

The Future of Pearson Air Museum

Background

Since Congress incorporated the 366 acre Fort Vancouver National Site in 1996, including the M.J. Murdock Aviation Center/Pearson Aviation Museum Complex (Museum Complex), the partnership between the City of Vancouver (City), the Fort Vancouver National Trust (Trust), and the National Park Service (NPS) has been successful due to the collaborative working relationship and focus on growing the entire historic site to become a vital community, regional and national asset.

Since 1995, the Museum Complex has grown to become a major tourist destination, educational center for area youth and an important historical aviation center for researchers and enthusiasts alike. It resides within the grounds of the Fort Vancouver National Site and sits on NPS land, which was acquired in 1972 from the City as part of a 72- acre purchase, including the seven acres on which the Museum Complex was developed.

More than \$4.2 million was raised from community members, the City, businesses and others to build the Museum and renovate adjoining buildings, with the M.J. Murdock Charitable Trust contributing nearly \$3 million in grant funding. Since 2005, the Museum Complex has been sustainably operated by the Trust on behalf of the City of Vancouver with an annual budget of over \$300,000. Of this amount, the Trust provides more than \$30,000 in direct operational and education programming support , with the remainder primarily derived from event rentals, as well as admissions, memberships and general donations. From 1995 until 2005, the Museum Complex was operated by the Pearson Field Historical Society, which provided similar financial support, and both the Society and the Trust invested in the acquisition of historic aircraft, as well as other exhibits. In total, there has been a community investment in the Museum Complex through the City and our nonprofit organizations of at least \$8 million, while the NPS has made no material contributions, other than allowing the development of the Museum Complex on their land.

Current Issue

Since May 2011 the Trust has been in discussions with the NPS concerning the Trust's operation of the Museum Complex. There is a Cooperative Agreement (Agreement) in place for Museum operations between the NPS and the City executed in December 1995. That Agreement was to remain in effect until 2025, with extensions thereafter. The Trust has served as the City's designated agent to operate the Museum since the Trust and the City entered into a sub-agreement in February 2005.

However, on February 1, 2013 the NPS terminated that Agreement after seeking to have the Trust sign a new Agreement. Among other changes, the proposed new Agreement would have required:

- NPS approval of all education and interpretive programming developed by the Trust up to a year in advance. NPS would also prohibit the Trust from entering into sub-agreements with education partners and would require that current relationships and agreements with education partners be transferred to NPS management.
- NPS approval of all events inside and outside the Museum Complex through individual special use permits with very restrictive criteria for approvals.
- NPS approval of all Trust income and expenditures associated with the Museum Complex, although the NPS would bear no financial responsibility for operational or capital support for the Museum Complex.
- Reduction in the land and building footprint of the Museum Complex, hindering the programs and operations of the Museum.
- Transfer of ownership and management of the Trust's collections and exhibits to the NPS.
- Unilateral authority of the NPS Superintendent over all programs, activities and events.

These are just a few of the demands contained in the proposed new agreement from the NPS which the Trust cannot accept.

The NPS justified this imposition of control simply because the community built the Museum Complex on seven (7) acres of NPS property. Since the Trust would not comply with these new terms the NPS terminated the current agreement that was to remain in effect until 2025.

As noted above, the NPS has not provided financial support for operations and they did not materially contribute to the development and rehabilitation of the Museum Complex buildings. All of the exhibits and collections, including aircraft, are either owned by the Trust or are on loan to the Trust by private donors, for which the Trust has a stewardship responsibility. This is why the Trust moved those assets to its hangars at Pearson Field.

Among the many impacts of this forced move are two very significant outcomes. The Trust needs to move established STEM (Science Technology Engineering and Math) based educational programs such as the summer-long aviation camps and Exploring Careers in Aviation Program – in partnership with the Clark County Skills Center - to the Trust's hangars on Pearson Field. In addition, the more than 100 community events held annually at the Museum Complex will have to find new venues, which will be a hardship on the many charitable organizations the Trust particularly enjoys supporting with special nonprofit rates.

The only way these programs, activities and events can be preserved is to remove jurisdictional authority of the M.J. Murdock Aviation Center/Pearson Aviation Museum Complex from the NPS and place it under the authority of the City of Vancouver. The City would then continue to partner with the Trust in its stewardship of the Museum Complex on behalf of and for the benefit of the community and the region.

After all, our community members paid for the development of the Museum Complex and have sustained this wonderful asset. The Trust believes it belongs to our citizens, and if you agree the Trust encourages you to support the City Council and our Congressional Delegation to advance legislation to change oversight of the Museum Complex from the NPS to the City. Their contact information is below.

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