

City of Keene
New Hampshire

AIRPORT DEVELOPMENT AND MARKETING COMMITTEE
MEETING MINUTES

Tuesday, January 25, 2022

9:00 AM

Terminal Building
Dillant Hopkins Airport

Members Present:

Curt Hansen, Vice Chair
Nathan Jacobs
George S. Hansel, Mayor
Richard Blood
Alona Florenz
Luca Paris
Peter Temple

Staff Present:

David Hickling, Airport Manager/Chair
Rebecca Landry, Assistant City Manager

Members Not Present:

Elizabeth Dragon, City Manager
Councilor Mitch Greenwald
Brian Johnson
Elizabeth Bendel
Bill Hutwelker

1) Call to Order

Chair Hansen called the meeting to order at 9:03 AM.

2) Adopt November Meeting Minutes

Mayor Hansel made a motion to accept the minutes of November 30, 2021 as presented. Mr. Temple seconded the motion, which passed unanimously.

3) Committee Organizational Business

Mr. Hickling stated the committee Chair and Vice Chair need to be elected, noting that he reached out to everyone eligible and no one is able to take on the responsibilities at this time. He informed the committee that he himself can be a non-voting Chair for the time being. Mayor Hansel stated the situation is not ideal but it is acceptable to keep the committee moving forward. With Mr. Hickling as the Chair, it was discussed that they would not likely have meetings if he could not attend, thus there isn't a need for a Vice Chair.

Mr. Hickling asked the committee for their input on what they would like to achieve in 2022 so that they can establish goals and set up action items for members to take on.

Ms. Florenz stated she's interested in the airport obtaining some commercial service and would like to help explore that option. She mentioned that the Rutland Airport has a Cape Air/Jet Blue partnership, noting that Rutland is much smaller than Keene. She also added that at C&S they travel quite a bit and use the Manchester, Boston and Bradley airports frequently, which is very time consuming. She stated that C&S could benefit from and be supportive of commercial service at the Keene airport.

Mr. Hickling stated he has been communicating with Ms. Florenz, who provided him with data that would help depict Keene as a valuable market for potential air service provider. He noted that that kind of data is exactly what he needs and is hoping other committee members can take a similar initiative of presenting ideas and actively taking steps to help achieve them.

Mr. Paris asked if the committee could help put something together for the Chamber to reach out to larger companies, and noted that he could assist. Mr. Hickling stated they could absolutely work together to create a message with regards to potential air service providers. Ms. Landry asked for clarification on whether they were collecting business travel data or personal as well. Ms. Florenz answered that it was just business travel. Mr. Paris stated booking business travel is likely the most important to begin with, because it will be the most consistent, and then the other aspects like personal travel will start to come off of that. Mr. Hickling stated it will cost more to fly out of Keene and leisure travelers typically are more price sensitive, so it's difficult to capture them from a small market.

Mr. Temple asked if exploring air taxi services could be included, explaining that if two or three people need to travel on a certain day and time they can book that flight together. Mr. Hickling stated that is definitely an option they can discuss further.

Mr. Blood stated he is looking to raise more local community knowledge and events to draw the non-aviation community to the airport. Mr. Blood suggested food truck rallies and air shows. Mr. Blood suggested ideas such as having police come down and setting up radar guns to check speeds, and also having a running group benefit. Mr. Paris added that he feels events are something they can do a lot of and be successful with at the airport. Mr. Hickling summarized the aforementioned goals as public relations events and engagement. Mayor Hansel added that it is a perfect time to do an event at the airport because it's all outdoors.

Mr. Hickling noted that Mr. Blood is going to be the committee representative for the EAA Take Off event and thanked him.

Ms. Landry brought up New Hampshire being the first state to legalize flying cars and wondered if the airport could do any events with that movement. Mr. Hickling stated there have been some airports partnering with the movement but noted that it's not moving quickly. He went on to state

that they do need to keep an eye out on the flying cars but there are other evolving aeronautical technologies, like electric aircraft, that will come along quicker.

Mayor Hansel expressed his support for the pursuit of two goals: commercial services exploration and focusing on one main event at the airport. He added that if they support the EAA event, maybe coupled with something else like a food truck rally, and draw a couple thousand people to the airport, that would be considered a win for them.

Mr. Temple stated that they used to have events with historic airplanes and veterans who would come out and share stories, which drew many people to the airport. He suggested they could combine something like that with the EAA event. He stated aerobatics could also be an idea and that they could do a couple of smaller scale events throughout the year.

Mayor Hansel noted that an event is some real work and they will likely need a group of around 6 people to meet on a biweekly basis for several months. Mr. Hickling agreed, stating he has done airshows in the past and the volume of work is significant. Although he knows what needs to be done and how to coordinate the event, they will need to find people who are willing and able to help, and should start planning 6-9 months prior to the event taking place. He also told the committee to keep in mind that an event of this size would require a budget of around \$200,000 to \$300,000 dollars.

Ms. Landry stated that with Mr. Paris and the Chamber at the table they now have the business community in support, which is a great asset. She added that the City of Keene is currently doing a branding and marketing campaign and are syncing up with the Chamber, noting that there will be representation from the airport once they have their committee set.

Mayor Hansel stated he is willing to participate in the event planning and added that it makes sense to start with something smaller to hit the goal of holding it this year.

Mr. Paris suggested they combine the food truck and air show together as one event. Mr. Hickling stated combining the events might get tricky because they can accomplish what they want to accomplish with one or the other, and need to consider capacity. He went on to explain that one of their biggest obstacles is traffic, since there is only one road in and out of the airport it makes their options limited. Mr. Paris brought up the possibility of parking at Cheshire Fairgrounds and busing people in. Mr. Hickling stated it was a good idea but may get costly.

Mr. Hickling mentioned that Mayor Hansel could be a great person to solicit sponsors for the event, especially if they could get one large sponsor. Mr. Paris wondered if they should try and get sponsors outside of Keene. Mr. Hickling stated for a smaller scale air show that would be difficult because outside sponsors typically want the airport to have traffic of around 50,000 people per day. He suggested they could do more in-kind sponsorship with fuel providers and local hotels, and noted that they typically target local businesses because they will get the recognition. Mr. Blood suggested car dealerships for sponsorship opportunities as well.

Chair Hansen suggested they walk before they run and start with the food truck event first. Mr. Hickling stated he will put together a game plan and send out a list of event ideas and general action items to everyone.

Mr. Temple stated that every spring the college runs a program where they do design and perform feasibility studies for the community and have worked with the City of Keene for years. He went on to state that they are working with Mr. Bohannon and the Keene Parks and Recreation Department to connect running trails up towards the airport and create nature trails where teachers can bring out students. Additionally, they are looking at supporting facilities such as where the fire department training facility used to be, which would provide additional parking and could potentially have a climbing wall, class lab, locker rooms and gym. Another idea is a supporting facility attached to one end of the t-hangars with running water, heat, bathrooms, etc. Mr. Temple stated if the committee is interested in pursuing some version of what they come up with this spring, they'd be happy to work on that.

Mr. Temple next stated he is interested and willing to help out with programs attached to the history of aviation, noting that a lot of New Hampshire's aviation history was centered in Keene, with several airports and famous pilots. He mentioned getting in touch with Mr. Rumrill and the Historical Society to see if he can obtain a copy or reprint of the book Wings over Keene.

Mr. Hickling summarized that Mr. Temple is interested in exploring and helping out with design projects and aviation history.

Ms. Landry wondered if there's a way to pursue the trail connections without interfering with the perimeter fencing and wildlife. Mr. Hickling stated that there is a way to make it all work.

Chair Hansen stated they covered everything he was thinking of as far as events, commercial flights and educational opportunities that don't conflict with Monadnock Aviation.

Mr. Hickling stated he will reach out to those who were not in attendance at the meeting and have them respond with their ideas. Chair Hansen added that he recognizes people are busy but participation in this meeting is very critical and it has been disheartening to see how many times they have had low participation and no quorum. He urged members moving forward to please do their best to attend meetings regularly.

4) DOT Small Community Air Service Development (SCASD) program grant

Mr. Hickling stated the next cycle for the Small Community Air Service Development (SCASD) grant was released a week or so ago. He has been in communication with an air service development consultant to discuss the grant process and potentially get help putting the application together. The consultant's recommendation stated that, with the way the industry is now and the difficulty of getting airlines interested in new markets or new services, obtaining

one of these grants would require an airline to write a letter of support noting that they will seriously take interest in going to the market.

Mr. Hickling went on to state that their primary target would be small commuter airlines such as Cape Air, Boutique and Southern Airways. Cape Air would have the best opportunity for success because they have alliances with other airlines. For example, if you buy a ticket out of Keene flying Cape Air through the Boston hub, you are ticketed through to your destination for any connection out of Boston. He explained that other small commuter airlines don't have such agreements. Therefore, going with the aforementioned scenario, if you buy a ticket from Keene to connect with a destination out of Boston, once you get to Boston you will have to re ticket and re-check your bags for your next destination. Mr. Hickling stated they need to do some research to see if the business traveler would support the latter because it is a more complicated flying experience. He noted that it's important that they know the services will be utilized before they go after the grant, which is why they would prefer a letter from Cape Air. He mentioned that he is confident that the airport could support Cape Air services.

Mr. Hickling informed the committee that the consultant reached out to Cape Air on their behalf to explain Keene and ask if Cape Air would be willing to provide a letter of support. Their answer was no for the time being; however, Mr. Hickling noted that this is not unexpected and helps them set up how they will move forward. He stated they can apply for the grant without recommendation from an airline but chances are lower. The consultant suggested the better option is to start building a relationship with commuter airlines like Cape Air over the next year so they know what Keene is and what they are doing, and then begin putting together a sales pitch.

Mr. Hickling summarized three main tasks they need to accomplish. One is to identify the business traveler market and find out how many there are, where they are going and whether they will use another air service that doesn't have airline agreements. Next, they want to put together incentives with a local match to go with the grant. Lastly, is to come up with other incentives such as marketing. For example, approaching an airline to say the airport is willing to invest \$100,000 into marketing their service to the area in the first year would be an incentive for the airline to join. Mr. Hickling added that the consultant can help them with the process but they will also need to gather some stakeholders to meet bi-monthly and discuss action items and goals.

Chair Hansen asked if anyone knew of other businesses besides C&S that would participate. Some suggestions were Smith Medical, Timken and Markem Imaje.

Mr. Hickling suggested that they have a Chamber event and he could speak about air services to those interested. Ms. Landry stated under the topic of transportation they could really explore air service, and could have the event at the airport terminal.

Mr. Paris stated he can create a chamber night out at the airport and try and direct it towards commercial air service interest. He added that he will put some thoughts together and see what the Chamber can come up with. Short discussion ensued about a potential Chamber event and April was suggested as a good date, with outreach taking place beforehand.

Ms. Florenz asked if the consultant is for filling out the grant application only, or if it's someone who has been successful drawing an airline like Cape Air to a smaller airport. Mr. Hickling stated he will get her the consultant's résumé, and noted that a lot of their consultants worked as airline route planners and are there to help with the whole process. He added that another value consultants bring is their relationships with airlines like Cape Air. Ms. Florenz wondered if they could benefit from connecting with an airport director who has already captured an airline to a smaller airport, to see if there are any best practices. Mr. Hickling stated he is confident they are utilizing the proper resources and have sufficient knowledge from experience.

Mr. Temple brought up the issue of fog at the airport and wondered if that will continue to be an issue. Mr. Hickling stated the airlines will be aware of the issue but just about every airport has their challenges with weather, so he's not too concerned about it. Mr. Temple stated that would be a benefit to a taxi service because they could still operate even with the fog. Mr. Hickling explained to the committee that a private pilot and charter operators have different FAA restrictions on what you can and cannot do as far as weather minimums and restrictions. He went on to state that smaller commuter airlines are a perfect fit for them because there 9 seats are attainable to fill. They also wouldn't require onsite security or aircraft rescue. This commercial service would be fairly easy for the airport to accommodate and make successful.

Mr. Hickling reminded the committee that they need to be patient, noting that obtaining air service does not happen overnight, it's a marathon and not a sprint.

Mayor Hansel asked if it would be a Rutland to Keene to Boston route and Chair Hickling stated that's possible but more likely to end up being only Keene to Boston. He noted that Keene to Boston is a short trip which is another advantage and it is not expensive for the airline to operate. This will help them when they put together incentive for revenue guarantees because three quarters of a million dollars would cover a lot of flights that aren't making money.

Ms. Lorenz asked for clarification on agreement lengths. Chair Hickling stated an agreement is typically 2 years, some may go 3.

There was a question about revenue guarantee and Mr. Hickling stated there would be a local match, his recommendation is \$250,000, and they'd ask for \$500,000 from the SCASD grant. Those funds together would be put aside and if an airline is operating and not making a profit, they would get money from the aforementioned fund to guarantee their profit. If the airline is making a profit, the aforementioned money would go back to the respective originators. He explained that this is important because airlines want them to prove they have an interest in making the market viable.

Mayor Hansel asked if they have a cost estimate of the route from Keene to Boston. Mr. Hickling stated he can try and get a better idea of what that cost would be and stated they should keep in mind that it will fluctuate. Mayor Hansel stated the price will be the difference because right now people are taking their car down to the Boston airport and if Keene can compete with that that would be great.

Mr. Hickling stated that they would want to have at least 2 flights per day to cover business travelers so they can hit connections, because business travelers will choose other airports if they have more time slots. He added that they will need to educate business travelers to create the message that if they want the service they need to utilize it. Their marketing campaign will focus on educating the community and promoting flying out of Keene as a first choice. He continued to state that if they are filling 2 flights per day then they can move forward from there, but they need flights to be cheap enough for flyers and profitable enough for airlines. He noted the whole process can be quite complex.

Mayor Hansel asked if they'd have 6am and 5pm flights, and Mr. Hickling stated that would be ideal.

Mr. Hickling stated the next meeting will be about exploring some of the initiatives they came up with today.

Mr. Paris stated a topic for next time is historical analysis and why air service was lost. Mr. Hickling stated that industry changes will impact airport services as well, so it's important to keep in mind that it's not always that the airlines can't support the service, but rather that the industry doesn't provide the service.

Mayor Hansel thanked Mr. Hansen for his service as Chair over the years. Chair Hansen opened the floor for discussion.

Dave Dinneen from Gale Associates suggested they could ask civic groups or non-profits to come down to the airport and do their events, which would take workload off of Mr. Hickling and the staff. He also added that, with regards to the Chamber after hours, there are other transportation needs that are happening around community. He suggested that they could have a transportation awareness event and bring in rails, busses, and other public transportation and have everyone talk about what they are doing and how it fits into community.

Steve Bourque from McFarland-Johnson stated he has been involved with several different airports in New Hampshire and the events they have had success with are simple with static displays, like touch-a-truck. He added that parents are always looking for something to do with kids and something that is free. Mr. Bourque also noted that the airport has a successful restaurant and cautioned them to make sure the restaurant is involved in events so as to not take away from them.

Mr. Hickling stated Mama McDonough's actually brought up the food truck event idea because they have a food truck. Mr. Paris stated the Cheshire Fairground was also talking about doing a food truck festival so they may want to make sure they are not doing it during the same time frame. Mr. Hickling added that food trucks are usually booked out so it's difficult to get them on short notice.

5) Adjournment

There being no further business, Chair Hansen adjourned the meeting at 10:05 AM.

Respectfully submitted by,
Nicole Cullinane, Minute Taker

Reviewed and edited by,
David Hickling, Airport Director