



AIRCRAFT OWNERS AND PILOTS ASSOCIATION

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March 20, 2007

The Honorable Ron Badowski
Mayor
Town of Wickenburg
Wickenburg Town Hall
155 N. Tegner St, Suite AZ
Wickenburg, AZ 85390

Dear Mayor Badowski:

The Aircraft Owners and Pilots Association (AOPA) represents the general aviation interests of 411,000 members, more than two-thirds of the nation's pilots – and including 12,124 members in the state of Arizona. 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 system.

We are writing to express our strong opposition to a proposal under consideration that would allow development of a substantial residential community within 3,400 feet of and along the extended centerline of Runway 5/23 at Wickenburg Municipal Airport (E25). We are aware that the Federal Aviation Administration (FAA) has already expressed their concerns about this proposed development as well. As the airport's sponsor and with ultimate jurisdiction of zoning authority within the city, it is the responsibility and duty of the Town of Wickenburg to protect the airport from incompatible land uses. The town has received Federal Airport Improvement Program funds under the Airport Improvement Program (AIP). Those funds were tied to federal Grant Assurances – a contract with the FAA. One of those federal assurances requires the airport sponsor to ensure compatible land use around the airport and protection of the approaches and departures to and from the airport. Not only will appropriate compatible land use zoning restrictions protect the airport and the \$8.4 million Federal investment in it, it will also enhance the safety of the citizens and residents.

In our 68 years of experience in working to protect and maintain America's general aviation airports, we see time and time again that close-in residential encroachment of airport operational areas can be the first step toward local residents calling for the ultimate closure of an airport. Once a developer completes his project and moves on to the next development site, it is the local municipality that must deal with potential noise and over-flight debates by its citizens.

The Honorable Ron Badowski

Page 2

March 20, 2007

AOPA strongly believes that it is poor public policy to simply look at short-term financial gains without fully considering the potential to put the citizens of Wickenburg and aircraft operators at risk. Allowing residential development directly under the approach and departure path of the airport is promoting of incompatible land use within the town and not in the best interest of the airport.

Some states have extremely restrictive regulations when it comes to developing residential developments near public-use airports. The State of California has gone to great lengths to protect the statewide system of General Aviation airports. In preparing the *California Airport Land Use Planning Handbook*, the California Division of Aeronautics commissioned a study of aircraft accidents around airports in 1993 and updated it in 2002. The Institute of Transportation Studies at the University of California, Berkeley compiled the accident data. They found that 50% of accidents at airports with runways of 6,000 feet or more in length occur within 5,000 feet of the runway. This handbook is available online at <http://www.dot.ca.gov/hq/planning/aeronaut/htmlfile/landuse.php>.

California has one of the best compatible airport land use programs in the country and in order to ensure compatibility with airport operations they established safety zones and basic compatibility qualities. These are listed in Table 9B of the planning handbook. The proposed development at E25 would fall into Zone 3 known as the inner turning zone and in which residential uses should be limited to very low densities if not deemed unacceptable by noise. This proposal does not meet that standard.

It is for the above reasons that we strongly oppose the construction of Hermosa Ranch development and request that the Town take the appropriate steps to continue to protect the airport.

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

Sincerely,



John L. Collins
Senior Liaison
Airports

cc:

Miles Johnson, Town Planner and Airport Manager, Town of Wickenburg
Kimchi Hoang, Program Manager, FAA Los Angeles Airports District Office
Barclay Dick, Director, Arizona DOT Aeronautics Division
Stacy Howard, AOPA Western Regional Representative
Denny Tyron, AOPA Airport Support Network Volunteer E25