



MARK R. BAKER
President and CEO

July 19, 2024

Mr. Greg Poschman, Chair
Pitkin County Board of County Commissioners
530 E. Main Street, Suite 302
Aspen, Colorado 81611

Dear Chair Poschman:

On behalf of the nearly 100 Aircraft Owners and Pilots Association (AOPA) members associated with Aspen-Pitkin County Airport (KASE), I am writing to request that you implore your fellow board members to mandate establishment of a KASE aeronautical users forum where airport users have a more regular (weekly) opportunity to both obtain status updates from and provide input to the contract negotiations between Pitkin County and Atlantic Aviation.

While AOPA recognizes the legal sensitivities involved with an active contract negotiation, Federal Aviation Administration (FAA) policy expects sponsors to materially involve aeronautical users in the airport policy making process. With contract negotiations currently estimated to conclude in the September 2024 timeframe, thus far, KASE aeronautical users have only had irregular meetings with airport administrators where this subject was discussed. Although those meetings have been informative and well-intended, they thus far have not provided a transparent view into either the areas of negotiation nor any clear mechanism by which inputs into the process can be provided on a routine basis. Both [FAA Rates and Charges policy](#) and [FAA Order 5190.6B Airport Compliance Manual Chg3](#), para 18.5 speak to the requirement to involve aeronautical users with airport policy and reinforce the fact that airport compliance with rates and charges policy is mandatory and a matter of Federal law.

Particularly given that the final contract ramifications will echo for decades to come, AOPA is seeking assurances from the Pitkin County Board of Commissioners (BOCC) that they will require weekly opportunities for KASE aeronautical users to both stay informed and provide inputs into both contract negotiation and future airport planning processes. Airlines for instance routinely negotiate the rates and charges they pay to airports and as a result, have leverage in discussions that impact their access to and operations on airports. General aviation deserves the same consideration.

Specific AOPA/Pitkin Pilots Association requests for BOCC consideration are detailed [here](#). KASE is a public-use airport, not a private airport, and subject to federal airport laws. It is also a publicly funded airport, has received \$77.3 million in FAA Airport Improvement Program funds since 2005, plus a recent \$3.4 million grant for rehabilitation of the existing taxiway pavement, and as you are aware, is subject to federal grant assurances in connection with that funding.



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According to The Aspen Times, the county accepted a multimillion-dollar bid for a 30-year FBO lease that includes base rent and fuel flowage fees significantly higher than what the FBO has paid in the past. The article also suggests the annual base rent is proposed to increase from \$211,829 to \$1.75 million, and the minimum annual guaranteed fuel flowage fees will increase from \$120,000 to \$12 million in the first year and \$18 million in subsequent years.

Atlantic's claim that their enormous increase in fees paid to the county will not result in increased fees charged to airport users seems unrealistic. Since the lease negotiation process thus far has not been transparent, we question how Atlantic can sustain these required payments to the county without increasing fees on pilots. AOPA sent [this](#) related letter last October but received no response from the BOCC. We have serious remaining concerns as the county considers a long-term contract with a private FBO which grants the FBO near-total control over parking and alters the ALP to potentially *reduce* planned future GA parking in exchange for hundreds of millions of dollars over the contract term while ignoring the legitimate concerns of other aeronautical user classes. Related AOPA FAA grant obligation-related concerns are outlined [here](#).

It is time for Pitkin County to choose a different path for its only public airport. For the benefit of all of its citizens and stakeholders, the county must pursue fair and reasonable airport policies with respect to rates, charges, and parking availability for residents. The national aviation system works because it is a network of airports which all play a role in balancing traffic, and it is vital to ensure that light general aviation aircraft are a significant and growing part of the aviation ecosystem nationally and at KASE. We look forward to increased communication and transparency between the county and its local general aviation community.

Sincerely,

cc:

Steve Child, Vice Chair, Pitkin County Board of Commissioners
Patti Clapper, District 1, Pitkin County Board of Commissioners
Kelly McNicholas-Kury, District 2, Pitkin County Board of Commissioners
Francie Jacober, District 5, Pitkin County Board of Commissioners
Ry Neiley, interim County Attorney, Pitkin County
Dan Bartholomew, Director, Aspen/Pitkin County airport
Diane Jackson, Deputy Director, Aspen/Pitkin County airport
Joseph Manges, FAA Office of Chief Counsel
Kevin Willis, FAA Director of Airport Compliance
Chuck Garrison, Director, FAA Northwest Mountain Region - Airports Division
Pete Doyle, Compliance Program Officer, FAA Northwest Mountain Region
John Bauer, Manager, FAA/Denver Airports District Office