

Glenda Wiles

From: David Nicolls <denicolls@gmail.com>
Sent: Friday, June 27, 2014 4:45 PM
To: Glenda Wiles
Cc: dan@rpa-hln.com
Subject: Ravalli County Airport, public comment on proposed project

To all interested parties,

Having recently transplanted myself to Ravalli County I have listened with interest to the dialogue regarding the airport in Hamilton. I have some problem understanding how the whole process of improvements and expansion has stumbled along for 16 years without construction getting underway. To my outlook that would not be the case unless there were some serious flaws in the Airport Master Plan and/or the Airport Layout Plan, Airport Capitol Improvement Plan or the community just does not feel the proposed improvements are needed. It would also seem that Airport management has been hobbled by others.

Having toured the airport it is clear that there are many other issues that should be addressed prior to considering a runway expansion. Among these are, questionable clear zones and approach surfaces for any proposed expansion, one or more intrusions into the imaginary surfaces, i.e. a hangar that seems to be either too tall or too close to the runway and narrow uneven taxi lanes in the hangar area. I am sure these issues are addressed in the Master Plan and Airport Layout Plan and are programmed into the Airport Capitol Improvement Plan, or at least one would hope so.

I have not heard just how the County share of the cost will be funded but private funding seems questionable at best and it would be interesting to see the proposed legal documents that would accompany these funds and a response from the Federal Aviation Administration would be illuminating. Any County cost should be born by the airport users not the community or County unless the County has excess funds around which seems doubtful when they can not even patch the roads. Asking the general public to carry any expense for the airport is a public relations disaster in the making and just plain wrong if contemplated. Forming an Airport District for taxing authority would seem to require a vote of the general public. The airport is of such limited use to the general public that folks would properly see it as a give away to a special interest group. If the airport users do not want to fund the improvements from their user fees then the project should be postponed or forgotten.

Lest anyone should discount these thoughts out of hand I would note that I have been involved with aviation since I was 12 years old and have been a licensed pilot for 40 years. I also helped operate, maintain, provide all fueling and improved two publicly owned airports that operated seven days a week as part of a three person team for 30 years, ten of those as Airport Manager. Over that time I was involved in many Airport Improvement Projects, all of the planning processes and was knowledgeable and involved in the Airport Improvement Program. That does not make me expert in the local airport or its politics but it does give me considerable insight into the workings of General Aviation Airports, State and Federal Agencies and County government as well as how the general public views airports. The two airports I was involved with were operated, maintained and improved by user fees not tax money from the general public. That is how General Aviation Airports can and should be operated and it greatly reduces outside static. If the local airport can not do that then it seems that a small special interest group would be the main benefactors of the proposed project.

My final thought is that the project is inappropriate and should be forgotten, maintain and improve what you have into a first class facility.

Thank you for opportunity to comment,

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David Nicolls