

Officials to make Aurora State Airport development decision today

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Molly Young



A small plane crashed into a home near the Aurora State Airport in September. The homeowner and pilot escaped unhurt.

Oregon's aviation board will **map Aurora State Airport's future** today, ending three months of tumult surrounding one of Oregon's busiest general aviation hubs.

At the heart of the controversy is whether to extend the airport's runway.

Chairman Mark Gardiner said that he supports a proposal to site an 800-foot extension on the north end of the runway that would allow takeoffs, but not landings.

Many airport businesses have already agreed to the option.

"That would serve the airport well," Gardiner said.

But officials at the Federal Aviation Administration, which would likely provide funding for the extension, don't buy the option.

"We would not participate in funding proposals that would provide only partial and or/limited use of a runway extension," wrote Carolyn Read, acting manager of the Seattle office, in a June 7 memo.

Planners **unveiled development options in March** as part of a years-long master plan update. The aviation board decided six weeks later to **ditch a proposed a 1,000-foot southern extension** that would close the road that bounds the airports south side. But the FAA's stance has motivated the board to reconsider.

Still, Gardiner said he doesn't favor the southern extension. The city of Wilsonville, the Wilsonville Chamber of Commerce and Friends Marion County don't support the extension, either. The airport sits just south of the Clackamas County line.

Perhaps the most passionate opponent is Mike Iverson, who farms the land immediately south of the airport. A lengthy southern extension would cut off his access road and likely flood his vegetable crops, he said.

"The farmers -- all we are is stewards of the land until they can find a better alternative," Iverson said earlier this month.

For months, airport users have said a longer runway is necessary for safety and business. But neighbors have objected, saying it would only lead to more traffic and noise.

State officials organized a June 7 public meeting to poll the airports planning advisory committee.

But several committee members feared the state aviation board had already made up its mind. Clackamas County Commissioner Jim Bernard predicted the airports future includes the 1,000-foot extension.

"Were sitting at a table that seems to me is a total waste of time," Bernard said. "The decisions already been made."

A public comment period closed Tuesday, and Gardiner said he's confident the board will make its final decision Thursday.

"I can't predict what the board would decide, but I'm an advocate for having the displaced threshold," said Gardiner, referring to the takeoff-only extension.