

**MINUTES OF THE MEETING OF THE  
ROWAN COUNTY BOARD OF COMMISSIONERS  
Special Meeting – Airport Master Planning Process  
September 25, 2007 – 5:30 PM  
J. NEWTON COHEN, SR. ROOM, ADMINISTRATION BUILDING**

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Present: Arnold S. Chamberlain, Chairman  
Chad Mitchell, Vice-Chairman  
Jon Barber, Member  
Tina Hall, Member  
Jim Sides, Member

County Manager William Cowan, Clerk to the Board Carolyn Athey, County Attorney Jay Dees and Finance Director Leslie Heidrick were present.

Chairman Chamberlain convened the meeting at 5:30 pm.

Commissioner Barber provided the Invocation and also led the Pledge of Allegiance.

**1. CHAIRMAN'S COMMENTS**

Chairman Chamberlain said the purpose of the meeting was to hold a work session regarding the Rowan County Airport master planning process. Chairman Chamberlain said there would be no motions, votes or public comment.

**2. DISCUSSION REGARDING DEVELOPMENT & FUTURE OF ROWAN COUNTY AIRPORT**

Chairman Chamberlain introduced representatives from Talbert & Bright (TBI), which included Carl Ellington, Andy Shook and Judy Elder. Chairman Chamberlain also introduced Airport Consultant Frank Newton and Senior Transportation Planner/Economist Thomas Blakeney.

Mr. Ellington recalled that the Board had started the airport planning process during its 2007 retreat when it voted to proceed with a master plan. Mr. Ellington said TBI had been selected to perform those services and he reported that it would take approximately 12 – 18 months to complete the final document.

Ms. Elder provided the Board with a power point presentation regarding the master planning process and said the purpose is to update the airport layout document. Ms. Elder reported that the last plan was done in 1997 and the Federal Aviation Administration (FAA) prefers the plans to be updated every 5 years.

The highlights of the power point presentation included the Project Purpose, Master Plan Process, Existing Inventory, Aviation Demand Forecasts, Facility Demand Forecasts & Concept(s), Environmental Analysis, Airport Layout Plan Drawing Set, Development Schedules and Cost Estimates and Runway Extension Justification.

Mr. Ellington explained that all aspects of the outlined process were required because they were tied to funding. Mr. Ellington said Rowan County would be competing nationally and statewide for funding and the process provided an argument as to why funding should be sent to Rowan County.

Mr. Blakeney discussed the runway extension justification.

Mr. Ellington elaborated on the Runway Protection Zones (RPZ). Mr. Ellington said the County already qualifies for funding of the existing RPZ. Mr. Ellington said the County could operate the airport without purchasing the RPZ; however, the FAA and the Division of Aviation prefers that the County own RPZ properties.

Mr. Newton explained the three types of airports, which were commercial, military or general aviation. Mr. Newton said Rowan County had a general aviation airport, which involved private aircraft, flying schools, fixed base operators (FBO), etc. Mr. Newton said airports effectively help communities grow their economic base and the Board must decide how to make the airport grow and prosper without using the General Fund.

Mr. Newton said general aviation airports have to come up with funds for their operations. Mr. Newton said some airports charge a landing fee for use of their airport. Mr. Newton said without landing fees there are 2 revenue options, 1) the sale of fuel/other aviation services, and 2) development of real estate. Mr. Newton said Rowan already sells fuel/aviation services. Mr. Newton pointed out that receiving federal funds creates an obligation for the County to make the airport as self-sustaining as possible and every transaction must meet certain standards required by the FAA. If the standards are not met, the FAA can deny future funding and the County runs the risk of having to pay funds back.

In response to a query from Commissioner Hall, Mr. Newton said the property at the airport must be leased at fair market rental. Mr. Newton explained that a County stands to make money in real estate at the airport by charging a fair market value, not just for the ground, but also for the improvements on the ground.

Commissioner Barber asked if other airports had discussed expanding their runways to distances great than 6500' to give them a competitive advantage. Mr. Newton said yes and he said the runway expansion projects are "enormously expensive." Mr. Newton said the FAA must buy into such a project before it would be possible.

Commissioner Sides said he felt the County wanted the airport to be self-sustaining and in order to do so, development must be the next step primarily in relations to hangars for corporate jets. Commissioner Sides felt the airport was a great economic tool for bringing people and jobs to Rowan County.

Commissioner Sides said federal and state governments are reviewing the general aviation airports that need to expand. Commissioner Sides said once an airport reaches the level that the Cabarrus County Airport had reached, they "fall off the board" for funding consideration.

Mr. Ellington agreed with Commissioner Sides and said Bill Maslyk from the Division of Aviation had addressed the Board during its retreat and had stated that Rowan County was "on the radar screen" for funding. Mr. Ellington said other airports that have the runway extensions are now leasing their property/assets for businesses to develop.

Chairman Chamberlain said the County was losing approximately \$160,000 per year on operations at the airport. Chairman Chamberlain said the Board must decide how to handle real estate development at the airport. Chairman Chamberlain asked Mr. Newton if the County should lease property and allow others to build on it, or if the County should build the hangars. Mr. Newton responded that the County should "never let a private entity put a dime's worth of capital investment in your airport." Mr. Newton said all development at the airport should be caused by Rowan County and should be leased for aviation purposes. Mr. Newton said those who wished to use the airport for commercial purposes, should be charged rental for use of the facility and also a commission for sales for the right to conduct business at the airport.

Chairman Chamberlain asked Board members their opinion as to how they felt the airport should be developed.

Commissioner Sides felt the airport should exist for the benefit of the citizens of Rowan County. Commissioner Sides said it would be best for the County to build on the property.

Commissioner Hall asked if the County needed a "middle man" and Mr. Newton said no. Commissioner Hall agreed with Commissioner Sides that the airport belongs to the citizens of Rowan County and that there was no reason to allow a private entity to develop the property.

Chairman Chamberlain said if the Board were to go into a public/private partnership there were those that he would not have problems conducting business with. Chairman Chamberlain said the public/private partnership “was not completely off the table.”

Commissioner Barber said he agreed to what his fellow Commissioners had said; however, he stated that he was open to alternatives. Commissioner Barber said an opportunity might arise when it would make sense to have a public/private partnership.

County Attorney Jay Dees asked if there were specific suggestions regarding the marketing portion of development for the airport? Mr. Newton said the County should focus on making it possible for companies to locate in Rowan County by having the type of airport facility needed for their business. Mr. Newton pointed out that the County should always have a vacant hangar available for rent.

Commissioner Mitchell said no one would argue that the airport shouldn't be self-sufficient. Commissioner Mitchell said he would like to see options, whether it was private partnerships, straight government control or a mixture of the two.

Mr. Newton said with respect to government versus private influence, the Board did not have a choice. Mr. Newton said, “You are the government, you own the airport and you may not derogate your responsibilities to private interests.” Mr. Newton said the only way to privatize the airport was to give back all FAA funds and make the airport a non-federally funded airport. Mr. Newton said the Board did not have the option of sharing the governance of the airport with private industry; however, the Board could grant successions and give land leases, allowing private individuals to build facilities.

Commissioner Sides discussed a Technical Advisory Committee (TAC) and said that it would be an asset for the Board to receive input from the general community, including private airplane owners. Commissioner Sides said if the Board created a TAC, the committee should be disbanded and have no further input as soon as the master planning process was complete.

Chairman Chamberlain made the initial appointments to the TAC, which included himself, Commissioner Sides, Airport Manager Tony Hankerson, Director of Administration Ken Deal and County Manager William Cowan. Chairman Chamberlain said there were others that would need to be appointed as suggested by Commissioner Sides. Chairman Chamberlain said the Board should probably appoint an additional 3 or 4 members but would discuss the additional appointments at a later date.

Commissioner Sides referred to development at the airport and said there was a lot of interest beginning to show. Commissioner Sides said it was critical for the Board to decide rather quickly how it wished to proceed.

Chairman Chamberlain did not elaborate but said there were currently 2 situations the Board needed to address and the Board would call a Special Meeting if necessary.

Mr. Dees inquired as to how the Board planned to field requests or proposals. Commissioner Sides responded that no one could speak for Rowan County other than the Board of Commissioners. Commissioner Sides felt there should be a thrust from the Economic Development Commission (EDC) to market the airport, however they would need policies from the Commissioners in order to do so.

Mr. Ellington said the TAC was for the Master Plan only.

Mr. Cowan said he preferred for the Airport Manager to be the first point of contact pertaining to requests and/or proposals for airport development, hangars, etc. Mr. Cowan said those queries would ultimately come before the Board.

Chairman Chamberlain said the EDC should also contact Mr. Hankerson regarding any economic development prospects that dealt with the airport.

Chairman Chamberlain expressed appreciation for the presentation.

#### **ADJOURNMENT**

There being no further business to come before the Board, Commissioner Barber moved to adjourn at 7:10 pm. The motion was seconded by Commissioner Mitchell and passed unanimously.

Respectfully Submitted,

Carolyn Athey  
Clerk to the Board