

City of Keene
New Hampshire

AIRPORT MARKETING AND DEVELOPMENT COMMITTEE
MEETING MINUTES

Tuesday, January 26, 2021

9:00 AM

Remote Meeting via Zoom

Members Present:

Curt Hansen, Chair
Elizabeth Bendel, Vice Chair
Councilor Mitch Greenwald
Joseph Bendzinski
Bill Hutwelker
Nathan Jacobs
Brian Johnson
George Hansel, Mayor

Staff Present:

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

Members Not Present:

Richard Blood

Chair Curt 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.

New Business:

1) Call to Order

Chair Hansen called the meeting to order at 9:04 AM. Roll call was conducted.

2) Adopt Meeting Minutes

Councilor Mitch Greenwald made a motion to approve the meeting minutes of December 1, 2020 as presented. Vice Chair Elizabeth Bendel seconded the motion, which passed by unanimous vote.

3) 2020 Review

David Hickling reviewed the accomplishments and challenges of 2020, a unique first year as Airport Director. He noted that upon being newly appointed to the position he immediately faced two significant challenges, first putting together and presenting the Capital Improvement Program (CIP), and then preparing the department budget. This was soon followed by the onset of COVID-19 which had everyone navigating a new normal. As part of the pandemic response, they collaborated with other City departments to put

together a Citywide continuance of operation plan (C.O.P.) which will provide a means to work with other departments to maintain critical functions if staff members were lost due to the pandemic. Fortunately thus far they have not had to utilize that plan. Another challenge secondary to COVID-19 was that everything moved more slowly, especially at the state and federal level. On a positive note, they applied for and received a Federal Aviation Administration (FAA) grant through the Cares Act grant program, which was for \$89,000.

David Hickling then went on to review accomplishments regarding the goals they set at the beginning of 2020:

Search for Air Service – they completed phase one of the agreement they had with Crawford, Murphy and Tilly, Inc. (CMT), which included completion of the catchment area study and market analysis. Mr. Hickling noted that the information obtained from this will be relevant for a few years. The project is currently on pause due to COVID-19.

Economic Development – Despite difficulty with outreach efforts due to COVID-19, they were able to bring on one new business, Monadnock Choppers, and Mr. Hickling was happy to report they are operating quite well at the airport.

Public Relations/Education – COVID-19 again had significant impact on this, but they were able to get a radio ad campaign started and also completed one engagement with the Keene Chamber of Commerce through their Coffee and Conversations meeting. Mr. Hickling stated that the process with Monadnock Choppers also included a lot of public engagement, which he hoped was positive and heard by the public.

Maintaining/Improving Airport Infrastructure – Mr. Hickling reported that they did fairly well on this goal in 2020. With regards to the taxiway extension and reconstruction, they applied for Airport Improvement Program (AIP) grants in excess of 4.5 million dollars and received all of them. Mr. Hickling mentioned the AIP grants are 100% funded by the FAA for the upcoming construction season due also to the FAA CARES Act. This is a positive as they have only been 90% funded in the past. The Fuel Farm Project has been designed and bid, the pre-bid meeting is set to take place within the next week. The perimeter fence project was moved up on the CIP with the hope that they will obtain money for environmental permitting for FY 2021-2022.

Viability of Airport: All T-Hangars are full now, which is maximizing airport revenue. They have had several land lease renewals, updates, and transfers, mostly through private hangars being bought and sold. They finalized the sale of the blue hangar and are now relieved of the obligations and costs associated with it.

Land Sales: They had one interested buyer for 2 parcels at the start of 2020 and had not made any progress in the FAA land release process. Mr. Hickling reported that now have interested buyers for both parcels and currently both are now at the FAA and they are waiting for releases.

4) 2021 Preview

Mr. Hickling stated COVID-19 is still a question and they are not sure what the impact will be in 2021, or if airport operations will return to normal. He stated he is hesitant to schedule public events and felt it might be best to wait until 2022, but would take advice if someone thought otherwise. He mentioned events like the Runway 5k and fly-ins might be possible later on in the year around fall, but something like an airshow, where there's a lot that goes into it, may be better to hold off on for another year. Mr. Hickling continued with a preview of 2021 for the committee:

Air Service: Mr. Hickling stated they are going to continue to watch industry activity, particularly commuter airlines, and if activity starts to pick up then he will jump on that. He stated that in the meantime they can start to work on an incentive package to entice airlines in, and be ready when the time comes.

Outreach: They may need to adapt to the new normal of remote outreach with regards to presentations for civic groups like rotary club, lions club, and chamber of commerce. Mr. Hickling stated one idea is to have an informational session on drone safety and regulatory compliance. They will continue and maybe even grow the ad campaign as well.

Economic Growth: They will continue to try to bring in new businesses. Mr. Hickling stated he typically does this through networking and connecting with people through conferences. Due to COVID-19 there are a lot of remote conferences occurring now and he will look into those. They will continue to work with local developers as well.

Infrastructure: The taxiway extension and reconstruction and fuel farm replacement will all be happening this summer. With regards to the perimeter fence, they are hoping to be able to do the environmental and permitting in 2021 and may need to get creative with funding. They will also continue to maximize grant opportunities, such as AIP grants, and any available state funding.

Elizabeth Dragon stated everyone did an excellent job making progress on goals for the airport given the challenges of the past year, making special note of Mr. Hickling's leadership. She mentioned Elizabeth Bendel did a great job getting creative. Dave Hickling agreed.

Nathan Jacobs stated he's excited for upcoming projects to happen and asked how they could let the aviation community know that these improvements are happening at the Keene airport and what routes could they take to promote on a national level? David Hickling responded that Mr. Jacobs made a great point. He had planned to update airport users as the projects take place, and stated he needs to look into a broader audience and see what opportunities are out there. Mr. Hickling mentioned that these projects won't cost the tax payers anything to the local community, so that would be a good thing to stress in public outreach. Mr. Jacob's idea prompted Mr. Hickling to tie together capital improvements and public relations moving forward, instead of keeping them separate. Mitch Greenwald agreed and stated he didn't feel radio ads were the way to get the word

out. He felt the more valuable route would be special articles in print, magazines, etc. Also radio talk shows, like the George Hansel show, with updates about what's going on at the airport. He asked if anyone knew of magazines that speak to the New England flight world. David Hickling stated there are some and noted that he would look into those and the cost. Nathan Jacobs added that Aviation International News has a section with local airport news. David Hickling said that would be a good resource for bringing in development of aviation businesses, too.

5) Restaurant Lease

David Hickling stated the lease for the Flight Deck restaurant is up at the end of March. They have sent Tracy a letter to see if she's interested in renewing and are waiting to hear back. They are hoping she renews because they love the work she does. Mr. Hickling stated that they could do a Request for Qualification (RFQ) if she doesn't want to renew under the specified terms.

Mitch Greenwald stated he feels it is not a time to be getting creative or aggressive with a restaurant, he would prefer to see an extension or whatever will keep the lights on for the next 6 months at the Flight Deck, and then get into changing terms or hours when things are more stable as far as operating a restaurant during COVID-19. Mr. Greenwald urged the committee to be cooperative with Tracy. David Hickling responded that they do recognize how tough it has been this past year and take that into consideration. Bill Hutwelker stated he'd like to support Mitch Greenwald's comments. He added that if there's a means to extend Tracy for a year under the current terms that would be great, because she has really stepped up and taken risks.

Mr. Hickling stated something new came up, a resident in the Edgewood District has some big trees they'd like to get rid of and inquired if the airport would remove them. They took a look and the trees are located right on the airport approach path, so they are going to look at removing the trees, possibly using funds from the Cares Act grant. He stated they are looking at doing another obstruction study in the next couple of years to identify what is left that needs to be addressed in the Edgewood District area. Elizabeth Dragon questioned which grant they'd use for removal of trees. David Hickling responded that they would use the grant through the Cares Act, which was specified to be used for operating costs. He stated if they run into problems they could use their operating budget. Elizabeth Dragon added that she knows at least one resident who is eager for them to remove trees, and she will pass that information along to Mr. Hickling.

Rebecca Landry joined at 9:33 AM.

Bill Hutwelker stated that there's a Swanzeay "Uncovered" newsletter, which is distributed 4 times per year, and may be a good resource to add a couple of paragraphs from the airport to help get the news out. The distribution is primarily internet but they are trying to get back to mailing, which would mean a copy goes to every Swanzeay household.

Old Business:

1) Property Sales – Update

Mr. Hickling stated things have moved slowly with this but everything is at the FAA for the two buyers interested, and they are just waiting for letters of release from the FAA so they can close on the sales.

2) AIP Grant & Taxiway Extension Status

Mr. Hickling stated they have now received two of the AIP grants for the funding of the Taxiway extension. They have been signed by the City manager and returned to the NH DOT. They should have the finalized grants back within a couple of weeks and will be able to execute the agreements with the contractors and have them ready to mobilize in April or May, weather permitting. They do not yet have the grant for the reconstruction portion of the existing taxiway. The Fuel Farm bid opening will be happening next week so they will also be able to start on that project in the spring as well.

Mr. Hickling mentioned they will be starting the budget process, which he will be working on in the coming weeks.

Chair Curt Hansen stated each year they need to elect a new Chair and Vice Chair, and asked for nominations. He mentioned it is probably time for someone else to assume the role of Chair as he has done it for two years in a row and is ready to step down. Mitch Greenwald nominated Curt Hansen to continue as Chair and George Hansel agreed. David Hickling stated Curt Hansen had expressed that he'd like to step down and asked if the committee could take some time to think about it and see if someone else would be willing to step into the role. Bill Hutwelker supported Chair Hansen continuing in the role, but agreed they should think on it if doesn't want to keep the position. Chair Hansen tabled the nomination until next meeting and said they will push the Vice Chair nomination as well and put it on the agenda for next the meeting. Mayor Hansel agreed with waiting and suggested it could give David Hickling time to talk to individual members.

Mayor Hansel stated it would be great to keep their eye on the ball when it comes time to potentially exploring passenger service. He mentioned if there's anything else that can be done in that regards, he'd like to see them striving for that.

Nathan Jacobs mentioned the airplane wash and asked if there were any thoughts on that as they put in the new fuel farm. He stated he will donate the hose. David Hickling stated that it's not so much the hose, it's an environmental concern because anything washed off an airplane should go through an oil-water separator. There's not an easy solution but he'll keep exploring options.

There were no other comments from the committee. Chair Hansen adjourned the meeting at 9:42 AM.

Respectfully submitted by,
Nicole Cullinane, Minute Taker