

City of Keene
New Hampshire

AIRPORT DEVELOPMENT & MARKETING COMMITTEE
MEETING MINUTES

Tuesday, February 25, 2020

9:00 AM

Keene Dillant Hopkins Airport

Members Present:

Curt Hansen, Chair
Mitch Greenwald, City Councilor
Joe Bendzinski
Rick Blood
Bill Hutwelker
Nathan Jacobs
Brian Johnson

Staff Present:

Elizabeth Dragon, City Manager
David Hickling, Airport Director
Rebecca Landry, IT Director

Members Not Present:

Peter Delaney
Beth Bendel, Vice Chair
Cory Watkins

George S. Hansel, Mayor

1) Call to Order

Chair Hansen called the meeting to order at 9:00 AM.

2) Adopt Meeting Minutes – January 28, 2020

Mr. Blood made a motion to approve the minutes of January 28, 2020. Mr. Bendzinski seconded the motion, which passed by unanimous vote.

3) New Airport Manager – Introductions

Chair Hansen stated that the airport has a new Director – David Hickling – and the commission welcomes him.

4) ADMB Goals and Expectations

Mr. Hickling thanked the committee and introduced himself. He stated that he would like to go around the table and hear each person's expectations for the next year, from him and from the committee.

Mayor Hansel stated that the airport is a tremendous asset for Keene, and one of the reasons Keene has some of the larger businesses it has. He continued that there is potential to expand the way everyday people utilize the facility and things that happen here. The ADMC is important to that marketing effort and efforts in the pipeline for planning and real estate development. This is the clearinghouse.

Mr. Bendzinski stated that he has been on the committee for years and his term ends in November. He continued that he agrees that the airport is an important economic feature of Keene and benefits many businesses. He hopes they can eventually achieve having some type of carrier making regular stops here – maybe even Amazon or Fed-Ex or something similar. That has been a goal for a long time and previous Airport Directors worked on it but did not achieve it.

Mr. Blood stated that he works at Cheshire TV and is an avid aviation photographer. He continued that he grew up in Keene watching the airplanes, and would love to see another air show here.

Councilor Greenwald stated that he wants to see commuter air here so the general public can enjoy the airport, or if that is not possible, then freight. He welcomes Mr. Hinkling. There is a lot of hope.

Mr. Johnson stated that he is the director of C&S's Flight Department. He continued that he has been on the airfield since he was a kid. He wants to help keep the airport in great operations.

Rebecca Landry, Assistant City Manager and IT Director, stated that her role includes filling in the gaps, and she has helped with airport management while there have been gaps in leaderships. She continued that she has learned that there is a lot of activity here that no one sees. She has also learned that the airport's partnership with the NH Department of Transportation (NHDOT) is phenomenal. So that link to the FAA is very valuable. Also, her personal connection is that her dad flew out of this airport in the 1960s when he was in the Marines.

Mr. Jacobs stated that he has been in the community for 14 years, flying out of here, and has a small airplane here. He continued that he wants to see growth for the airfield that is thoughtful instead of piecemeal. He wants them to have an actual idea of where it is going, and wants to see those ideas executed.

Mr. Hutwelker stated that he is a Selectman for the Town of Swanzey. He continued that the airport is an important aspect of Swanzey, and is an important meeting point to help the Town and the City work collaboratively to improve economic development. There is a real opportunity

for both communities to grow, and it is critical to the county that the airport become the economic engine it needs to be.

Chair Hansen stated that he is a retired Senior Vice President from C&S. He continued that he joined this group when it was the operations group and then it transitioned to what it is today. The airport is an incredible asset. This committee has been underutilized. They are here to help the Airport Director, and he encourages him to avail himself of the talent sitting here at the table.

Mr. Hinkling stated that he agrees, and he really wants to engage this committee more. There are a lot of resources here, and more potential for ideas and input, helping the airport grow. He continued that they can help the relationship between Keene and Swanzey and the other towns. The airport is run by Keene but here for the whole region. They need to capitalize on that. This group is a great asset. The things they are talking about are just what he saw in this airport when he was considering this job. It is a community that understands the importance of the airport and what it can bring to the area, and everyone wants to work towards that goal. This is an exciting position to step into, to have a bunch of people behind it.

Mr. Hinkling stated that he has been in aviation industry for almost 40 years. He started in the Air Force, and was stationed in NH for seven years. He went to flight school and did some flying, and then became a family man and switched to airport operations. He is loyal – he stayed for 20 years at the previous airport, moving his way up to Airport Manager. He worked hard and took opportunities as they came. He left because he was able to retire and collect a pension (and return to work), and also because he and his wife were ready for a change. This type of airport is just what he was looking for.

Mr. Bendzinski stated that he wants to mention the asset the airport has: the FBO, [Monadnock Aviation], who does a tremendous amount of work, arranging events, and getting people down here. They are amazing.

Mr. Hinkling replied yes, there are a lot of assets. He continued that he has been here three weeks. He had expectations when he came in, and did a lot of research. That leads to the next agenda item.

5) New Director – The first three weeks, and beyond

Mr. Hinkling stated that the airport's assets are the FBO, the restaurant, and the City's government, other department heads, and the team atmosphere. He continued that one of the biggest things he realized in his first three weeks here is how phenomenal the Airport's staff are. Given the small size of the staff, he expected that half of his job would be day-to-day operations, but it is not, because the staff here are incredibly competent, dedicated, and resourceful. They have it. This allows him to focus more on other things. His responsibility is to support the staff and make sure they have what they need.

Mr. Hinkling continued that the airport's assets also include this committee, and the Airport's relationship with the NHDOT. He wants to get out and meet all of the airport's tenants, such as C&S. He has interacted with Beth Bendel quite a bit, and sat down with Tracy from the restaurant. He did not realize that during his first three weeks he would need to submit a Capital Improvement Plan (CIP) proposal and budget; that took over a bit. He wants to reach out to all the T-hangar tenants and let them know he is very accessible. Many have stopped by to talk already.

He continued that he had a lot of plans before starting the job, and plans change when you find out reality. He now does not see a need to focus on day-to-day operations as much as he had planned on. Public relations and public education are needed, and those will be part of what he does, via traditional media, social media, press releases, and so on and so forth. He wants to coordinate social media efforts with Beth and Tracy. He can also see doing speaking engagements for local organizations, and he welcomes suggestions for that. He wants to make sure the public is hearing positive information about the airport.

Mr. Hinkling continued that he wants to see more events. He has a lot of air show experience and wants to have air shows here. He also wants ideas from the committee, regarding events that could draw people in. For example, at his previous airport, all the businesses did trick-or-treating for children at Halloween, and it was very popular and well-attended. They also had a drive-through festive lights display, also very well-attended. They can brainstorm ideas for events to draw positive attention to the airport. Another idea is to host educational meetings about drones. He continued that the general public could use information on where and how they are allowed to safely and legally use drones.

Mr. Hinkling continued that he also wants to focus on maintaining and improving the airport's infrastructure, which has been done very well in the absence of a manager here. As Ms. Landry mentioned, they have a great relationship with NHDOT, in terms of capitalization of grant opportunities, and they will continue that.

He continued that regarding the opportunity for commercial service, the City had been proactive with seeking a company to do a market study. The agreement has been completed and sent to CMT. He anticipates talking with CMT in a week or so to set up a kick-off meeting with a plan for how to move forward. CMT will do a study to see how many passengers from the catchment area are actually flying on planes and the feasibility of capturing them here. They also have to look at the financial impact – would it be self-sustaining? Subsidized by the Federal government or another source? They will look at all that and come up with a plan. The initial study phase is six months. Phase 2 would be looking at what kind of market they could go after.

Ms. Landry asked if CMT will be coming to an ADMC meeting. Mr. Hinkling replied that if they were not already planning to, he will ask them to. He continued that he expects they will want face-to-face interaction with people from local businesses. The commercial service would be focused more towards business travelers; it would be hard to capture leisure travelers.

Mr. Hinkling stated that lastly, and like everyone else talked about, he wants to focus on increasing the viability of the airport. They have to make sure businesses here are successful and do whatever they can to help sustain and grow them. He wants to bring in additional base corporate aircraft, which would be a big pull, but he has ideas for that. It is about finding businesses and letting them know about the opportunities here. It will not be easy, but they are goals to go after and he wants to do it. There are other potential businesses to bring into the airport – for example, avionics, emergency parachute systems installation, or de-icing. Those are just ideas. They would have to look into what would be viable.

Mr. Hinkling concluded that that is his vision for going forward, and working with this group is vital.

Mr. Bendzinski stated that at one point they were discussing some very expensive fencing along the runway, and not having it could have some disastrous consequences. Mr. Hinkling replied that the fence is in the CIP, and yes, it is expensive. He continued that they have talked with the NHDOT. He wants the project to start this year; it is a priority. But they have to find funding. Ms. Landry stated that the Airport continues to work with DuBois and King with the grant-funded projects, and this is part of what they are looking at, opportunities to lump sections of fencing into other projects that are happening.

Councilor Greenwald stated that it is terrific that Mr. Hinkling is stating goals. He continued that he has ticked off almost everything that has been stated in past years. He asked if he could write the goals down, somewhere other than in the minutes. Mr. Hinkling replied that they need to be realistic, and some of the goals are not easy. Councilor Greenwald replied that he understands that, but at least he is stating the goals. If you do not put up a target, you will never hit it.

Mr. Jacobs asked if Mr. Hinkling has, at his previous airport, worked with a committee like this. Mr. Hinkling replied yes. Mr. Jacobs asked what he expects to receive from the committee. Mr. Hinkling replied that the previous group he worked with was not very interactive – they would just say “okay” to what he would report to them. He sees people here who really want to get involved, and he wants that, too. He wants the group to give input and ideas, and help with problem-solving. It is great to have interaction.

Mayor Hansel stated that something else to go on Mr. Hinkling’s radar is interacting in a positive way with the City Council. He continued that that is really important. Much of what the City Council hears about the airport is negative, such as when neighbors have complaints. He encourages Mr. Hinkling to reach out individually to City Councilors, and get them to the airport for tours. There are several new City Council members who do not have much knowledge or understanding of the airport. Mr. Hinkling replied yes, that is absolutely something to focus on.

Mr. Hinkling stated that another thing he would like to see from this committee is for its members to be “airport advocates.” If they ever hear someone saying something negative about

the airport, they can jump in and say something positive. He would like to work with City Councilors on that, too; they can speak positively about the airport when constituents come to them.

Chair Hansen asked if there are City Council members who have never been here. Ms. Landry replied yes, and it would be really nice to offer a tour to two or three City Council members at a time. Mayor Hansel stated that there is also an upcoming CIP bus tour. Mr. Hinkling replied that that is a great idea, and he will send an invitation to everyone for tours.

Chair Hansen stated that before the meeting started, Mr. Bendzinski asked if there are any openings for new members on this committee, and the answer is yes. He continued that there is a member who has hardly come to meetings at all, and maybe they should ask him if he really still wants to be a member. Ms. Landry replied that that conversation has been had, and yes, that person wants to stay. She continued that they could have that conversation with the City Clerk again. Mayor Hansel stated that that person's term has expired, but technically, an expired member stays until a new member has been appointed. He continued that he is open to suggestions for who to appoint, because there are available slots. Chair Hansen stated that they have failed to reach quorum a couple times. Mayor Hansel replied that he will fully utilize the five alternate member positions and try to fill those as well. Chair Hansen asked for anyone who has names to suggest to please email them to the City Manager's Office/Mayor's Office.

Mr. Jacobs stated that he has one more thing to add – the other day when he was downtown during the winter carnival, he noticed that Ben was down there with the large snow blower. He continued that Ben was doing a great job being an advocate for the airport. He was talking with parents and kids and explaining how everything works, and the kids were having a great time.

6) Old Business

a. Alps Property Sale

Mr. Hinkling stated that they got the updated appraisal and sent it to the NHDOT. They have been reviewing it. Once they get it back to the Airport they should be able to move forward with that. He and Mark have a meeting with Carol from the NHDOT on Friday.

b. Development of Passenger Service

There being no further business, Chair Hansen adjourned the meeting at 9:35 AM.

Respectfully submitted by,
Britta Reid, Minute Taker