

NEWS

State supreme court won't overturn ruling that halted Aurora Airport runway expansion

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The state's highest court denied the state aviation department's petition to review a ruling that found the department violated the state's land-use system in attempting to lengthen the runway at Aurora Airport.

The Oregon Supreme Court on Thursday declined to review a Court of Appeals decision from June that determined the state had tried to circumvent land use laws and the state's land use board of appeals upholding of the state's plan was flawed.

“Until there is a legal decision in another court that modifies or overturns the court of appeals ruling, it stands,” said Ben Williams, president of Friends of French Prairie, one of the land-use groups joined by the cities of Aurora and Wilsonville in opposing the Oregon Department of Aviation and business owners at the airport in the case.

Legal: Appeals court halts efforts to extend runway at Aurora Airport

For years the state has sought to extend the runway at the Aurora Airport to 6,004 feet from its current 5,004 feet.

The airport, located just outside the Aurora city limits, is the third busiest in

Oregon and one of 28 the state owns.

The state erroneously tried to adopt a master plan that would have allowed the expansion to go forward, the Court of Appeals determined, justifying the change solely because the airport is in a rural area.

And the state improperly used state law in saying the proposed lengthening wouldn't allow a larger class of airplane.

In meetings prior to appealing the decision, the state aviation board considered pursuing legislative action as well as the judicial review it did to the state Supreme Court.

“The problem for the airport guys and ODA is they can't expand the airport or lengthen the runway without FAA funds and they can't do that without a proper master plan,” Williams said.

“The blinders they are all wearing about FAA may get them through the master plan process, but then before they can do anything, they're going to have to deal with Oregon State law.”

Infrastructure: Oregon will receive over \$5B in 5 years from Biden's infrastructure bill

The Oregon Department of Aviation has begun the process for creating a new master plan for the state-owned airport, though it will take years to complete.

The land-use case likely will be sent back to the Land Use Board of Appeals because of the Court of Appeals decision.

The airport received a \$148,000 Airport Rescue Grant in June, with funding coming from the American Rescue Plan.

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