



421 Aviation Way
Frederick, Maryland 21701

T. 301-695-2000
F. 301-695-2375

www.aopa.org

January 8, 2008

Honorable Joanne Twomey
Mayor, City of Biddeford
205 Main Street
Biddeford, ME 04005

Dear Mayor Twomey:

The Aircraft Owners and Pilots Association (AOPA) represents the general aviation interests of 413,000 members, more than two-thirds of the nation's pilots – including 2,157 of our members in the state of Maine. On behalf of our membership, AOPA is committed to ensuring the future viability and development of local general aviation airports and their facilities as part of a statewide and national air transportation system.

I am writing to you to express the Association's serious concerns regarding a December 21, 2007 newspaper article which appeared in the *Biddeford-Saco-OOB Courier* concerning a local petition drive which will place a voter referendum question on the November 2008 ballot. This question asks if voters approve closing the Biddeford Municipal Airport. Statements made in the article indicate the potential closure of the airport would occur within one year of successful passage of the referendum measure.

We are confident that the City, as the legal sponsor of the airport, is fully aware of the contractual obligations the City entered into with the Federal Aviation Administration (FAA) in exchange for receiving Airport Improvement Program (AIP) funding from the FAA for airport improvements. Paramount among them is the commitment by the City of Biddeford that they will continue to operate the airport as an airport for twenty years from the date of the last AIP grant received. This provision of the contract with the federal government provides for the protection of the public investment in the airport and an opportunity for the airport to contribute to the local economy. According to the United States Department of Commerce RIMS-II model, for every dollar spent at the airport, an additional \$2.53 is spent locally. In 2006, the Maine Department of Transportation found that the Biddeford Airport contributed \$3,623,500 in direct and indirect economic benefits to the community.

AOPA is aware that the City adopted an update to the airport master plan in 2005 and is currently in the process of conducting an Environmental Assessment to evaluate environmental impacts associated with upgrading the runway safety area at the end of Runway 6. Further, the City has future projects in the planning process for repaving the runway, removing obstructive vegetation, building new hangars and installation of a wildlife/security fence around the airport. Each of these projects is indicative of an airport sponsor who is committed to ensuring a safe, compatible airport operating environment that balances the concerns of the community with continuing access to the nation's air transportation system and safety for those on the ground and in the air.

The process to close an existing airport that is part of the National Plan of Integrated Airport Systems and the Maine State Aviation System Plan as Biddeford Municipal is would be unlikely to succeed. Even if undertaken as a result of the vote, it will be a costly and time-intensive process that will be subject to review by several agencies. Ultimately, the FAA has the final

Honorable Joanne Twomey
Page 2
January 8, 2008

decision regarding closure of an obligated airport and that usually comes at a price to the airport sponsor. It is not a decision that can or should be made lightly and it will not happen immediately upon passing any referendum by the Biddeford city voters. It may well be that the value of the airport land, if sold for development, would not cover the costs associated with studies and litigation that will surely ensue with any effort to close the airport.

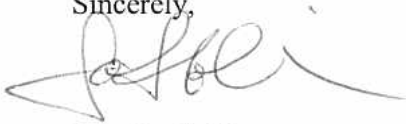
We encourage the City to fully discuss the process and ramifications of closing a federally obligated airport with both the Maine Department of Transportation and the FAA. Further, we would strongly suggest that the petition proponents be made fully aware of the City's federal and state obligations to operate the airport so that they are not laboring under false expectations.

Finally, we suggest that a series of public meetings be held to fully explain all facets of this proposal and to take public comment so that a more accurate measure of the citizens concerns can be discerned.

Let us be clear that AOPA is opposed to the closure of Biddeford Municipal Airport and feel that it serves a vital purpose in the national air transportation system. Just as the City would be hesitant to close off access to Interstate 95 or restrict U.S. Route 1 from passing through the City, so should it be hesitant to cut off aviation access to the City by closing the airport.

Thank you for your consideration of our views on this issue. If we can be of further assistance please contact us at 301-695-2200.

Sincerely,



John L. Collins
Senior Liaison
Airports

cc:

Members of the Biddeford City Council
Jennifer O'Bryan, Aviation Policy Specialist, Maine Department of Transportation
Donna Witte, Airports Program Specialist, FAA New England Region Airports Office
Craig Dotlo, AOPA Northeast Regional Representative
Alan Lyscars, AOPA Airport Support Network Volunteer B19