

AURORA AIRPORT MASTER PLANNING AND THE ROLE OF PUBLIC ADVISORY COMMITTEE

The last master planning process at the Aurora Airport began in 2009 and resulted in the release of the unapproved 2012 Aurora Airport Master Plan, which has been plagued by almost a decade of dispute and a recent successful legal challenge. Oregon Dept. of Aviation, with the approval of the Oregon Aviation Board, is about to launch a new master planning process for Aurora, paid for with FAA funds.

The Executive Summary of the final version of the unapproved 2012 Master Plan states:

ODA organized a Planning Advisory Committee (PAC), representing Airport users and neighbors, to participate in the planning process. In addition to six PAC meetings, public involvement in the master plan update included a website to disseminate information and gather comments and questions, and five open houses for the general public.

In the section titled Planning Process Goals, the following goals were listed:

- *Be open minded and proceed in good faith*
- *Keep the focus more on the long-term future than the short-term future*
- *Don't mix unrelated issues and don't be sidetracked by issues that don't relate to the master plan*
- *Obtain high quality information for analysis and cite sources*
- *Seek consensus for solutions that are acceptable, helpful, and clear.*
- *By the end of the planning process, establish a clear vision statement that defines what the Airport will be like in the foreseeable future (30 to 50 years) and that is overwhelmingly embraced by all stakeholders. The vision statement should encompass safety, noise, and development scale and flavor.*

The net of all this can be read as a collegial undertaking that involved most or all stakeholders who would work together to reach a vision that was both agreed upon and would be supported (i.e. consensus) by all participants. That did not occur, and that outcome was not achieved.

Unraveling of the PAC

Tony Holt, PAC member representing Charbonneau Country Club, noted the following in his report following the first PAC meeting held on July 22, 2010:

[Rainse] Anderson [WH Pacific moderator] reminded attendees the PAC is an advisory committee to ODA and ODA has final authority over the Master Plan. If serving on the PAC, members are asked to provide input to help produce a plan that balances a wide range of airport stakeholder needs and concerns; bring forward comments and concerns of those they represent; and help disseminate accurate information about the plan.

It is worth noting that while the PAC was informed that their role was "advisory," the context in which this advice was given was much broader and implied an active role in which the input and views of all would be received, considered and balanced. That was not to be and prior to the second scheduled PAC meeting, a subset of the membership representing local neighborhoods and governments sent a letter to the Chair of OAB titled: Request for meeting to discuss Aurora State Airport master planning process and role of the Planning Advisory Committee (attached). That letter began by stating:

As local-government and community-organization members of the Planning Advisory Committee (PAC) to the Aurora State Airport Master Plan, we have grave concerns that our participation in the process is not intended to be meaningful. We see serious deficiencies in how the process is being conducted by the consultant, W.H. Pacific, and we seek to resolve these issues of concern.

How that disconnect came about may be best illustrated by comparing the stated planning goals with the outcomes:

- **Be open minded and proceed in good faith:** *within months it became apparent the process was rushed on a condensed timeline and pushed toward a preconceived outcome.*
- **Keep the focus more on the long-term future than the short-term future:** *rather than arriving at a long-term future state the emphasis was clearly on a near-term means to lengthen the runway.*
- **Don't mix unrelated issues and don't be sidetracked by issues that don't relate to the master plan:** *construction of an air traffic control tower was treated as a separate and unrelated subject though it would likely be a driver of increased airport operations and impacts.*
- **Obtain high quality information for analysis and cite sources:** *Total Operations projections were forecasts based on earlier forecasts that had never been achieved and were never corrected, and Based Operations and Constrained Operations numbers were based on surveys with unvalidated data and supplemented with secondary survey data to achieve the desired outcome.*
- **Seek consensus for solutions that are acceptable, helpful, and clear:** *the PAC was marginalized and never provided with data such as Total Operations to review and discuss before it was sent off to the FAA for approval.*
- **By the end of the planning process, establish a clear vision statement that defines what the Airport will be like in the foreseeable future:** *a Vision statement was never created, and in fact, at the first PAC meeting ODA staff said, "We are gathering the goals and issues from all parties now, without them you can't develop a vision. As the Plan progresses, a vision of the airport may develop, but it won't be in the form of a one sentence vision statement."*

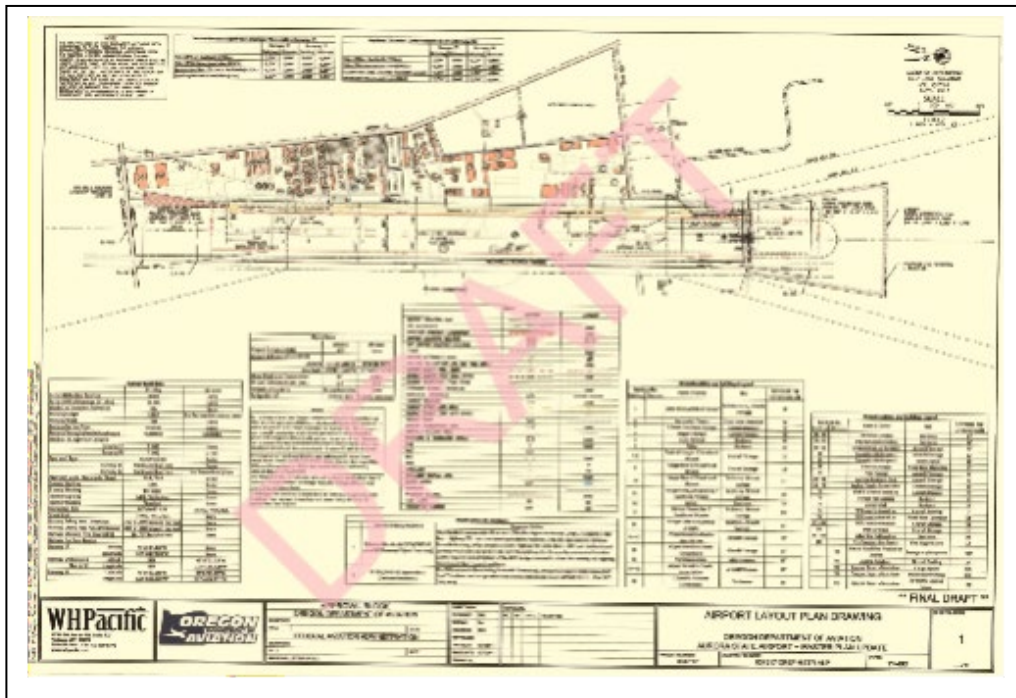
The PAC letter to the OAB Chair summarize the fundamental problem:

Despite the absence of any discussion of the 'strategic role' and 'study goals' and any review of the activity forecast with the PAC, the process developed by the consultant, under the direction of ODA, appears to be one of justifying the preconceived idea that runway expansion and strengthening is required at Aurora Airport.

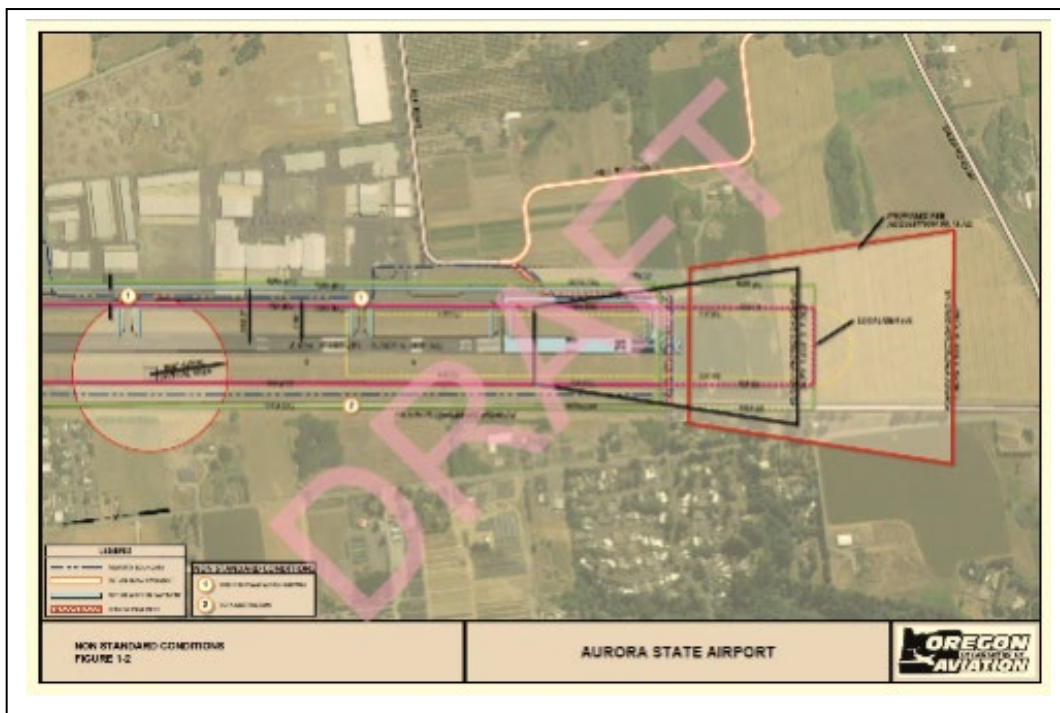
In the case of the 2012 Master Plan process, the preconceived goal was to lengthen and strengthen the runway to accommodate larger business jets, but what was unclear to ODA, WH Pacific and the commercial interests was the best way to do that. For them the purpose of the master plan process was to determine how to do so.

Specifically, public surveys were taken about expanding the airport. When the results were negative, a second survey was taken of pilots only, and those results added to the first to change the outcome. In the absence of an Air Traffic Control tower, the method of determining Based Aircraft was by survey. Total Operations numbers were arrived at via some mechanical runway counts and pilot survey data with no demonstrated validation, then these were used to forecast future growth. Constrained Operations numbers were also arrived at via pilot surveys.

By the time the final unapproved 2012 Master Plan document had been released, the Airport Layout Plan had been modified substantially to expand the Aurora Airport and approved by the FAA. The ALP was re-published in the 2018 Constrained Operations study, which ostensibly "updated" Based Aircraft and Total Operations numbers and demonstrated over 500 Constrained ops per year.



2012 Airport Layout Plan as printed in 2018 Constrained Operations Study



Impact of 2012 Airport Layout Plan on surrounding land from 2018 Constrained Operations Study

The soon-to-be-started master plan process is about to begin not just with a desire to lengthen the runway by 1,000 feet, but a roadmap to expand the airport onto 55 acres of EFU land (via the 2012 Airport Layout Plan), and improve it to handle the largest corporate and small commuter airline type jets.

Guidelines for the new PAC were delivered in advance of the first meeting scheduled for November 16, 2021 and include the following qualifications:

- Members will provide input at key decision points in an advisory level; as a **sounding board**.
- No recommendations will be made by the committee; the group will be asked for feedback through poll questions and break out room discussions.
- PAC Members will provide input as a representative of their organization.

That begs the question of the role and purpose of a Public *Advisory* Committee other than as window dressing to meet some level of so-called public transparency.

Members of the Planning Advisory Committee to the Aurora State Airport Master Plan

Charbonneau Country Club • City of Wilsonville • Clackamas County
Deer Creek Estates • Friends of Marion County

Mark Gardiner, Chair
State Aviation Board
Oregon Department of Aviation
3040 25th St. SE
Salem, OR 97302-1125

September 14, 2010

RE: Request for meeting to discuss Aurora State Airport master planning process and role of the Planning Advisory Committee

Dear Mr. Gardiner:

As local-government and community-organization members of the Planning Advisory Committee (PAC) to the Aurora State Airport Master Plan, we have grave concerns that our participation in the process is not intended to be meaningful. We see serious deficiencies in how the process is being conducted by the consultant, W.H. Pacific, and we seek to resolve these issues of concern.

In a nutshell, **we are very concerned that the Aurora Airport master planning process is being rushed on a condensed schedule—reduced by one-third from the original timeline—without adequate discussion of issues at the PAC level in order to satisfy preconceived outcomes of a few special interests that may be detrimental to the greater public good.** It seems fairly clear that the consultant intends to march steadily through construction of ‘chapters’ of the master plan, according to a predetermined timetable, regardless of whether or not there has been adequate discussion at the PAC of the issues. This is not the meaningful public-input practice that the Federal Aviation Administration (FAA) recommends for stakeholders in the master-planning process.

The FAA is quite clear, as outlined in the document ‘Airport Master Plans,’ AC 150/5070-6A, that **stakeholders must have an early opportunity to meaningfully comment before major decisions are made.** Stakeholders in the master-planning process have been asked to enunciate their individual goals, but there has been no discussion on how to integrate these into establishing the ‘strategic role’ and the ‘study goals’ as outlined by the FAA. ODA and consultant W.H. Pacific have specifically rejected the establishment of a ‘vision’ for the Airport as a starting point, something several members of the PAC requested at the outset of the process.

We observe from the conduct of ODA that installation of an air traffic control tower is being actively pursued prior to development of the new master plan and without consultation with the PAC. The fact that ODA is acquiring funds to build a control tower in the absence of any cost estimate and without first conducting planning demonstrates a serious lapse in judgment. ODA has indicated that concurrent to the master plan update, the agency has contracted for an air traffic control tower siting study; again an issue that the PAC should discuss has been arbitrarily removed the planning process.

Further, it seems clear that the role of the PAC has been deliberately marginalized. The forecast of future activity at the airport has apparently been compiled and is about to be sent to the FAA for

approval without any advance discussion with the PAC. It is notable that there is no accurate information available on current activity levels, since there are no records of landings and take-offs. Any methodology used to generate undocumented current activity numbers to use as a starting point for future usage projections surely should require very close scrutiny. But the PAC has not been given that opportunity for review and discussion.

Despite the absence of any discussion of the 'strategic role' and 'study goals' and any review of the activity forecast with the PAC, the process developed by the consultant, under the direction of ODA, appears to be one of justifying the preconceived idea that runway expansion and strengthening is required at Aurora Airport. The Scope of Work, dated June 19, 2009, states on page 3 that consultant "W.H. Pacific will prepare a letter on behalf of ODA to request statements [presumably from large jet operators] to *help justify* an extension" of the runway (emphasis added). This would seem to clearly demonstrate an intent that undermines any pretense of a meaningful process.

We are not aware of any impact analysis based on a forecast of future activity that was developed. In short, this appears to leave the simplistic assumption that if the demand can be somehow justified, then it must be supplied, no matter the impacts. Common sense tells us that increasing the size and types of airplanes, and the increase in the frequency of their use, will have impacts. Going from a general aviation airport with mostly small, propeller-and-piston-engine light-airplane and smaller jets under 45,000 pounds to an airport catering to larger, heavier turbine-engine jet aircraft calls for a serious, reasoned analysis of impacts.

The Aurora State Airport is located in the French Prairie area of "foundation farmland," which the Oregon Department of Agriculture indicates contains Oregon's highest-quality agricultural soils, and has been able to co-exist with its neighbors as a small-aircraft airport. However, the airport is within a mile of the Portland Metro Urban Growth Boundary and dense residential development to the north. There are serious traffic-congestion problems on roads around the airport and on nearby Interstate 5 at the Boone Bridge "bottleneck" over the Willamette River. As the FAA document 'Airport Master Plans' makes clear, the regional setting of the airport must be examined "because the impact of airport planning decisions can extend well beyond the airport property line." What will be the impacts of this greater development at the airport be on noise, pollution, the surrounding farm lands, off-site surface transportation facilities including the interstate highway, and nearby residential areas? What, if any, mitigation should occur?

While the PAC's role has been marginalized, ODA plans to select interviewees outside of the PAC and master-planning process who will be asked to give their views on at least one of the major master-planning issues. The Scope of Work, page 8, states that "up to 20 people [will be interviewed] regarding future activity at the airport." That is a critical task. Who are these people and how has ODA directed the consultant to choose them? What meaningful process is there for the PAC in this regard? Again, there has been no discussion by the consultant with the PAC on this matter.

The Scope of Work, page 5, lists the main areas under which data will be collected. Under Item E, Environmental Inventory, there is no mention of collecting data on noise and traffic impacts on nearby communities and on their transportation infrastructure, key aspects listed by the FAA on page 123 with the title 'Environmental Overview for Master Plan Purposes,' FAA AC 150/5070-6B. Nor

is there any discussion in the Scope of Work of National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) requirements and whether or not an Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) is required. The Scope of Work states that noise contours will be developed, but only to show existing conditions and those five years into the future. As the activity forecasts will be generated for five years, 10 years and 20 years into the future, the noise contours should be developed for the same time periods.

We are very concerned that the Aurora Airport master planning process is being rushed through on a condensed schedule without adequate discussion of the issues at the Planning Advisory Committee level in order to satisfy the preconceived outcomes of a few special interests. This is not the meaningful, due process input the FAA intended in their Master Plan process.

We respectfully request that a meeting be arranged at the earliest opportunity for the undersigned with you, the Acting Director of ODA, the consultant, and appropriate representatives of the FAA to discuss these concerns. Furthermore, we request that this letter be memorialized as a part of the record of the Aurora Airport Master Plan update. Too many issues of previous inside dealings connected with ODA's handling of matters at the Aurora Airport have recently come to light, and it is important that now, under new management direction, ODA not be a part of a process that lacks meaningful input, good planning, and transparency.

We thank you for your time and consideration.

Respectfully submitted by the undersigned members of the Planning Advisory Committee to the Aurora State Airport Master Plan.



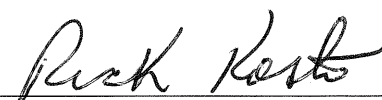
Tony Holt, Chair, Civic Affairs Committee
Charbonneau Country Club



Jim Bernard, Commissioner
Clackamas County Board of Commissioners



Steve Hurst, Councilor
City of Wilsonville City Council



Rick Kosta, President
Deer Creek Estates Homeowners' Association



Roger Kaye, President
Friends of Marion County