

## Findings and recommendations to Rock Hill-York County Airport Commission

### VISION STATEMENT

#### Findings:

- Good statement
- Outlines key strategies to achieve vision
- Several strategies already completed
  - Taxation issue
  - Compatible land uses on adjacent property
  - Acquisition of land for future runway extension
  - Corporate hangars (still in process)
  - Modern facilities and services
- More work needed:
  - On-site revenue generating businesses
  - Determine need and justify runway extension
  - Achieve “airport of choice” status
  - Advocacy group
  - Business and marketing plan

#### Recommendations:

- Update 2003 Vision and have reaffirmed by Commission, City and County Councils

### AOD

#### Findings:

- City and County were right to pursue zoning changes that protect airport from encroachment and incompatible land use, which are among the greatest threats facing general aviation airports such as Rock Hill-York County Airport (UZA)
- Process was lengthy and provided substantial opportunity for public comment
- Changes and improvements demonstrate public input was considered
- Collaboration between City and County is commendable and should continue. Learn from mistakes allowed by lack of coordination in the past
- The CAAG cannot adequately respond to all of the specific concerns of individual property owners affected by the AOD

#### Recommendations:

- When communicating to area property owners about zoning or other issues, City and County should expand the use of media beyond legal advertisements and postcards mailed to immediate neighbors. Proactive use of email, city website and larger mailings would help ensure interested parties receive relevant information
- When collaborating, City and County should establish one central contact to receive communications and concerns from citizens, keep records and ensure questions are answered. Accountability would improve. Multiple points of contact

within City and County staffs may contribute to conflicting answers that some citizens said they received

## **AIRPORT OPERATIONS**

### **Findings:**

- City owns and operates facility and generates revenue from leases, rents and other sources
- County collects revenue from taxable property (real and personal) at airport and shares cost of capital improvements with City
- City operating budget for airport does not provide a complete picture of its multiple revenue sources or its true operating costs. Certain revenues show up in other department budgets, and expenses incurred by other areas are attributed to the airport budget. This creates a distorted view that the airport operates at a substantial loss. After adjustments, the operating loss is reduced substantially
- While airport has made progress increasing revenue from new sources of business, more is needed
- Skytech, the fixed-base operator at the airport, receives high marks from customers and airport visitors. Both the company and the City deserve praise for a facility that is modern and attractive
- Skytech, which operates under a 25-year lease with the City, has invested more than \$3 million in new facilities and equipment. These investments revert to the City upon completion of the lease agreement
- Skytech paid the City \$115,000 in 2007 for license fees, rent and percentage of fuel sales; this is a typical business model in the general aviation industry
- Skytech's primary business is selling airplanes. Other revenue comes from maintenance of aircraft. About 2% of revenue is derived from its FBO operations

### **Recommendations:**

- The City and County should provide context when discussing the airport's revenue and cost structure. Otherwise, the airport could lose community support if it is perceived as a significant drain on resources

## **ECONOMIC BENEFITS**

### **Findings:**

- The airport is an important tool for economic development in our region
- Proximity to a general aviation airport is among the top 10-15 attributes a company considers when relocating or expanding a business
- A surprising number of businesses and organizations regularly use the airport. Several cite airport's convenience and say Charlotte is congested
- A state economic impact study attributed 87 jobs and an annual \$2.3 million payroll to the airport. Further, more than 19,000 visitors plus other direct and indirect spending contribute to the airport's \$6.9 million annual economic impact

### **Recommendations:**

- An economic impact study conducted by a respected third party should be commissioned to rationalize the local value of the airport

## **RUNWAY AND RUNWAY EXTENSION**

### **Findings:**

- The airport Master Plan serves as a long-range planning and policy guide
- Weight limit of existing runway is 60,000 pounds, which prevents large, commercial aircraft and cargo planes from using airport. No increase in weight limit has been considered for the existing runway, or for an extended runway. There is no basis for speculation that the weight limit would be increased
- Historically, the airport has largely been used by small, piston-powered aircraft. In the last 10-15 years, turbo, multi-engine and jet aircraft usage has increased and is forecast to grow more rapidly. Turboprops and jets are projected to grow from 8% of based aircraft in 2002 to 25% in 2022, assuming infrastructure improvements are completed
- The Master Plan projects a runway extension of 1,000 feet would cost (in 2003 dollars) approximately \$13.7 million. Relocating Airport Road north of the runway, should that be necessary, could cost another \$2.2 million. The FAA covers 95% of eligible costs, provided the agency approves a project. It has given a preliminary indication that more data is needed to demonstrate sufficient traffic volume and that the present runway negatively impacts certain aircraft. Data collection is on-going
- Most private aircraft can operate in and out of the airport with the existing 5,500-foot runway. However, the runway length does limit approximately one-fourth of the current production business jet market because these planes have a required Take Off Field Length of up to 6,500 feet. In hot or wet weather conditions, an even greater percentage of these jets would not be able to operate out of Rock Hill because of the existing runway
- A longer runway would allow the airport to serve the entire business jet market
- A runway extension could increase traffic volume, fuel sales, corporate visitors and create other economic benefits that would benefit the airport and the region
- A runway extension would help the airport remain competitive with competing facilities
- A cost-benefit analysis and an environmental impact study would be required first steps. It could take six years or more to study, plan and complete a runway extension
- An undetermined number of homes are located near the site where the runway extension would be built.

### **Recommendations:**

- When revised in the next few years, the Master Plan should incorporate language that the airport does not envision changing the FAA category designation the facility currently enjoys
- The City needs to determine the number of homes near a proposed runway extension, their proximity, and whether property owners would be affected. If so, this issue should be addressed fairly by the City
- The City and County should continue to explore the feasibility of extending the runway

## NEIGHBORHOOD HOUSING VALUES

### Findings:

- MLS market data on home sales in neighborhoods surrounding airport show the median value of homes sold in 2007 declined 5% compared to 2006. However, the median price increased 2.5% by the midpoint of 2008 compared to 2007, and the average days on market improved dramatically: 136 in 2008 vs 194 and 141 in 2007 and 2006, respectively
- Most of the negative publicity surrounding the AOD process occurred during 2008
- Data appears to refute speculation the airport has negatively impacted neighborhood property values

## HEALTH AND NUISANCE COMPLAINTS

### Findings:

- A variety of ailments and health concerns were raised during a community meeting, and certain neighbors implied the airport was a possible contributing cause. None of these claims can be adequately assessed or judged by the advisory group
- Similar complaints have been heard in other communities across the country where airports operate in populated areas. No credible evidence has been presented to the advisory group that the airport poses a health risk to the local population
- An FAA Office of Environment & Energy presentation notes “there are known direct emissions of hydrocarbons... particulate matter and hazardous air pollutants from aviation activities” and that “these emissions interact among themselves and with background air to form other air pollutants such as ozone, PM, etc.” Importantly, however, the presentation acknowledges the inadequacy of current air quality models and measurement methodologies to accurately quantify the contribution of air pollution attributable to airports. Further, the presentation focuses only on major commercial airports, not general aviation fields
- Some comments in the community meeting focused on airport appearance, landscaping and litter along the perimeter
- Multiple speakers at the community meeting talked about a few pilots who buzz neighborhoods, fly aggressively, create excess noise and generally do not “fly friendly.” Speakers did not have much faith that it would do any good to report incidents to FAA, which governs and controls airspace

### Recommendations:

- The City should explore options to provide attractive landscaping, visual barriers (trees, shrubs) and litter crews to remove unsightly trash along the airport perimeter
- While the airport has periodically communicated its noise policy to pilots, it can take more proactive steps, such as:
  - Communicating its policies to neighbors
  - Establishing a central contact person to record and follow up on issues and concerns

**GOING FORWARD****Findings:**

- Concerns about the AOD led several committed neighborhood opponents to organize their efforts. They were effective in raising concerns and dominating public discussion about the airport and AOD proposals
- While the AOD was approved by the City and County in late 2008, airport opponents have not abandoned their efforts. They will continue to challenge and question the value of Rock Hill-York County Airport, and they will vigorously oppose proposals to expand the airport and its runway

**Recommendations:**

- The City should take proactive steps to keep lines of communication open with airport neighbors. Such actions could include:
  - Frequent communications targeted to airport neighbors
  - Open houses
  - The City, County and Airport Commission forming a standing airport advisory committee comprised of a diverse mix of neighbors and community leaders to represent the general community, its interests and concerns about the airport
- We believe the vast majority of area citizens are not concerned about the airport or future prospects for expansion. However, their neutrality could become compromised over time if airport opponents continue to generate publicity for their cause, and airport advocates fail to counter critics
- The Rock Hill-York County Airport is a valuable asset to our community and region. More effort is needed to promote this asset and, at the same time, balance competing interests among various constituencies