

City of Keene
New Hampshire

AIRPORT DEVELOPMENT AND MARKETING COMMITTEE
MEETING MINUTES

Tuesday, December 1, 2020

9:00 AM

Remote Meeting via Zoom

Members Present:

Curt Hansen, Chair
Joseph Bendzinski
Bill Hutwelker
Nathan Jacobs
Elizabeth Bendel, Vice Chair
Richard Blood (Arrived 9:14 AM)
George Hansel, Mayor

Staff Present:

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

Members Not Present:

Councilor Mitch Greenwald
Brian Johnson
Cory Watkins

Chair Hansen read a prepared statement explaining how the Emergency Order #12, pursuant to Executive Order #2020-04 issued by the Governor of New Hampshire, waives certain provisions of RSA 91-A (which regulates the operation of public body meetings) during the declared COVID-19 State of Emergency.

1) Call to Order

Chair Hansen called the meeting to order at 9:03 AM. Roll call was conducted.

2) Adopt Meeting Minutes

Mayor Hansel made a motion to approve the meeting minutes of September 22, 2020. Mr. Bendzinski seconded the motion, which passed by unanimous vote.

3) Capital Project Updates – Airport Perimeter Fence

Airport Director David Hickling stated that regarding the Capital Improvement Program (CIP), COVID has affected the timing of getting grants this year. He continued that he wanted to update everyone on how the perimeter fence project is going.

Mr. Hickling stated that hazardous wildlife is a safety issue the airport and there have been incidents, some of which have damaged aircraft. Additionally, staff continuously have to chase deer and other wildlife off the airfield. The Airport does have a Hazardous Wildlife Plan, as do most airports, and most airports have a fence to keep wildlife out as well. Although our airport does have a partial fence, we do not have a fence in the area wildlife are most likely to come from. The City recognizes this as a priority; however, it is not seen as a priority with the FAA. The project had been pushed back in the CIP but through recent conversations with the Department of Transportation (DOT) and the FAA, it has been moved up to a FY 2021-2022 project. They would look at doing a design and environmental permitting in 2021 and construction in 2022.

Mr. Hickling has had several conversations with the Conservation Commission – that body has some concerns about this project including wetland impact and the potential impact that a fence could have to the popular wildlife viewing areas along airport road. As a result of these conversations along with his own concerns of meeting the objective of preventing wildlife hazards on the airfield, changing the proposed location of the fence would likely address the Conservation Commission’s concerns and also benefit the Airport. Mr. Hickling believes that working with and the Conservation Commission to do this will be of great benefit.

Mr. Hickling shared a map and pointed out where the original plan for the fence was. He continued that route would have been the easiest installation and would have avoided most wetlands. It would also be a longer route, with more linear footage, but could still be more cost effective. There are some issues with the location however. The Conservation Commission says this area of Airport Rd. is used a lot by people viewing wildlife; there are many rare species seen here. Being able to use this road to view wildlife is a great asset to the community and if the fence is placed in this location, it will interfere with that viewing and with photography. Our concern is that we need to keep wildlife off the airfield. Placing the fence in this location would be enclosing an area of cover, where wildlife can hide, inside the fence with the runways. It would make it very hard to eradicate wildlife from that area. M. Hickling believes it would be more advantageous for the Airport to exclude as much of this cover as possible from inside the fenced in area. This would make it easier to control wildlife. Thus, the Conservation Commission and the Airport both have a common goal to be able to relocate the fence.

Mr. Hickling continued that the challenges to relocating the proposed fence are wetlands impact and also FAA Part 77 as far as protected airspace area. He welcomed Mark Goodrich, engineer from DeBois & King to the meeting and asked him to talk about Part 77 and the challenges that brings.

Mr. Goodrich showed three protected areas on the map that the FAA wants to keep free of obstacles. He continued that they have had conversations with John Kirkendall at the FAA about how close they can get to the runway with the fence. The new proposed fence line runs right along the Object-Free Area and that is the closest the FAA will let them get. If they were to go by the Part 77 surface they would have to protect the primary surface, which is another 100 feet out. The purpose of trying to locate the fence as close to the runway as possible is to minimize

wetland impact. Even at its new proposed location there would be approximately 3,700 feet in one area that the fence would be located within wetlands. The issue of environmental permitting is also being discussed with the FAA. Because the project is federally funded, it will have to comply with the National Environmental Protection Act (NEPA). There is some question as to whether it could be considered categorically excluded. State and local permitting would still have to be done, regardless of the determination from the federal perspective.

Rick Blood arrived at 9:14.

Mr. Goodrich continued that relocating the fence from along the road to along the runway would involve approximately 17,000 total feet at about \$100 per foot. That price may seem high, and that is because the FAA requires an “animal skirt,” which is additional fencing dug into the ground to prevent burrowing. He does not think they would have to do that in the wetlands. There is the potential that this would cost well over one million dollars for the total fence.

Mr. Hickling stated that that is one of the challenges with the Object-Free Area. He continued that in conversations with the State he heard that there is precedence where airports have been given permission to put fences in the Part 77 protected area up to the Object-Free Area. That is the closest they could probably get. This would still have quite a bit of impact to the wetlands, which is primarily associated with the installation. Once the fence is installed, it is not much of an impact.

Mr. Hickling stated that funding is another challenge he recently found. The FAA gives entitlements, a certain amount of money the Airport is certain to get each year, and beyond that it is discretionary. The Airport is competing for discretionary funding. The FAA uses a scoring system on the various projects to decide which projects are funded through discretionary funds. This project does not score very high in that system. It would be difficult to get this funded in one year with discretionary money. The FAA would probably want the Airport to phase it over multiple years using entitlement money, but there are problems with that. If it takes three years to do this perimeter fence project, it would push all the other projects in the CIP back three years. Another problem is that if they just build a little bit of fence each year, they are not only closing down the area where wildlife can get in, they are also closing down the area that wildlife can use to get out. It would be preferable to do it all in one shot, once construction is started. The design and permitting can be done ahead of time.

Mr. Hickling stated that another thought he had would be to do a Hazardous Wildlife Assessment, which is common for airports. The USDA or other contractors do a study to determine whether you have a wildlife hazard problem and give recommendations on what to do. The FAA might even require this before they consider any funding. His thought is that if they get this assessment and it says there is a wildlife hazard problem here, and they recommend a fence, it might improve the score and make it easier to get the discretionary funding from the FAA. Unfortunately, according to Carol from the DOT that that is not the case. Mr. Goodrich stated that may or may not be accurate and says he has seen precedent before where the

assessment has helped. Getting the hazardous wildlife study may be a route to take, identifying that there is an issue and using that to leverage more discretionary money from the FAA. If that does not work, they can possibly look at other funding sources. Maybe the State has funding, or maybe they could find some kind of environmental funding. That is the objective – either improve the project priority with the FAA or find alternate funding so they can do this all in one shot. He asked if there were questions.

Mr. Goodrich stated that there are alternate funding sources; the State has the 80/20 match. He continued that he is not sure how much money is in that this year but it has been around a quarter of a million dollars in the past. There may be other federal funding sources for safety as well.

Rebecca Landry, Assistant City Manager, stated that she knows they do an annual inspection, at a minimum. She continued that at the last inspection there were only two concerns: runway markings and wildlife. Will that report help them get funding, whether State, Federal, or otherwise?

Mr. Goodrich replied that it helps identify the project priority, from an airport perspective. He continued that they want the airport to be safe and those are safety issues. However, for scoring projects, scores are based on the size of the airport and the type of project. Fencing for a non-commercial service airport has a very low rating - about 40, and they need to be in the 70 range to get money. Because the project exceeds \$150,000 they will need discretionary money, which is where the project score comes into play. If somehow they were able to keep the cost at \$150,000 that is guaranteed but they are looking at over a million dollars. Mr. Hickling replied that he agrees. He continued that if this was a commercial airport the project score would jump up. They would definitely include all that information [that Ms. Landry is referring to] in the application, along with the history, and all the activity the Airport does to reduce wildlife hazards. That all plays a part.

City Manager Elizabeth Dragon stated that the CIP would need to be changed if they do make some adjustments, because right now the fencing project is in FY 2025. She continued that it is several years out before it is even in the City's budget. But they have an opportunity because they got the additional funds this year for their current project which frees up some City money to match it. If they move this project forward and then do it phased, she realizes it is not the best approach, but if they can get it funded through the FAA they would be doing quite well and only have to bump one project, she thinks. She understands the concern about fencing in wildlife but that phased approach might be the only way to do this. She is concerned that if they wait too long and try to get all of these other funding sources it will get even more expensive. If the FAA will work with them and commit with them to a multi-year project she does not think that that is a bad avenue to go.

Mr. Hickling replied that it might be the only way they can go. Mr. Goodrich stated that sometimes they can pair projects. He continued that maybe they could pair the fence project with a higher-rated project and that is a way to get a higher score. It does not mean getting the

entire fence, but maybe they could get half of it, and have a better chance of getting funded. Mr. Hickling replied that that is a good idea and they could look at projects to pair it with.

Ms. Landry replied that they had talked about doing that with the taxiway runway reconstruction project. She asked if that is no longer an opportunity. Mr. Goodrich replied that projects need to be scoped to the nth degree. He continued that when they scoped the project they did not say they were going to put in X,000 feet of fence, and the FAA would not let them add it. Part of the challenge is that there is limited funding coming from the government. The FAA is really putting pressure on everyone to just do the highest-rated projects. Mr. Hickling replied yes, funding is a challenge, but he thinks they have some avenues to explore. If they have to do it as a multi-year project they will.

The City Manager stated that the solar project is moving forward. She asked if this revised design takes that into account. Mr. Goodrich replied that they have been working with the contractor, and the solar project has been moved and now it will go straight north and will not be anywhere near the proposed fence.

Mr. Hickling asked Mr. Goodrich to give an update on the Fuel Farm Project. Mr. Goodrich stated that they have two bids, one for the fuel tanks, and one for the actual site construction. He continued that he hopes to get both of those out this week; he needs to coordinate with Jeff Titus in Purchasing. He is happy to report that no contaminants were found in the ground. Thus, they have the option of removing the tanks or leaving them in place, which is a slightly different cost. The estimate is around \$600,000 for the total construction of that. He knows that is slightly over the Airport's budget and they have done everything they can to reduce the costs. They will put a bid alternate in there for leaving the tanks in place, with the idea that in a future project they can remove the tanks with federal funding. They anticipate construction starting in the spring. They put in the requirement that the existing fuel farm needs to remain operational during construction. There may be some minimal shutdown when they have to swap over between the two systems. It will continue to use the existing pay kiosk and shelter.

Ms. Bendel asked what "minimal" means in this sense. A day, a week, a month? Mr. Goodrich replied that they anticipate a couple days at most – they have to swap over and pump what is leftover in the tanks and that should be pretty quick. Ms. Bendel asked if he means whatever fuel is in the tanks will be transferred to the new tanks. Mr. Goodrich replied yes, the contractor will transfer the fuel. He continued that they got quotes from a few people early on.

Ms. Bendel asked if there are any issues they need to be aware of or discuss, regarding the possibility of bringing contaminants from old tanks to new tanks in the transferring process. Mr. Goodrich replied he does not think it will be an issue but will check. Ms. Bendel asked if she will need to minimize the fuel in the tanks around that time, or if it is not an issue. Mr. Goodrich replied that he does not think that is an issue.

Mr. Hickling stated that he will involve Ms. Bendel in the job meetings. Mr. Goodrich replied that they plan to have those construction meetings weekly and Ms. Bendel, as the user of the fuel farm, will be involved in those.

Mr. Jacobs asked when the project is anticipated to start. Mr. Goodrich replied that they want to advertise the project this week and anticipate to start construction in the spring when weather allows. They will be very busy in the spring.

Mr. Hickling stated that regarding the Taxiway Extension and Reconstruction project, the grants have still not come from the State, which is unprecedented, but it is 2020 and a lot of things are different this year. He continued that he is not sure what the turnaround usually is. He has not worked with the block grant program before. The FAA released the grants to the State in September and the grants are still with the Governor. Once the Governor signs the block grant the DOT will start releasing the grants to airports. At this point nothing will happen this year. He expects they will receive these grants and execute agreements with the contractors and be ready to start work once the weather is good in the spring. The positive to that it is that they will not have the experience of receiving the grants late in a construction season and having to make the decision of whether to start the work then or not and how much they could get done; now they know they can start this right at the beginning of the construction season and have the year to get everything buttoned up and not be fighting weather at the end of the project.

Mr. Hickling asked if anyone had questions about any of these capital projects.

Mr. Jacobs stated that regarding the fence and trying to mitigate the cost and the issues, he would like to see the posts and the skirt fence in so that animals can still move back and forth and then the final work to be done would be actually installing the fence. He continued that then you are mitigating the wildlife issue and spreading it out over a couple years. He asked if that is a possibility.

Mr. Hickling replied that he likes that idea and thinks it is a great way to approach the project. He asked Mr. Goodrich what he thinks. Mr. Goodrich replied yes, his understanding is that they would install the skirt and the posts and leave the fabric off until the final project where they simply install all the fabric. Mr. Hickling replied that it would be a way to phase the project without creating the trap effect, and it is definitely something to look at.

4) Property Sales – Update

Mr. Hickling reported that the request for release for both parcels have been submitted to the FAA. He continued that the first one, for the larger parcel, has been with the FAA for six weeks so they should hear something back at any time. The FAA had to review it and then it has to be posted on the national register for 30 days to see if anyone protests it and then the FAA will give them the release. Both of these sales are anticipated to be completed by the end of the year. The revenue from these sales will go toward the local share for future CIP projects. Regarding the

smaller parcel, the applicant is also going through the Town of Swanzey's Zoning and Planning processes and is planning on installing additional amusements there. That sale, even if it gets through the FAA process, is pending those approvals.

Mr. Hickling asked Mr. Hutwelker if there were any issues at the Town of Swanzey's Zoning meeting last night. Mr. Hutwelker replied that the Zoning Board approved it but he does not know if it has yet gone to the Planning Board. The Zoning Board required that the applicant close the entrance that is nearest the intersection and they encouraged the Planning Board to look at parking because of the additional uses, but other than that, it was a very favorable Zoning Board meeting and he expects it to go well with the Planning Board as well. Mr. Hickling replied that the applicant is excited to start a restaurant and amusements there.

5) Marketing Update

Mr. Hickling stated that at the last meeting Johanna Zambella from Monadnock Broadcasting gave a great presentation to the ADMC. He continued that he met with Ms. Landry and the City Manager and they are entering into an agreement with Monadnock Broadcasting to run radio ads to promote the airport and airport businesses - Monadnock Aviation, The Flight Deck, and Monadnock Choppers. They are currently working with Ms. Zambella to create the messages of the ads. It is exciting to have this moving forward.

The City Manager stated that the City is experimenting with this and trying to build more familiarity with the airport and what it has to offer. Radio is a good way to help the community understand the value of the airport. This is not something that was in the Airport budget – she had to take money out of her budget in order to do this. They are hoping that the businesses at the airport will find the value and see the benefit of it and in future years they may be willing to partner with the Airport to continue this advertising program.

Mr. Hickling thanked the City Manager for finding the money in her budget, the Airport really appreciates it. He continued that this year was not a good year to do any events at the airport but they are really hoping to bring that back next year. Creating this relationship with Monadnock Broadcasting is helpful and they are excited to help the Airport promote events.

The City Manager stated that they are also looking at promoting downtown businesses in January, February, and March, leading up to the springtime, which is the slow time for the downtown. She and Ms. Landry have been talking about creating another smaller agreement with the radio to do some advertising for downtown as well. With COVID they have to use all the available tools.

Mr. Hickling asked if anyone had any more questions or topics for him. Mr. Jacobs asked if he knows if the new location for the Fire Department in Swanzey is moving forward, and if so, have there been talks with the City of Keene and the Airport so that it will also be an airport fire department? Mr. Hickling replied that he has talked some with the Fire Chief, and Keene would

be willing to make access from the fire department's location to the airfield, but Keene would have no control over staffing or anything like that. Mr. Hutwelker stated that they have not decided whether this is going to the voters in March. This has been on the ballot three times already. They are trying to determine what the voters will support. He spoke a bit more about the process to date.

Mr. Jacobs asked about the Runway 2-0 PAPI. He asked what Mr. Hickling's thoughts are about moving the threshold or getting that runway more usable and increasing safety for that approach. Mr. Hickling replied that they have another obstruction survey coming up and the goal is to identify what trees are left that they need to remove and see if they can get that so they can use the full length to put that back into service. He does not want to displace the threshold.

Mr. Hickling asked Chair Hansen about the schedule. Chair Hansen stated that the next meeting would be December 22 if they are following their regular schedule. He asked for committee members' thoughts on whether to change the date, keep it as is, or skip the December meeting. Discussion ensued. The group decided to keep it as is.

Chair Hansen asked if anyone had anything else to talk about.

The City Manager stated that there is a vacancy on this committee and additional vacancies coming up, as there are two people who will have reached their maximum terms at the end of this year. She asked everyone to put on their thinking hats and send suggestions for potential new members to Mr. Hickling and the Mayor. Chair Hansen asked if the committee's change from an operating committee to a marketing committee reset the term limits at all. The City Manager replied that the committee's name changed but not the schedule. She continued that they can take a look at that again – if they were to propose making a change there they would have to bring it through the ordinance change process, which is a process that is doable but takes some time.

There being no further business, Chair Hansen adjourned the meeting at 9:48 AM.

Respectfully submitted by,
Britta Reida, Minute Taker

Edited by,
David Hickling, Airport Director