

## Mayor Christopher Taylor and Members of City Council

Once again the members of the Airport Advisory Committee and the Airport Manager are requesting the Council to lengthen the main runway at the Ann Arbor Municipal Airport. As long-time residents of the city and citizens who have served several terms as non-pilot members of the Advisory Committee, we are distressed to see this proposal raised once again.

We have seen the AAC function as a lobby group for expansion proposals at least once in each decade for the past half century. As citizen representatives we have been minority voices during several of these prior campaigns, and it has not been a pleasant experience. Aviation enthusiasts do not wish to hear the views of other city taxpayers, who have in the past, overwhelmingly opposed expansion.

Current Council members have told us that they are now hearing only the pro-expansion case and that the same arguments used in prior decades are being recirculated. While a working session of Council may soon be scheduled for the Airport Advisory Committee, it is important to note that there has been no chance to assess citizen opinion because there has been no public presentation of the proposal.

Let us respond to arguments we have heard repeatedly and which are apparently being re-circulated.

Safety—the runway, as currently constructed, is safe. There have been no incidents related to runway length. All recorded incidents have been attributed by investigators to “pilot error” or “equipment failure.” No attention has been accorded the safety of persons or structures in the surrounding area, yet all of the fatal accidents originating at ARB have occurred outside the airport. Two persons were killed in 2001 in a crash on S. State in Pittsfield Township. Three died in Pittsfield in 1989. One committed suicide in 1978 west of ARB. The pilot and two passengers died when a plane slammed into the yard of a home near Pattengill Elementary School in June 1973. The proposed longer runway would have planes taking off at low altitude over heavily populated residential and business areas.

Larger planes—advocates claim it is important for “economic development” that large planes be able to take off and land fully loaded and fueled at ARB. Landing and take-off privileges cannot be denied to any pilot. If the pilot of a large, heavy, high-powered plane chose to try to use ARB, he/she could not be refused. The only safeguard is local control of the length and weight-bearing capacity of the runway. Council can exercise that control only by refusing to lengthen or strengthen the runway. Any serious accident might result in a major lawsuit against the City, which has been forewarned of its potential liability. It should be noted that the control tower is operative only half of the time; to protect the underlying aquifer, no winter de-icing is allowed, but there is no protection from lead in aviation fuel leaking into our drinking water, and no security check of people or cargo takes place at ARB.

Expansionists dismiss nearby Willow Run Airport as inconvenient or unattractive. United States presidents arrive in our city by utilizing the superior aviation and security facilities there, and then traveling by helicopter or motorcade to their destination. Chief executives of major corporations doing business with the University do the same. Pfizer and Warner-Lambert, when they operated here, flew regularly into Willow Run.

At least four prior Councils have listened to expansion proposals and voted not to expand, but to maintain the airport as it has been for years. We urge you to take advantage of their wisdom and decline to re-hash the same stale material.

Robert Gunn (2 terms on the AAC)

Barbara Perkins (3 terms on the AAC)