

City of Keene
New Hampshire

AIRPORT DEVELOPMENT AND MARKETING COMMITTEE
MEETING MINUTES

Tuesday, February 28, 2023

9:00 AM

**Terminal Building,
Dillant Hopkins Airport**

Members Present:

Elizabeth Bendel, Vice Chair
George S. Hansel, Mayor
Nathan Jacobs
Richard Blood
Bill Hutwelker
Peter Temple
Luca Paris

Staff Present:

David Hickling, Airport Manager/Chair

Members Not Present:

Elizabeth Dragon, City Manager
Councilor Mitch Greenwald
Curt Hansen
Brian Johnson
Alona Florenz
Kristopher Radder

1) Call to Order

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

Rebecca Landry, Assistant City Manager and Marketing and Communications Director, introduced herself. The members present introduced themselves.

2) Adopt December Meeting Minutes

Mayor Hansel made a motion to adopt the minutes of the December 13, 2022 meeting. Mr. Blood seconded the motion. The motion passed unanimously.

3) Airport Development Marketing Plan

Chair Hickling noted he sent out an email that the completed land use study has been posted on the airport's website and about the website he is working on with planning. At this point, he needs input from committee members about marketing. He asked whether they should develop a written marketing plan or just come up with some steps on how to move forward.

He offered some ideas about target markets. Yes, they should develop personal and corporate hangars, but they should target aviation businesses to bring significant increased activity and potentially jobs to the area. He stated they had a lot to offer.

Number one, they could target AMO (approved maintenance organization) facilities certified by a manufacturer, like Bombardier, to do maintenance on their jets, so aircraft would come from all over to get maintenance done. It might be an AMO that has a facility somewhere else but is looking for a facility in New England, or it might be a startup.

Another target would be fractional ownerships, aircraft management companies, or charter operations facilities. Basically, there would be a fleet of corporate jets, national, international, or regional. He speculated that a regional company might want to expand to New England because it's getting demand here.

Another target would be an R&D facility. There is a lot of high tech stuff out there. "Urban Air Mobility" is a big thing in aviation now, eVTOL, which is basically electric aircraft taking off and landing vertically. There is a lot of research and development into that. Electric aircraft is the thing of the future. UAS (unmanned aircraft systems), also known as drones, is another industry they can target. Even sustainable aviation fuels could be targeted.

Aviation businesses should be the focus, even if they don't involve flying, which would bring in even more business. For example, they could bring in an avionics shop. People would fly in and out for services.

Mr. Blood asked about targeting small tech schools with the potential to start an Aircraft Maintenance program. This would open opportunities to collaborate with Keene State College or the Keene High School career center. Chair Hickling indicated he has had experience working with a community college doing with the same goal. It's labor intensive, but there's a market for it. The College would run the program, and the airport would provide the facility for lab work. Vice Chair Bendel stated Nashua Community College (NCC) has a program already. She is on the advisory board. It might be a better fit than Keene State College, or they could collaborate, as NCC is looking to expand. Mr. Temple mentioned another local school, River Valley, might also be a contender.

Chair Hickling noted that FAA regulations require these schools to be certified, which requires a significant investment. The school basically has to have the shop set up, with aircraft component mockups, preferably with an aircraft to do sheet metal work on. That's what stopped the school he was working with before. It requires a lot of investment before even getting certified and getting revenue. There are hurdles, and that may be why there's high demand for these schools. Vice Chair Bendel reiterated that NCC is all set up and looking to grow. She also noted there is a mechanic shortage, so a mechanic school would be fantastic. Mr. Blood noted it could be a career path for local kids.

Returning to the topic of aviation maintenance facilities, Mayor Hansel speculated the couple of major aircraft manufacturers out there must have a list or map of certified mechanics. Mr. Jacobs indicated for each specific aircraft, there is a list of locations for mechanics, parts, etc. Mayor Hansel thought it would be a fairly easy exercise to call around to the big ones to see what interest there is for a maintenance facility at the airport. Mr. Jacobs discussed finding a maintenance company that needs more space. He mentioned ProStar, which is big in Manchester, could get tight on space there, and they could offer space in Keene for expansion.

Chair Hickling noted there might be an opportunity with corporate aircraft. For a Boston company, there is no space in Boston to build a facility for an aircraft, and it's very expensive. Somewhere like Keene might be a good option, even if it requires repositioning.

Chair Hickling asked about getting contact information for targets markets. Should they do bulk mailings or targeted calling? A lot of leg work is required. What's the best method? He noted there was a budget for marketing. Should they do social media? Should they go to trade shows? He noted there were regional NBAA conferences with all the players, but making contact takes a certain salesman-like personality.

Ms. Landry noted addressing these issues was her job. She stated she was glad the committee was thinking about targets markets and goals. Goals should be documented. She indicated all the methods discussed should be used. She said outreach should be targeted. She mentioned needing a process to handle leads. For example, would everything just go to Chair Hickling? Chair Hickling noted he is an aviation guy, not a business development guy. His experience with sales and marketing is somewhat limited.

Mr. Jacobs asked how hard it was to get the opportunities listed on LoopNet or another a commercial MLS-type service. That is where he goes first when he is looking for commercial property. He wondered if you have to be an agent to list. Mr. Hutwelker noted there are a few listing services. He noted it should be fairly easy to just call and find out.

Mayor Hansel noted they need a high-level flyer to show the opportunity anyway. They could just post that on various online listing services. And they could mail them out. Ms. Landry cautioned against casting too wide a net. Chair Hickling said he thought outreach to maintenance schools would be very different from outreach to other groups.

Vice Chair Bendel asked for clarification about reaching out to manufacturers about getting a service facility at the airport. Chair Hickling clarified he was using Bombardier as an example. He was thinking about bringing in any jet repair, avionics, or a prop shop. Vice Chair Bendel noted that approaching each of those would be different. She cautioned against casting too wide a net. She thought it was important to know what the goal is and how to get there. Otherwise, there would be a lot of talk and nothing would happen.

Ms. Landry focused on the questions of how do we get there, how do we focus. She noted there are a lot of opportunities. Chair Hickling indicated they should be casting a wide net because none of the target markets would be easy. It could take years of work and persistence to make something happen – It's a lot to get someone to invest \$5 million to start a business. He therefore thought it would be better not to focus too narrowly but wondered if they could take it target market by target market. Vice Chair Bendel said yes, she said they need to identify each target to know if they are moving toward the target. Chair Hickling wondered about the best way to proceed.

Ms. Landry noted the recently completed land use study should help narrow the possibilities down and inform the best use of the properties. She didn't think it would be too hard to market.

Vice Chair Bendel asked when it was time to "hone in." Chair Hickling said he did not think they would figure it out in one meeting. He wondered if they should form a group of 3 or 4 people experienced in marketing real estate. He said he wants as much help from the committee as possible.

Mr. Jacobs noted there is a budget, so they could hire someone to help. Mr. Jacobs asked about how the airport Chair Hickling came from developed. Chair Hickling responded it was a similar situation. They tried to market properties but were unsuccessful. He noted, however, that it was difficult to bring a business to New York State. When he came to New Hampshire and saw all that the region had to offer, he thought it made sense to bring a business here. It is more economical than down state or Boston.

Mr. Temple discussed businesses starting build centers and builder assist centers, including in Northern Vermont, for people to build kit planes. He noted many are from Eastern Europe and Germany. There's a demand for centers in the US to introduce and sell kits and finished airplanes. He was not sure if the density and dollars per square foot made sense for that kind of business. He noted there is a lot of money in avionics, though. He noted Fitchburg Airport had a major Cessna dealer center for working on private jets many years ago. He wondered if there is a market for something like that.

Mr. Jacobs said he thinks there is a market. He noted there are smaller manufacturers that would like a Northeast service center, and getting close to New York City was expensive. One hurdle here is not having airlines in the area. A lot of people want to fly in and leave, rather than wait several days for their plane to be fixed.

Chair Hickling wondered if they should do a SWOT analysis to identify strengths and weaknesses. Mr. Paris said they should answer questions like for what purpose do they want people to utilize the airport – recreation or business, for example. What can they offer? What are their strengths? What reasons might people not want to use the airport? He wants to avoid going after a market that would not use the airport regardless.

Chair Hickling returned to Mr. Jacobs' suggestion about hiring someone to help with marketing. He said there is money in the budget, although not a lot, and a new budget cycle is coming up. Ms. Landry said it is less about marketing than about understanding how to generate leads, how to achieve what they want to achieve. She noted they could get a lot of leads, but if they can't offer what 99 percent of the leads want, there isn't much point. There are people who can help identify specifically what they need to achieve to be successful. She noted the land use study includes information about available properties, like their size, but not necessarily what the best business for a particular lot is.

Mr. Jacobs stated it is a matter of identifying what benefits everything. For example, if there is a maintenance shop, there would be planes flying in, buying fuel, supplying mechanics, etc. He wondered if a maintenance school would do that; they just need a facility, not an airport, since they don't fly. Vice Chair Bendel agreed but noted a school might bring more people into the area to shop, for example. He agreed they should get something that would use the full spectrum of what they have.

Mr. Temple noted they do not have anyone with a pulse on what's going on with the aviation business in the country. He wondered if they should consult with an expert in marketing in the Northeast aviation industries, as well as marketing in general. He said it is well known that every airport has a shortage of space, with huge waiting lists for hangar space, and that individuals and businesses have nowhere to park their airplanes. They do not know, however, what is going on with the various industries, such as what is growing, what is shrinking, what are new areas, what is going on in the world of avionics. Things change rapidly. They need someone who knows what is going on and probably works with large airports already.

Mr. Blood wondered if each parcel should be marketed separately. Chair Hickling said they could market to a flight school at the same time they market to a maintenance organization or an aircraft management company. They have multiple opportunities. They don't have to only market to one place. They should market to all.

Chair Hickling returned to the topic of doing a SWOT analysis. He plans to send an email out about a couple issues and have committee members respond with strengths and weaknesses. He plans to do this next week.

Mr. Paris asked Ms. Landry whether the city's prior marketing efforts included the airport. She said the airport was included in branding efforts. Mr. Paris noted they did not do a SWOT analysis for the airport, however. He indicated both the city and chamber did a SWOT analysis. He noted there is a range of what could be spent on this type of analysis. The state, for example, was working with JLL on a travel and tourism SWOT analysis, which was three or four times as much as the chamber spent and ten times what the city spent. He noted it might be better to get an external analysis rather than an internal one. He wondered about branding the airport as an individual brand. He said, for example, if they have no chance to get a commercial jet, they

should acknowledge it and move on. He did not want to have the same conversation in five years and never get further, so they should set their goals now.

Ms. Landry noted they did look at some of the airport's limitations. For example, they do not have certain resources or certifications needed to accept commercial passenger flights. Mr. Paris asked what can they do, what makes sense. He warned against forgoing a professional study. Chair Hickling sought other opinions about whether, at minimum, they should hire someone to put their strengths and weaknesses on paper. Vice Chair Bendel noted they did a SWOT analysis eight years ago and said if they do not focus, they would be having the same conversation in five years. Chair Hickling wondered how paying someone versus doing it internally would affect them moving forward. Vice Chair Bendel noted she thought they did a good internal SWOT analysis last time but then got stuck. Maybe a consultant could help determine what they do with the information from an analysis.

Ms. Landry noted that to reach their goal, they do not have to do an RFP for a SWOT analysis. Rather, they should seek someone to help attract business customers that are important to the airport and leave it to them as to how to do it. Chair Hickling said he would do some research on organizations that help with airport development.

Mayor Hansel asked whether Chair Hickling ever got inquiries from businesses about opportunities at the airport. He said he only got inquiries from people who wanted to build a hangar for private use but not from people interested in aviation business development. Mayor Hansel expressed nervousness about the lack of inquiries but noted it might be because they don't have any opportunities listed. Chair Hickling noted a lot of people look for commercial service airports, rather than general aviation airports, which is a shame, as it could be a marketing strength. Mr. Hutwelker noted, however, that a shop at the much smaller Middlebury, Vermont, airport had people dropping off their planes and having a friend fly them out and back in, so it did not seem to be a problem that there was no passenger service.

Mr. Paris asked whether there was any analysis done on their airport competitors and what they were doing. Chair Hickling thought a developer would do that research before deciding where to develop.

Mr. Hutwelker wanted to see what the FAA guidelines say is permitted. He wondered what aviation-related really means. He noted filling 200,000 square feet of warehouse space in Keene. He suggested making local land use developers aware of the airport opportunities, since they get a lot of leads. Chair Hickling suggested they talk in more detail later.

Mr. Temple wanted to make sure they do not forget the cost side of setting up a business at the airport. For example, he knows someone who wants space to build airplanes, and he's looking at owning or having a very long term lease, possibly with the Lebanon airport or a small private airport. He's not looking at Keene because he is aware Keene can't do leases longer than 50 years due to funding restrictions.

Ms. Landry requested action items. Chair Hickling said he had some, but since the committee's discussion was wide-ranging, he wasn't sure about them.

Mr. Hutwelker noted there was a Swanzey economic development committee meeting at which tax incentives were discussed. Chair Hickling echoed that he asked the Town of Swanzey about putting their tax incentives on the website. Mr. Blood asked about MEDC (Monadnock Economic Development Corporation) helping, and Mr. Hutwelker confirmed MEDC was involved. Discussion ensued about legislation that provides tax relief on the incremental value of property after investment.

Chair Hickling asked whether they should put something out there now to see if there is any interest, and whether interested parties should send letters of interest to him, but noted it might be premature. Mr. Jacobs said yes.

Chair Hickling indicated he had some action items. He plans to look at consultants with aviation or airport business development experience. Vice Chair Bendel wondered if they would also do the SWOT analysis. He said he would ask. Mr. Temple suggested they could lead the committee in a session. Ms. Landry wondered if there is any risk in missing part of the market by waiting. Chair Hickling said he doesn't think so because he wants to get the website finalized and live promptly. Mayor Hansel noted there is no interest right now. Planning their marketing is good, but right now they just need to drum up interest and make it known there are opportunities. He said they should get the opportunities listed where people are searching for them now.

Vice Chair Bendel suggested they at least have a posting up in the terminal for people passing through. Chair Hickling mentioned possibly just having rack card. Ms. Landry said materials should knock your socks off. Mr. Blood suggested a smart board might be good.

Ms. Landry asked about getting someone from Nashua Community College. Vice Chair Bendel said she talked to the president of the aviation program about coming to Keene, and she was noncommittal, so someone else from the program might be a better fit, but she was happy to make a connection. She noted that NCC was not interested in Keene several years ago because of its low population, but that might have changed. Ms. Landry said it is important to talk to NCC. Chair Hickling said next quarter might be better than now.

Mr. Jacobs stated they should market toward management companies like the one he works for. His company manages around 190 airplanes. Solaris and EJM are examples. The management companies are the ones that manage the people who have the money to build hangars. Instead of building at a more expensive airport like Bedford that could charge \$100,000/month, they could build in Keene. Chair Hickling asked how often owners are in the same location as their planes. Mr. Jacobs indicated it is not uncommon for planes to have to reposition because it is cheaper to do so than to store it at an expensive airport.

4) Promotional Video Series

Chair Hickling stated there is a new audio/visual production specialist, Asah [Cramer]. She is working on making promotional videos for each department's webpage. He has talked to her about doing a series of short promotional videos for the airport. Ms. Landry is also involved. He is thinking about business spotlights with Monadnock Aviation, Monadnock Choppers, and Mama McDonough's. He is also thinking about airport user profiles with C&S Wholesale Foods, Experimental Aircraft Association (EAA), Civil Air Patrol (CAP), other businesses that charter out of Keene, Corning Specialty Materials, or even individuals who use the airport for business. They would talk about how the airport serves their businesses. He's hoping to start in about a month and continue through the summer.

Mayor Hansel wondered if they could get a student to help. He urged more focus on normal people using the airport rather than just businesses. He also suggested showing the maintenance and equipment facilities. Ms. Landry suggested it is important to build general awareness of the importance of the airport, not just for business purposes. Chair Hickling expressed concern about perpetuating the impression that the airport is just for wealthy people.

Chair Hickling plans to put the videos on the airport's website and then have them shared on other City social media. Otherwise, he would leave next steps after producing the videos to Ms. Landry.

5) Airport Land Use Study

Chair Hickling showed part of the new website and sought feedback. He said it was 90 percent complete and would go live soon.

The site gives information on the airport's distances to various locations. There is an overview of three general development areas. There is a mockup from McFarland Johnson that shows the terminal building, the maintenance building, and the C&S hangar. It shows the northeast development area around the terminal with a brief description of parcel 1, which is just south of the C&S hangar; there is information on the best use of the three-acre parcel. Parcel 2 is next to the parking lot. There are additional descriptions of other developable areas. Committee members expressed liking the way the site was laid out. Chair Hickling mentioned he wants to add available incentives to the site. In response to Mr. Temple's inquiry, Chair Hickling clarified parcel 15 was in fact developable. Also in response to Mr. Temple's inquiry, Chair Hickling clarified the level of detail included on the site, such as height restrictions and compatible uses.

Vice Chair Bendel suggested it might be helpful to include the city's land use policy. Chair Hickling said he could add a link.

6) **General Discussions**

7) **Adjournment**

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

Respectfully submitted by,
Wendy Chen, Minute Taker

Reviewed and edited by,
David Hickling, Airport Director