and includes modern operating features, such as screen-based controls and joystick operation.

Training for both airline personnel and airport staff will be conducted before the bridges are put into service. Staff is currently reviewing spare parts inventories, developing training curricula, and preparing procedures to address minor issues in-house and ensure rapid response to any larger operational needs. As the equipment is brand new, no significant issues are expected at the outset.

Terminal Construction Update: The Director provided an update on terminal construction progress. Photos show continued advancement on the building exterior and new perimeter fencing. Interior work is also progressing, with terrazzo installation and polishing underway near the main entrance. The new TSA screening checkpoint terrazzo is complete. The Director noted that the floor's petal-shaped design features represent water hyacinths, a marsh plant native to the Lowcountry. A small interpretive display will be installed in the terminal to explain the design to travelers. At this stage, most remaining interior work depends on completion of the terrazzo, after which other finish items will resume. Exterior landscaping has begun, and final soffit work is underway. Overall, the building is taking shape with a more relaxed, welcoming aesthetic compared to the previous institutional design. The Director encouraged anyone who has not visited recently to see the progress firsthand.

- **PROJECTS UPDATE – Steve Parry:**

Terminal Operational Readiness: Parry reported that as the terminal project moves closer to completion, staff is identifying a wide range of operational items that must be addressed before opening. These include key controls and secured access points, spare parts for newly installed

equipment, such as the jet bridges, and common-use airline requirements, including printer paper specifications. Staff assignments will be made to ensure each operational area is fully prepared.

Airport Master Plan: Parry provided an update on the Airport Master Plan. He noted that work continues with the consulting team following a recent coordination meeting with the FAA. Several items must be aligned before the stakeholder group can reconvene, but the stakeholder meeting remains a priority and will be scheduled once those steps are completed.

Airfield Grading Project: Parry explained that the airfield grading project is progressing. When the runway length was increased in 2018, the airfield's classification changed, requiring updated grades to meet the new requirements. A key stormwater component—removal of a plug and construction of a necessary wall—has now been completed. The unique casting component required for the project is currently in production and is expected to take approximately 8 to 10 weeks.

Parking System and Revenue Control: Parry addressed ongoing challenges with the Elite Parking system. The terminal lot's layout, with multiple entrances and exits, makes placement of tag-reading cameras difficult. Consultants from Talbert, Bright and Ellington are conducting a parking study to determine appropriate locations for permanent entry and exit gates. In the meantime, airport staff are preparing to install temporary gates to begin capturing lost revenue. A recent review by the vendor showed 78 vehicles in the lot, with only 18 recorded as paid, highlighting revenue loss under the current honor-system model.

HXD Tower Renovation Update: Parry reported that the tower renovation is nearing completion. Recent work includes installation of new countertops in the cab to better support the upgraded communications equipment received in prior years, improving both equipment stability and controller usability. He also noted that a new private restroom unit has been installed in the cab, allowing controllers to remain on duty without going downstairs; plumbing connections are currently being finalized, and controllers have expressed appreciation for the added convenience. Parry explained that the airport beacon, previously mounted on an older tower structure, has been relocated to the top of the current tower, providing safer and easier access for maintenance staff. The renovated cab now includes two controller operating positions, offering needed flexibility on peak-traffic days. While most weekday operations will continue with a single controller, the space is fully capable of supporting two positions when required.

Airport Entrance Corridor Landscape Enhancement: Parry reported that improvements to the airport's entrance corridor are moving forward in preparation for the terminal opening in the spring. Several years ago, the entrance was significantly upgraded to eliminate the dark, tunnel-like appearance for arriving drivers. The next phase will further enhance aesthetics to align with the high-quality landscaping at major community entrances across the island.

Proposals were solicited from multiple landscape installation and maintenance companies, and a vendor was selected based on a strong plan for installation and ongoing maintenance. The contractor will complete the initial landscaping work and will maintain only the entrance area, as the remaining grounds are managed under separate contracts.

The agreement also includes quarterly updates to seasonal color, similar to the approach used at local plantation entrances. Permanent landscaping elements, such as palm trees, will be installed, with seasonal plantings refreshed four times per year to maintain a vibrant, welcoming appearance. These enhancements are expected to complement the new terminal building and create an attractive front entrance to the airport.

ARW Runway Rehabilitation: Parry reported that the runway rehabilitation project at Beaufort Executive is substantially complete. One remaining item—final pavement markings—is pending and will be completed when weather conditions allow. Once the contractor returns to repaint the designated areas, the project will be complete.

ARW Parallel Taxiway Extension: Parry noted that the parallel taxiway extension, a significant improvement for pilots operating at Beaufort Executive, is well underway. All required preliminary items, including geotechnical surveys and supporting documentation, have been provided to the consultants. They are now developing plans, including electrical components and other necessary design elements. The project is expected to be ready for bid in spring 2027. Funding for the work will come through grant sources.

ARW Hangar Site Work: Parry reported that the hangar site work is progressing, though the team is awaiting a possible change order related to installation of a fire hydrant. Internal coordination is ongoing, and more details will be shared as that change order is finalized.

ARW Automated Weather Observing System (AWOS) Relocation: Parry confirmed that the AWOS system, previously removed, has been approved by the FAA for installation at a new location. A work authorization is in place with the consultants to complete the final design and bidding documents, ensuring the system is properly sited and does not require future relocation.

- **DEPARTMENT UPDATE:**

Welcome and Introduction: Rembold officially welcomed Dr. Eli Roth as the newest member of the BCAB and noted his recent tour to the airport along with participants from a local leadership group.

Staffing and Team Transitions: The Director reported continued team growth, highlighting that several previously contracted functions are now being staffed internally. Security roles within and around the terminal, as well as all grounds-maintenance responsibilities, have been transitioned to in-house personnel.

The Director emphasized the benefits of this change, including increased flexibility, accountability, and the ability to reassign staff to priority work.

The new in-house security team began operating on February 1. The Director explained that this team will now serve dual roles, providing both security and year-round customer information services.

AIRPORTS' BUSINESS UPDATE:

Real ID Update: The Director reviewed Real ID requirements, advising that travelers without one may still fly but will be required to pay a \$45 Confirm ID fee valid for 10 days. Travelers were encouraged to consult TSA guidance.

Grand Opening Events for the Terminal: The Director stated that the official opening date remains fluid due to construction adjustments, including the addition of a concourse bar. Plans include a Chamber ribbon-cutting and a separate invitation-only evening event.

RBC Heritage Volunteer Opportunities: The Director highlighted upcoming volunteer opportunities at the RBC Heritage tournament, where the airport maintains a venue at the 10th green. The event supports community engagement and outreach.

Upcoming SCAA Conference: The Director announced attendance at the upcoming SCAA conference. Topics will include implementing the new common-use system and collaborating with another airport using the same system to identify potential operational challenges and prepare appropriate IT responses.

UNFINISHED BUSINESS

There was no Unfinished Business.

NEW BUSINESS – ACTION ITEMS

1. CONTRACT AWARD - RECOMMENDATION OF CONTRACT AWARD TO LOW COUNTRY COMMERCIAL SERVICES FOR HXD JANITORIAL SERVICES

Rich Sells made a motion to approve a recommendation of contract award to Low Country Commercial Services for HXD Janitorial Service. Leslie Flory seconded the motion. All were in favor, and the motion passed.

2. HILTON HEAD ISLAND AIRPORT (HXD) – RECOMMENDATION TO APPLY FOR TOWN OF HILTON HEAD ISLAND ACCOMMODATIONS TAX (ATAX) GRANT FOR TOURISM MARKETING

Thomas Sheahan made a motion to approve a recommendation to apply for the Town of Hilton Head Island Accommodations Tax (ATAX) Grant for Tourism and Marketing. Rich Sells seconded the motion. All were in favor, and the motion passed.

3. HILTON HEAD ISLAND AIRPORT (HXD) - RECOMMENDATION TO APPLY FOR COUNTY HOSPITALITY TAX (HTAX) GRANT FOR TOURISM MARKETING

Thomas Sheahan made a motion to approve a recommendation to apply for the County Hospitality Tax (HTAX) Grant for Tourism and Marketing for HXD. Rich Sells seconded the motion. All were in favor, and the motion passed.

4. BEAUFORT EXECUTIVE AIRPORT (ARW) – RECOMMENDATION TO APPLY FOR COUNTY HOSPITALITY TAX (HTAX) GRANT FOR INFRASTRUCTURE

Thomas Sheahan made a motion to approve a recommendation to apply for the County Hospitality Tax (HTAX) Grant for Infrastructure for ARW. Rich Sells seconded the motion. All were in favor, and the motion passed.

CHAIRMAN UPDATE

Starnes, acting chair, noted that Chairman Butler provided no updates.

1. Finance Committee

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

The Committee had nothing new to report this month. They will keep the board informed of any new developments.

2. Passenger Service Committee

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

The Committee had nothing new to report this month. They will keep the board informed of any new developments.

3. ARW Facilities Use and Improvement Committee

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

The Committee had nothing new to report this month. They will keep the board informed of any new developments.

4. HXD Airport Improvement Committee

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

The Committee had nothing new to report this month. They will keep the board informed of any new developments.

5. Government Affairs Committee

Members: Rich Sells (Chair)

The Committee had nothing new to report this month. They will keep the board informed of any new developments.

PUBLIC COMMENTS

County Council Member Tom Reitz provided an update on the newly approved county procedures for board appointments, reappointments, and seat assignments. He noted that the County adopted these rules on December 8, but the board had not been notified, causing confusion regarding recent appointments and seat-shift requests.

He explained that a formal standard operating procedure is being developed to ensure consistent communication moving forward. Under the new rules, seat changes can no longer be made informally by the chair and must go through the Clerk to Council using the same process as new appointments.

Councilman Reitz confirmed that reappointments must also be processed through the clerk's office.

ADJOURNMENT

The motion to adjourn was made at 10:53 a.m. It passed unanimously.

NEXT MEETING

March 12, 2026 | 10:00 a.m.

Town of Hilton Head Island, 1 Town Center Ct., Hilton Head Island, SC 29928