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Other Voices: Council takes consistent stance on Ann Arbor Airport expansion, until now

by The Ann Arbor News

Sunday June 28, 2009, 10:25 AM

By Barbara M. Perkins

The emergency landing on the Stonebridge Golf Club by a small plane should stop Ann Arbor leaders considering a fifth attempt at airport runway expansion. A larger, heavier twin-engine type plane that an extended runway would attract might not be as lucky as this plane was, resulting in tragedy.

For most of the 42 years I have lived in Ann Arbor, there has either been a proposal to expand the Ann Arbor Municipal Airport or one recently rejected by City Council.Â

Several councils have, by bipartisan majorities, vetoed lengthening the current runway or adding technology to allow for larger planes. They agreed that it is a safe, small airport appropriate in size to its use and the thousands of surrounding homes. The 1975 resolution to maintain the airport with a weight-bearing capacity of 12,500 pounds and a 3,500-foot runway was considered potent enough to end the debate. Councils have consistently voted to LEAVE IT AS IT IS.

Aviation interest groups at the federal, state and local levels just won't accept those decisions, so city residents need to be constantly alert for the next attempt. The airport expansion proposal for this decade is, like the rejected ghosts from the past, based on incomplete, irrelevant and misleading information. Like the others, it was first introduced as a pilot safety measure. It has now been demonstrated that none of the incidents or accidents during this decade (including a double fatality) could have been prevented by a longer runway.

With the safety argument debunked, expansion advocates have switched to a new concept: "critical aircraft." This notion, promulgated by State Aeronautics bureaucrats, is the newest attempt to justify a longer runway. This concept recommends a runway lengthened to accommodate ALL POSSIBLE PLANES IN THE HEAVIEST CATEGORY of the B-II classification the State Aeronautics Division has assigned this airport.Â Â

The heaviest planes include twin engine and small jets that exceed the 12,500 pound weight limit Council has tried to uphold. Indeed, local airport lobbyists are advocating a weight limit of 40,000 pounds. At Ann Arbor Municipal, only one based plane fits the proposed expanded criteria. It's a high-performance Cessna Citation 560XL owned by a company outside the city of Ann Arbor. With its specifications of 20,200 pounds maximum take-off weight and required 3,560-foot runway, it is unable to operate at peak efficiency at our airport, and because it is privately owned, operations figures are hard to verify. Either state aviation bureaucrats are seriously suggesting the runway be lengthened for the benefit of that one plane or are assuming that other large planes will be attracted.

This argument has not been aired except at a single meeting of the Citizen Advisory Committee closed to the public. Council did not discuss the idea before it approved - without a public hearing - a new airport layout plan with a longer runway. Council seems reluctant to hear other voices on the issue. At my requested meeting with my 4th Ward representatives, they

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unilaterally invited Airport Advisory Committee (AAC) members and then left the meeting. Other members expressed hostility to public comment speakers who raised the issue. Council members appear content to hear only views of AAC members.

I served as a "citizen advocate" on the AAC for three three-year terms, appointed by Mayors Albert Wheeler and Liz Brater. I was painfully aware that, absent the minority voices speaking for non-aviation concerns, the Advisory Committee was a lobbying group for airport expansion.Â

Twice I was censured or asked to resign for my "anti-aviation views." My views are not anti-aviation, they are pro-neighborhood quality of life and safety. Apparently no one represents non-flying homeowners among the AAC.Â

The needs of pilots whose planes fit the current configuration seem to be ignored, and there is no recognition that on the eastern edge of our county, Willow Run sits ready for use. Most disturbing, there is no acknowledgement that there are fewer than 150 planes based at the Ann Arbor airport and that the number of flights is dramatically reduced from 20th-century levels.Â

Even if all the based planes are owned by city residents - and they are not - only scores of Ann Arbor taxpayers would benefit from expansion compared to the many thousands of families in city neighborhoods and surrounding townships whose quality of life and safety would be impaired.

An amendment offered by 5th Ward Republican Councilman James Cmejrek to the 1977 rejection of expansion reads "... the Ann Arbor City Council shall not consider future changes in the Master Plan for the Ann Arbor Municipal Airport or the previous Council Resolutions referred to herein until it is first shown that there has been a substantial change in circumstances directly and adversely affecting the health, safety or general welfare of the citizens of the City of Ann Arbor." That approved resolution has never been rescinded. It should be all the protection Ann Arbor citizens require from the continual demands of airport lobbyists.

Further, taxpayers could be imperiled by declines in airport revenue due to the dramatic decline in airport operations. Council has decreed that the airport must be self-sustaining, just as other recreational facilities like pools and golf courses are.Â

This step was needed because earlier nearly \$200,000 per year was taken from the general fund to pay off airport bonds. In this budget crisis there are no general fund dollars to spare; council has considered denying funds to the Burns Park Senior Center, Project Grow and more, because they do not generate enough revenue to be self-funded. Any acceptance of federal money would commit the city to support the airport financially for 20 years regardless of the facility's ability to support itself. Declining operations could put us back in the unsustainable situation of using general fund money to support an enterprise fund beneficial to few.

If the choice between fully funded city service and lengthened runway were put to a vote of Ann Arbor taxpayers, there would be overwhelming support for projects that benefit thousands, not hundreds. City Council owes it to voters to respect past council actions and address the financial stakes, as well as the negative effects on property values and safety for neighborhoods.

Dr. Barbara Perkins is a retired professor of American literature. She has served on the boards of Huron Services for Youth and HelpSource. With her husband, George Perkins, she has authored several books and circumnavigated the world on the Cunard liner Queen Elizabeth II.

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COMMENTS (13)[Post a comment](#)

Posted by **AAVoter** on [06/28/09 at 4:05PM](#)

Ms. Perkins

Thank you for expressing so eloquently what many of us think about the AA Airport.

It makes absolutely no sense !

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Posted by **SalineDion** on [06/28/09 at 11:03PM](#)

Dr Perkins has really placed the city council on the spot. Well done. Something is foul here and in politics when something smells there usually is money involved. It makes no sense to have the runway expanded. Shifted 150 feet to the SW maybe.....but for the city council to be in support of this expansion can only mean some suspicious envelopes have been passed under the table.

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Posted by **harryphysio** on [06/29/09 at 10:29AM](#)

Thank you Dr Perkins for taking the time to inform us about the history of previous attempts to expand the airport.

We can only hope and trust that this current City Council will look out for the interests of the majority of AA residents as well as past Council's have done.

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Posted by **ARBisSafe** on [06/29/09 at 12:00PM](#)

Excellent and informative article by Dr. Perkins !

One has to wonder when will the City Council start questioning the information and spin they get from their "Airport Advisory Committee" ?

Ask your elected officials where they stand on the issue. Some of them are up for reelection.

Now is the time for them to take a stand on this issue. Now will be the perfect time for them to put an end to this insanity !

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Posted by **skypirate** on [06/29/09 at 4:48PM](#)

Ms. Perkins, the emergency landing on the golf course was not "lucky" it was most likely the result of a pilot doing exactly what he was trained to do although I do not know the exact cause of his engine failure. The runway extension is necessary for everyone's safety. Flagship air charter and others are already operating the kinds of "heavy" aircraft that you say will be "attracted" to the airport.

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Posted by **AntiHypo** on [06/29/09 at 5:36PM](#)

SkyPirate.

You miss the point.

Obviously the tail-dragger pilot did an excellent job.

OBVIOUSLY, just like ALL of the other accidents and incidents, **IT HAD NOTHING TO DO WITH RUNWAY LENGTH !**

I appreciate how you so nicely explain the REAL push behind this scam: "Flagship air charter and others are already operating the kinds of "heavy" aircraft".

But once again, and in a true fashion of the "Airport Advisory Committee" Spinners, you fail to tell the whole story.

So let me help you out: PrivateAir's Piaggio and the Citation used by Avfuel (A Private Co.) while operating out of ARB now, the ARE NOT operating at full takeoff gross weight. They can NOT carry all the fuel and all the payload.

That is EXACTLY what Dr. Perkins said.

Now since I hate HYPOCRISY, I can't let the rest of your nonsense left unanswered. You said:

"The runway extension is necessary for everyone's safety".

Simply said: **Nonsense !**

For the sake of **SAFETY, of thousands of people in the surrounding communities**, the runway should be left **AS IS !**

Allowing light twins and biz-jets fly out of ARB at **FULL TAKEOFF GROSS WEIGHT** is insane ! It is akin to playing Russian Roulette with the lives of thousands of people.

I am sure you know that every aircraft's performance is tailored to certain runway length and meteorological conditions.

The 3500' runway is an EXCELLENT FILTER to prevent future disaster.

As Dr. Perkins said, previous AA councils have realized this fact and many residents actually like the small airport.

The emergency landing at hole # 5 was a proof that this "short runway filter" works just fine. Had this been a longer runway and a heavier aircraft, the stall speed would have been higher, reaction time shorter and the end result not as "romantic".

Keep the dialogue going ! It will help in enlightening folks who fell victims to special interest groups spin, half truths, innuendos and flat out lies.

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Posted by **63Townie** on [06/29/09 at 7:38PM](#)

Quoting Dr. Perkins letter: "Council seems reluctant to hear other voices on the issue. At my requested meeting with my 4th Ward representatives, they unilaterally invited Airport Advisory Committee (AAC) members and then left the meeting. Other members expressed hostility to public comment speakers who raised the issue. Council members appear content to hear only views of AAC members."

This sounds similar to others who expressed concern over Council's attention (or lack thereof) at public comment sessions during Council meetings. It seems that some may be turning a deaf ear to their constituent's concerns, (especially where money is concerned) and I find this troubling.

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Posted by **AAPolska** on [06/29/09 at 11:00PM](#)

63Townie.

"This sounds similar to others who expressed concern over Council's attention (or lack thereof) at public comment sessions during Council meetings. It seems that some may be turning a deaf ear to their constituent's concerns, (especially where money is concerned) and I find this troubling."

They BETTER be paying attention to this issue. If they make the wrong decision and extend the runway, they will place several communities at RISK, while also increasing risk of REAL (As in non-fictional) overruns.

They better do their homework and pay attention.

As Dr. Perkins said, the status quo is a no-brainer. I agree. ARB while busy yet continues to decline, in single engine traffic is close to LAST in the state in the more serious IFR traffic (I think they had around 150 IFR departures during 2008).

As such, it makes NO business sense, especially not when there is a REAL and SAFE airport next door. It makes no 'safety to pilot sense'. And for sure it makes ABSOLUTELY no sense when it comes to safety and quality of life of the neighboring communities.

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Posted by **FltInstruct** on [07/01/09 at 2:42PM](#)

Hey SkyPirate.

You said:

>>Flagship air charter and others are already operating the kinds of "heavy" aircraft that you say will be "attracted" to the airport.

Are you talking about PrivateAir, the charter company which requires two fuel stops to get to the west coast for what it would cost(probably even more) you to fly first class on an airline NONSTOP ?

Ya, I am certain they'll be in business for a long time (wink wink...) So, HEY, by all means, let's extend the runway, after all there have only been 5 other charter companies at ARB that went out of business.

SkyPirate, most of us live here longer than these companies stay in business. We actually DO SUPPORT the AA economy and schools. One would think our safety should count for something in this discussion.

Have a great day.

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Posted by **skypirate** on [07/02/09 at 11:40AM](#)

Flight Instructor:

"Are you talking about PrivateAir, the charter company which requires two fuel stops to get to the west coast for what it would cost(probably even more) you to fly first class on an airline NONSTOP?" No - I was talking only about FLAGSHIP and I wasn't making a case either way for a business model.

AntiHypo:

"Allowing light twins and biz-jets to fly out of ARB at FULL TAKEOFF GROSS WEIGHT is insane ! It is akin to playing Russian Roulette with the lives of thousands of people."

"I am sure you know that every aircraft's performance is tailored to certain runway length and meteorological conditions."

Your two sentences don't make sense and are mutually exclusive. On a very cold day with a good headwind, a light twin or a biz-jet might be able to fly out of ARB at full TO Gross Wgt even without the runway extension. As far as roulette with the lives of 1000s of people...I tell my kids not to exaggerate...let's keep it real. The only person "allowed" to determine max TO wgt for conditions is the PIC and I do know that.

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Posted by **AntiHypo** on [07/02/09 at 12:09PM](#)

Pirate.

You said:

"...let's keep it real. The only person "allowed" to determine max TO wgt for conditions is the PIC and I do know that."

Once again, you prove my case !

IF (again IF) you run out of runway, it is "pilot error" . Which is precisely why

not even ONE incident is attributed to a "short runway at ARB.

You said:

"On a very cold day with a good headwind, a light twin or a biz-jet might be able to fly out of ARB at full TO Gross Wgt "

What about all other (not cold and not enough headwind) days ?

You said:

"even without the runway extension"

Well then ...why are we even discussing extension ? If it is not needed for a HEAVY twin, for sure it is not needed for almost ALL of ARB aircraft which are single engine ?! (Note: A Single Engine aircraft only needs less than one HALF of the EXISTING runway for takeoff or landing).

And last you said:

"I tell my kids not to exaggerate...let's keep it real".

Please make sure to inform the Chairman of the Airport Advisory Cmte, of what you tell your kids...

After all, I am not claiming 11 "OVERRUNS" or that the 950' extension will only be reflected in one of the "parallel" runways (For crying out loud ;-) and only in one direction...

It appears with their zeal to SPIN and twist FACTS, the Airport Advisory Cmte has lost whatever little touch it had with reality.

Please help them out Pirate !

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Posted by **Longfellow51** on [07/08/09 at 8:23PM](#)

With little time left before the Ann Arbor News closes its doors and takes down the site, I have created a discussion venue for those who are interested in continuing the various on-going (and new) debates.

The site is called: Ann Arbor Yacking

annarboryacking.com

Membership is free, and signing up is similar to the registration we went through here.

If any of you are interested in volunteering to serve as a moderator, please follow the link requesting moderation help in the messages list.

I wish to thank the Ann Arbor News for all it has done in the past, and wish its staff and owners luck in their future endeavors.

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Posted by **pilotvoice** on [08/12/09 at 12:24PM](#)

After reading all of the comments about the preceding article, it is clear that the individuals in this forum have reached a point of desperation.

"--IF (again IF) you run out of runway, it is "pilot error"--"

It seems that AntiHypo is assuming that the aircraft are impervious to defects and anomalies. I consider this statement to be a personal attack on pilots.

If you purchase a home adjacent to an airport, it is "community error"

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