

Wm. Weston J. Newton, Chairman  
October 1, 2009  
State of the Region – Hilton Head Airport runway and tree removal

Good morning, I'm pleased to be here to speak before you today.

The Airports Board was recently revamped with new members who will provide input to county council from a greater cross section of the community, not only do we have pilots, but we have those who live in close proximity to the Airport, as well as people with business and financial expertise.

Mr. Kubic held an orientation for the Board yesterday to help make clear the role and responsibilities of board members and to brief them on the master plan update which is underway now, it is our hope that this board, with six and soon seven new members, will be able to work together and build consensus regarding the big Airport issues.

What are the big issues? The Chamber has identified the tree removal project at the north end of the Hilton Head Island Airport as one, and the runway length as the other, allow me to begin with the runway, many and divisive opinions are the result of rumors and speculation. Is our runway a sufficient length? And for what purpose? Is a longer runway needed?

The Hilton Head Island Airport Master Plan update is under way. The last update was done in 2001 and is posted online as part of the current master plan effort. You will find materials pertaining to the scope of work, the process and timeline ,a summary of public comments from the two public meetings held in August ,and an interactive survey form where you may leave your thoughts and recommendations,

I invite you to review these materials by visiting the county website, [www.bcgov.net](http://www.bcgov.net)

Through the process of updating the master plan, the Airport, its runway and all its facilities will be evaluated. We want to make it very clear that this process is as transparent and as public we can make it. The consultant was hired and the scope of work developed jointly by the county and town. All meetings and discussions are public and all reports will be posted at the website pages developed just for this purpose. There are no preconceived results for the master plan. The consultant has prepared a credible timeline that will take about one year. The process calls for measured steps, all done in an open forum with appropriate public notice. The process is detailed, thorough,

rational, crystal clear and it's being done in the public eye. We have begun at ground zero and are working to keep you informed every step of the way.

The scope of work outlines three issues that are crucial to the future of the Airport and the potential impact they could have on the town, the county and the region. First of all this includes emergency operations, requiring verification that the Airport will meet our needs during a hurricane evacuation or recovery effort. It requires a detailed examination of various disaster scenarios, complete review of our existing County and Town emergency and recovery plans, a determination of which types of aircraft or agencies would need access should our bridges fail, and a long list of other concerns that require much study.

Another of the three issues affecting the future of the Airport is the continued viability of commercial services. This also demands rigorous examination of what the requirements are of nearby hub Airports as well as what type of aircraft we will need to support in the future, and a clear understanding of our assets and liabilities. This is not a simple process.

Thirdly, the master plan will look at land and facility requirements. This calls for a determination of our size and layout limitations and how they impact services, safety, and our neighbors, again, another big item for research and recommendation.

The master plan update is a major undertaking that considers our current situation, our strengths and weaknesses, our economy, our environment and our citizens. It will identify trends in usage and type of aircraft. It will identify our needs and limitations. It will recommend goals that are achievable and that work for us, all of the reports, data and recommendations regarding all facets of the Airport will be reviewed in a public forum. In the end, the master plan update will include a business plan for the future. We invite you, and we urge you, to be part of this process. After the completion of this effort we will be in a position to have an educated and informed public.

The number one safety priority for the Airport is the removal of trees that penetrate approach airspace at the north end of the Airport, for safety purposes, the FAA requires a 34-to-1 approach slope.

We worked closely with the town to remove tree obstructions two years ago at the south end of the Airport, that effort was less complicated, still, it was done with maximum sensitivity and under the guidance of arborists. It involved mostly pines which were skillfully uprooted with special equipment to avoid destroying the understory vegetation, in total 375 trees were removed at a total cost of \$602,196. The county paid 2.5% of that with the FAA funding 95% and the state the remaining 2.5%. The south end was cleared to a 20-to-1 glide slope but the FAA requires that we go back when possible and clear it to 34-to-1 slope. That cost is yet to be determined.

Tree removal at the north end is more complicated. Here we have a preponderance of live oaks, laurel oaks and other hardwoods, the number of trees we are talking about amount to 1400 on Airport property and 980 on private property near the Airport, again. We are working with the town and other agencies to develop an acceptable plan that will solve our safety problems and satisfy environmental concerns,

This is not an inexpensive effort, even with the FAA paying 95% of the bill, the county's portion will pinch in this economic downturn. Keep in mind that the FAA will only fund this project once, if we have to go back in a few years and do it again, it's on our dollar entirely.

Other agencies beside the county and town involved in the oversight of tree removal include U.S. fish and wildlife which looks out for endangered and threatened birds and other species, DHEC which is concerned with runoff and OCRM, which regulates our waterways.

In addition to the environmental concerns , we must be careful to avoid any damage to fort Howell, an earthen works of the civil war era. It is under the protection of the state historic preservation office.

The initial cost so far for tree removal at the north end has amounted to \$124,747. This includes only the environmental assessment and on-Airport tree survey portion, aviation easements, legal expenses, design/permitting/bidding, actual trimming and removal, plant back, tree-mitigation bank payment and future maintenance costs are all still to be determined, but will vastly exceed the cost of the south end tree removal project.

We ask what, if any, expansions may be appropriate at the Hilton Head Island Airport??? Council has approved a new 72-hundred square foot fire station for a total construction cost of \$1.7 million. Again the FAA will pay 95% of that. ,beyond that the master plan update will offer any recommendations for possible expansion of Airport facilities, ramp space, aircraft storage hangars, the terminal, everything, including the runway, we make no assumptions, no guesses, no preconceived plans or proposals. We look forward to seeing what the master plan determines.

In conclusion, there is no simple solution regarding the future of the Hilton Head Island Airport however, the County, the Town, the state and the federal agencies involved all want to do the right thing, and even if we occasionally disagree, I believe we are approaching a plan that will be suitable for everyone. Here again, the answer lies with the county and the town working together to find solutions and respecting one another's needs and concerns. Thank you.