



THUN FIELD ADVISORY COMMISSION
MEETING SUMMARY

January 19, 2021

A meeting of the Pierce County Thun Field Advisory Commission (TFAC) was held on Tuesday, January 19, 2021 at 6:30 p.m. via Zoom.

I. Call to Order & Welcome

Chair Andrew Karlsson called the meeting to order at 6:30 p.m.

TFAC VOTING MEMBERS	
Present:	Andrew Karlsson, Chair John Hurlbut Mike Thompson J. Keith Kemper
Excused:	
TFAC NON-VOTING MEMBERS	
Present:	Nichole Weber, SHAC; Dave Morell, County Councilmember; Rod Propst, Airport Manager
Excused:	
PIERCE COUNTY STAFF	
Present:	Rod Propst, Lissa Smith, Cindy Willis
VISITORS	
Present:	Approximately 16 members of the public participated.

II. Approval of Meeting Summary

Motion (Karlsson/Hurlbut) to approve the October 20, 2020 meeting summary was passed unanimously.

III. Reports

- O&M Report – Rod Propst, Airport Manager, reported on the Master Plan. The FAA has begun to look at those documents, including the ALP; we will have a virtual meeting with the FAA; they are making progress.

We're continuing to work on the issue of derelict aircraft; it has not fallen off our radar. We've auctioned off two planes and will continue to request owners provide a plan to make these aircraft airworthy or remove them from the airport.

We're replacing the engine generator for use in the event of loss of electricity for runway lighting as it has not been working.

We have a new website format; it's more functional. We've included a link for noise complaints; we list the different projects on the airfield. The site is more user friendly.

Keith Kemper asked if the MPAC has been disbanded. Rod said no, we're just waiting for the FAA—they've had a change of leadership and have several new hires, so this is the first traction on this project since he's been here. Mike Thompson asked about the age and maintenance schedule for the generator. Rod said it's 10-12 years old; the diesel motor has a problem that Tacoma Diesel can't fix, and we've been throwing good money after bad for repairs; it seizes up after a short period. Perhaps there's some salvage value. The generator isn't connected to the fuel pumps; the FAA won't pay for that. Eric Brown asked if the gates are connected to the generator; Rod said it runs only the runway lighting.

- Commission Reports – none.
- Council Update – CM Dave Morell said he's looking forward to a better 2021.

IV. Old Business

- Hangar Inspections – Rod said Lissa and he inspected almost all the hangars. He saw lots of interesting aircraft and met some interesting folks. We have a couple hangars left--typically those people don't want us to see them. We've done some re-inspections and they passed. It's a process that gets better over time; when we do it again in 2021, it'll be easier.
- Hangar Roofs – Rod said Wright Roofing came out and re-roofed one row and fixed the drains on others; our plan is to re-roof one more row this year and the last row next year. Lissa Smith said we had one hangar with leaks after the repair and Wright Roofing came to do repairs; the last storm didn't bring up any more issues. Rod said that's good news. The County is hiring a new on-call roofing contractor—we should know who by next week. Our experience with Wright Roofing was good.
- Hangar Door Replacement Project – Rod said we're still in receipt of \$750,000 borrowed from the state for hangar doors; we have re-evaluated and will do sliders instead of hydraulic doors due to the cost. An RFP will be out in the next several weeks and we'll see what response we get. We will have uniform doors on 50 County hangars. Rick Anderson suggested that Hangar #45 has a door design that might work well to replace wood or fiberglass doors; it has survived 20+ years in this weather and requires little maintenance. Rod said Helix has suggested those doors as well; they seem to have stood the test of time. We'll go out for an RFP and get bids.
- Noise Complaint Report – Rod said noise has become a real issue. Since October, we've had 14 noise complaints. We look at location and frequency and all complaints have come from two residences. We have a phone hotline and an online link for leaving complaints. It's part of the South Hill Community Plan to track noise complaints. CM Morell held a meeting on

November 9 with Council staffers and a senator to discuss noise around Thun Field. Rod prepared a staff report with historical references that the government has controlled aviation for nearly 100 years. Our constituents have difficulty understanding that local jurisdictions can't control airport noise or aircraft once they're airborne. Explaining that to folks who live under the traffic pattern is difficult. Both the Comp Plan and South Hill Community Plan (SHCP) are trying to protect people from airports and airports from people. The area of Influence map gives neighbors an idea where the traffic pattern is. The homes being built on the south end of the airport are outside the area of influence. All complaints have come from north of the field inside the area of influence where residents can expect to see and hear aircraft. In our Master Plan effort, we're discussing having a calm wind runway (Runway 17 would be the calm wind runway).

Ed Hrivnak asked about proactive education; he works at the fire department on the airfield; there are many homes going in on the south end. Realtors are reluctant to point that out, but education goes a long way. Rod said by state law, a realtor must point that out. John Hurlbut is a realtor and said the airport is not a material fact that must be disclosed; most realtors let folks know, but not all do. Rod said the problem is how to proactively educate buyers; we can talk to flight schools, flight instructors about flying friendly, but how do we reach out to potential buyers? Ed Hrivnak said many people don't understand how an airport works. Rod said the goal is to ensure that the SHCP is followed; it uses the TFAC as a vehicle to inform the public and be involved in the Master Plan process. Once COVID is past, we could hold an open house for questions about operations and what will happen if the runway goes to 4000'. Another important thing to note is that both our airports were purchased with FAA participation, so must stay as airports in perpetuity; the airport won't go away, so we need to be better neighbors, but we need to educate the public. Rick Anderson said back when Bruce Thun was manager, the calm wind runway was Runway 16. Since then, it's changed to noise sensitive in all quadrants. This has been reviewed many times; if we can find out which direction/approach/departure/what kind of aircraft, that would help. Rod said the noise complaints are likely due to flight schools with repetitive touch and go's, single engine, and repetitive in pattern making people unhappy. With growth in South Hill, it will get more difficult as time goes by. Whatever we can do to educate citizens is the best we can do. Eric Brown worked for 30 years at Boeing Field; their turboprop-powered wind tunnel had a 10 pm curfew and there were noise complaints even when it was closed. Eric asked if we've done any noise studies to see if we're over the decibel limits set by the FAA. RCW 14.08.030 spells out eminent domain and encroachments prohibited in airport environments. Are the neighborhoods in compliance? Rod said we don't measure noise, but we use computer modeling and the typical noise standard is anything about 65 is a problem. Our noise standards are well within the limits or the FAA would have commented on it. Rod said one gentleman will either get used to it again or he'll move. We've done a good job of trying to comply with the community plan and master plan. Nicole Weber said the SHAC members have asked and we've had the phone calls. Rod said this summer was the perfect storm for noise complaints: everyone was home, the weather was nice, and everyone was outside, and planes were flying; as the weather has gotten worse, it's calmed down. Only 14 calls in 90 days isn't a lot. Nicole said there were a couple people complaining at Council—the recent crashes have enlightened the community about potential dangers. She'll talk to the neighborhood HOA and get them on board. Nicole asked if the County issued a press release when the two crashes occurred. It would be helpful to have guidelines about noise and the airport in general on the website.

Rod said we could put something together about the airfield, but we don't want to speculate about what caused the crashes; we'll have to wait until the NTSB publishes its report; it takes 30-60 days for an initial report, but it'll be a year before the final report is available. Rod said we could add information about the number of annual operations, businesses based there, and that it's the location for primary emergency response for natural disasters. Rod Wetherbee asked about the location of the complaints. Rod said all 14 were north of the airfield, both east and west of the runway, close to 150th Ct. E. and the west side of Meridian. Planes were probably departing to north, climbing, and turning. Rod said air accidents are spectacular and don't happen often, so they're newsworthy. Michael Thompson said they're accidents, not crashes. Rod Wetherbee said it would be nice if we had a standard statement to read regarding airport noise; Rod Propst said to give them the hotline number and he will call them back.

- Commercial Operating Agreements – Rod said these exist in the Pierce County Code and Airport Rules & Regulations; he's not asking the Commission to approve their existence, but just to make a recommendation on the fee and definition of operators. When the FAA provides a grant, we sign a contract saying we'll abide by grant assurances for the next 20 years. Grant Assurances 22 and 24 apply to the Minimum Standards that the County won't discriminate economically, and the airport will be as self-sufficient as possible. The Minimum Standards define what are commercial aeronautical activities. He encouraged everyone to look at Minimum Standards and the Rules and Regs. There was no agreement document, so Rod created one from a Right-of-Entry form; he had virtual meeting on November 9 with some of the commercial operators to discuss it. In November 2019, the Council passed an ordinance that addresses flight instructors and aircraft mechanics paying the County *per the agreement*. His recommendation is that the TFAC recommend that the code should include the definition about commercial operators. At the TNAAC meeting last week, they recommended \$50/month as compensation for providing a place for commercial operators to conduct business. This agreement is only for businesses who don't have an existing lease that specifies commercial use with the County.

Mike Thompson asked about the verbiage in current leases that covers this commercial operating fee; what are lessees paying for that privilege? Rod said that businesses that have leases that define their uses are not based on the same data; some leases were written 20-30 years ago and are still in effect. The key is if you have a ground lease and it specifies allowed activity, what you pay the County is what was negotiated. Rod did not provide that data. He said he thinks that \$50/month is fair; \$200 was probably high. The PCC is specific that operators would pay the County for doing business on County property. Andrew asked if \$50 covers both airports? Rod said yes; if you have a business based at PLU and name the County in as additional insured, you already have an agreement for both airports. Mike said the proposal said *per airport*. Rod said most important is the insurance covering the County. Mike said that needs to be clarified in the proposed agreement. Rod Wetherbee asked how we will police flight instructors taking business away from him. Rod said it's easy to regulate a mechanic with a van; with flight instructors, it's harder to enforce; they won't likely tell us. Rod W. said some abide by it and have a cost; others don't. Rod P. said it's difficult to enforce with flight instructors and the three of us don't have time to chase instructors. Rod W. asked if our current lease allows for commercial services, when we sublease, do we have to pay an additional amount? Rod said whatever the uses the lease specifies, if it says AND THEIR SUBTENANTS, they're covered. Rod said the TFAC needs to make a recommendation

which will be included in the director's transmittal to the County Council. Motion (Karlsson/Hurlbut) passed 3-1 to approve Rod's recommendation for \$50/month and the definition of commercial operators as included in the staff report and Minimum Standards.

- Airport Rules & Regs – Rod said these recommended changes are mostly for TIW, although it works for Thun Field, too. This change to the Rules & Regs goes to Council for action.

Vehicle Operations:

Mike Thompson said the biggest concern is when the gate is inoperable; the south gate is making noises; has there been any effort to do preventive maintenance to keep us from driving on the ramp? Rod said we'll endeavor to do that. Rick Anderson said the gates have been here for 10-15 years; the Thun family turned the airport over to the County in the 1970s. Motion (Karlsson/Kemper) passed unanimously (4-0) to change the Rules per the proposed language.

Security:

Rod said every airport operator is responsible for assessing and mitigating risk. Gates and fencing are essential to security; clearly after 911, the security posture at GA airports changed; leaving gates open into operating area seems like bad management practice and makes no sense. Rod understands that there are businesses inside the fence, but there are also millions of dollars of planes and equipment in hangars. A fence provides a physical barrier at both airports and a psychological barrier when gates are closed. Based on his experience, Rod recommends that the gates be closed at all times and accessed via card or code. By securing gates, you keep an honest person honest and provide a level of security that doesn't otherwise exist. Lissa has had to repair fences cut at night. If someone really wants to steal your tools or plane, a gate or fence won't stop him. Fullerton Airport had a 4' fence; it was a welcoming airport, but that low fence led to being #1 in the nation in stolen aircraft; of 16 planes stolen in the U.S. that year, 4 were from Fullerton.

Mike Thompson said this was hashed out between airports and the County and it was determined that the south gate at TIW and both gates at PLU would be open during certain hours of day—to be revisited as conditions warranted. Rod said we closed the gates in March due to COVID; since then, not one business has said it's a problem and is affecting my business. You can provide a code to your customers or vendors. Mike said that Rod's opinion means little. The TSA says each airport should be treated as an individual business. Rod said he's been doing this for 30 years, he's AAAE accredited, and well qualified. Eric Brown asked if the pedestrian gate codes could be changed once a month. Rod said they can do that. Eric said the condo association has tried to get internet, but it's cost prohibitive for individuals. Can the County put pressure on Comcast to run a cable and individual hangar owners can get coverage and security for their hangars? Rick Anderson suggested that pedestrian gate codes shouldn't be shared though email; that's not smart. As far as an internet connection, near Seattle Turbine, someone is using a cable connection; it's not DSL. Rick didn't know whose it was. Rod said the TNAAC tabled this gate issue to the next meeting to mitigate for one owner due to a hearing issue; perhaps the TFAC wants to do the same. Rod Wetherbee is not in favor of changing codes monthly for the pedestrian gate; customers come through it

and it would be cumbersome to change often. The code could be put on back of the gate. Rod said this recommendation is for vehicle gates, not pedestrian gates. Andrew asked about security patrols. Rod said we pay for security once a night, but you know you get only \$10/hour worth of security. Motion (Karlsson/) was made to approve the gate security per Rod's proposed language. Mike Thompson said prior to gate closure in March, he told Rod that since traffic was down to close the gates, but to rediscuss and reopen them later. Mike asked if we're talking about cards or code only; Rod said code, card, or squawk box at gate. Mike said if he's expecting someone, that's ok; if not, it takes time away to answer the squawk box or we buzz someone through and never see them. If there were a closed-circuit TV to see who we're buzzing in, we wouldn't let in someone who didn't belong there. Rod said it makes sense, but cameras are expensive. The \$24,000 in profit made last year at the airports won't buy a camera system. GA airports' security systems are not eligible for FAA funding. Rod W. said he'd pay extra to be able to open the gate from his cell phone. Eric Brown said internet would help people provide their own security system. There was no second to the motion and the issue will be held over until the April TFAC meeting.

V. New Business

- Election of Officers
Chair – Andrew Karlsson – 4-0 unanimous
Vice chair – John Hurlbut – 4-0 unanimous

- TFAC Vacancies – Cindy Willis said we have these vacancies: two airport users; two community residents (Graham/Frederickson); Rod Wetherbee said he has applied, but he's not been appointed; he asked if there's a question of conflict of interest due to the fuel concession. He would like better clarification about why Doug Miller was not reappointed; Rod P. said that's a question for the County Exec. Cindy will send applications via email.

VI. Visitors and Petitions

(Public comments are limited to 3 minutes per person on non-agenda items.)

1. Rod Wetherbee asked if the airport sign is operating now. Lissa will check.
2. Warren Hendrickson said their single-phase generator at Bremerton was replaced; he offered the old one to Rod; he'll email specs and numbers. They'll talk off-line.
3. Eric Brown had vendors work on his condo hangars; the maps disagree about road number names; he has tried to change them on Google. If fire or police are trying to find a specific address, the maps don't match up. MSN shows the right street numbers at the airport.

VII. Adjournment

The meeting was adjourned at 8:17 p.m.