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August 6, 2008

Honorable Ed Martin
Mayor
City of Venice
401 West Venice Avenue
Venice, FL 34285

Dear Mayor Martin:

The Aircraft Owners and Pilot's Association (AOPA) represents the general aviation interests of 414,000 members nationwide, more than two-thirds of the nation's pilots – including 31,883 who reside in the state of Florida. On behalf of our membership, AOPA is committed to ensuring the future viability and development of general aviation airports and their facilities as part of a national transportation plan.

AOPA is concerned with the lack of action needed to enhance the safety and vitality of the Venice Municipal Airport (VNC). Further, we are extremely discouraged at the City Council's recent decision to call for the resignation of the Venice Airport Advisory board members.

City Must Make Airport Safety a Top Priority

Despite calls for action from AOPA, the Federal Aviation Administration (FAA), the city's airport advisory board, the Venice Airport Business Association, the Venice Aviation Society, Inc., and other aviation experts, the city continues to pursue alternatives that move the airport further from a state of compliance with Federal Aviation Standards as codified through 14 C.F.R. Part 151, Federal Aid to Airports.

Of specific concern is the present need for safety improvements to runway 4-22 that will not be funded until the city produces a master plan update product to the FAA. We strongly urge the city to make the safety of the airport users and the surrounding community a top priority. Evidence of the city's interests in moving forward to address these very serious safety concerns will be provided when the city holds to its commitment to provide the master plan update to the FAA by August 31, 2008.

Airport Advisory Board Recommendations Prove Valuable

It has been AOPA's experience that airport advisory boards provide great value to airport sponsors while filling a key role in educating local elected officials on the value of the local airport and the need to ensure safety and compliance with federal obligations and standards. Based on AOPA's close monitoring of the issues surrounding VNC, the airport board has been a real asset to city officials through their education initiatives and the informed guidance to the City Council.

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Despite the fact that the guidance of the board may run contrary to the opinions of those who serve on the City Council, the city would be well served in maintaining the current airport advisory board members and acting on the solid guidance they have offered the city's elected officials. Advisory bodies like this should not be filled with "yes-men", but rather with individuals who can offer the city their expertise and good judgment.

Previous planning decisions, changes to airport standards and natural growth have all been factors in planning the airport's future development. With the FAA's grant assurances in place, the city has an obligation to fully protect the airport from incompatible land uses and to ensure the full utility of the airport is maintained.

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

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read "Heidi J. Williams", with a long horizontal flourish extending to the right.

Heidi J Williams
Senior Director
Airports