



421 Aviation Way
Frederick, Maryland 21701

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

www.aopa.org

November 30, 2010

Mr. Jerry H. Bulloch, P.E.
Public Works Director
City of St. George
175 East 200 North
St. George, UT 84770

Dear Mr. Bulloch:

On behalf of the Aircraft Owners and Pilots Association (AOPA), I want to thank you for your October 13th letter responding to John Collins. Mr. Collins and I have discussed your response with members that have been in touch with us regarding the relocation of general aviation (GA) operations to the new airport. Rather than viewing our letter as adversarial, we would hope that you would consider it as advocating for our members, who are concerned about what the future holds for them during this period of transition. It is in that spirit in which we hope to continue this conversation.

We are pleased to hear that the city has spent a significant sum on completed GA facilities at the new airport, and that you are ready for GA hangars to be built. The Association welcomes the construction of new airport facilities provided that all GA operators at the old airport are accommodated in a fair and reasonable manner and that all GA operators who wish to relocate to the new airport are established in new facilities prior to the closing of the old airport. We have also found that, despite the stated best intentions of an airport sponsor to do so, when a new airport serves both general aviation and scheduled airline operators, it is usually the airline side of airport development that receives the most attention. We have seen that occur first hand many times, most recently with the replacement of the Panama City International Airport (PFN) with a new Northwest Beaches International Airport (ECP). In that case, the airport authority provided AOPA and tenants with 5 years worth of written promises that general aviation needs would be completely met with new facilities in place when the new airport opened. They were not! The new airport operated for over 5 months before GA operators were completely accommodated. GA operators with businesses to conduct could not do so for an extended period of time.

With this in mind, I am certain that you can understand the Association's concerns regarding the condition and availability of GA facilities at the new airport, as well as the terms on which they are being offered.

Your letter indicated that "some tenants find the lease terms acceptable." While this may be so, we are concerned for the many who have expressed their apprehensions to us. We would be interested in hearing from you the exact number of tenants that have executed new leases and what percentage that represents of your total GA tenants. With the Federal Aviation Administration (FAA) master record for the existing airport showing 166 based aircraft at the airport, we would also be interested in learning how many of those aircraft will be accommodated at the new airport on opening day, or how quickly thereafter you expect to be able to accommodate the remaining aircraft.

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We have also taken the opportunity to share what we believe is the current version of the lease being offered to tenants at the new airport with our legal counsel. In our discussions, counsel has advised us that the terms and conditions in the lease in our possession are amongst the most onerous and restrictive they have ever encountered at similar airports, and would be reluctant to advise a client to sign such a document.

While we can appreciate that, according to your letter, the city has made a number of concessions to accommodate hangar relocation, our past experiences, including with Panama City's relocation process causes us to continue to have serious concerns about this project. Ultimately, Panama City was told by the FAA that they must hire a relocation expert to assist the GA tenants. Has St. George retained these types of services as well?

Clearly, despite the meetings and other communications you have had with the pilot community at St. George Municipal Airport, many tenants continue to be extremely apprehensive about the City's plans for the transition. Accordingly, we invite you to redouble your efforts to demonstrate to our members and their Association why the transition to the new St. George Airport will not be troubled with the same string of broken promises as befell tenants in Panama City, Florida, and ensure that all existing tenants at the old airport will be accommodated at the new airport on opening day. If this action cannot occur, on their behalf we must insist that the existing airport not be decommissioned until such time as all tenants have been relocated.

AOPA stands ready to assist in this effort. If you believe that conducting a meeting of all the parties involved (city, FAA and tenants) would be productive, we stand ready to attend such a meeting in St. George.

Sincerely,



Bill Dunn
Vice President
Airport Advocacy

cc: Daniel D. McArthur, Mayor
Gary Esplin, City Manager
Rick Crosman, Airport Manager