

Airport Study Committee
Pittsfield Municipal Airport
Pittsfield, MA 01201
Monday, May 16, 2016

Members Present:

Thomas Sakshaug, Chair
Councilor Melissa Mazzeo
Councilor Chris Connell
Jonathan Lothrop
Mike Lyon
Jeff Cook
Chris Pedersen
Ashley Persip

Members Absent:

Donna Todd Rivers

Also Present:

Bob Snuck, Airport Manager
Richard Dohoney, City Solicitor

Chair Thomas Sakshaug called the meeting to order at 6:01 p.m. and announced that the meeting was being recorded in accordance with Mass. General Law.

1. Roll Call: See above for attendance.

2. Approval of Minutes April 27, 2016 and March 9, 2016: March 9, 2016 - Motion to approve made by Chris Pedersen. Seconded by Jonathan Lothrop. April 27, 2016 - Motion to approve made by Chris Pedersen. Seconded by Jonathan Lothrop.

3. Discussion with City Solicitor about hangar, Westwood, and other airport leases, based on categories and questions developed at last meeting:

Councilor Mazzeo inquired about the Westwood lessees, sublessees, and corresponding lot numbers. Dohoney confirmed he has not reviewed or conducted an analysis of any of the leases at Westwood. Dohoney suggested that research of Westwood business relationships could be best accomplished by an ad-hoc citizen's committee and the topic should be included our recommendation for the mayor's staff. Councilor Mazzeo stated that she was not prepared to make a recommendation to the mayor and suggested the committee consult professionals from other airports.

Councilor Connell noted that the petition called for a cost-benefit analysis and stated that the committee could not complete the analysis without knowing if the existing leases are legal. He continued saying the committee needs good numbers and information in order to provide a recommendation.

Councilor Mazzeo expressed concern about unsigned and incomplete documents, asserting that the committee needs to figure out Westwood before providing a recommendation.

Bob Snuck said the information from the FAA says the FAA provided the money for the Westwood expansion. The documentation says the leases were approved for non-aeronautical use but also says the airport money must go to the airport. On the other hand, CDBG has its own grant assurances for developing the land. We need grant assurances from CDBG and the contract that was signed for that grant. You can ask for a release from CDGB funding in perpetuity due to the conflict with FAA. The FAA can intervene on the leases.

Chris Pedersen inquired about the original ownership of the property in terms of acreage, which agency purchased which land, and how many acres were from the FAA. Snuck confirmed all seven lots were generated from one family and that we would need to do a title search to get the information.

Richard Dohoney noted he would need to be given direction from the mayor to complete any research but that compliance work should be done with clear goal in mind. If it is the desire of the city and commission to move out of the leases, it's something that could be explored. Jonathan Lothrop suggested working with PERC to get the original leases and resolve the issue around the revenues from those leases as best we can.

4. An explanation for the public about the frequent helicopter flights around the airport and city:

Bob Snuck explained that army helicopters have new navigation system and they are doing time sensitive training, some which needs to be in designated mountainous terrain. There is increased activity in our air space as a result and, unfortunately, we cannot restrict numbers of flights or times. It should ease shortly.

5. Discussion of recommendations to be made to the Mayor and City Council:

Councilor Mazzeo asked Mike Lyon to conduct research and provide figures that allow us to make more specific recommendation related to fee increases. Specifically, she inquired about increasing fees without further investment to the facility in a way that would allow us to remain competitive. Mike Lyon encouraged the committee to look at the big picture in terms of how to develop the airport instead of nickel and diming.

Mazzeo and Chris Pedersen discussed how to get the community excited about the airport and better educate public about the facility and its value. The airport employs 70 people, and Mike Lyon expressed concern about what the committee is looking to accomplish – are we seeking to close?

Jeff Cook suggested the committee align its approach to developing and delivering recommendations and consider the voices of Pittsfield citizens in the surrounding area if the airport were to be regionalized.

Councilor Mazzeo, Councilor Connell and Jonathan Lothrop presented opinions about how deep the committee should go – should we do the work or give recommendations for others to complete the work? Snuck requested time at a future meeting to share airport activities that might be of interest to the community.

6. Discussion of agenda items for future meetings:

Chair Sakshaug asked the committee to submit agenda items and FAA questions for the next meeting.

7. Adjournment:

Motion to adjourn made by Councilor Connell. Motion seconded by Chris Pedersen. Meeting Adjourned 8:40 p.m. Respectfully Submitted, Ashley Sulock