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June 3, 2010

Mr. Dennis Ackerman, Chairman
Zoning Board of Appeals
City of Taunton
15 Summer Street
Taunton, MA 02780

Dear Chairman Ackerman:

The Aircraft Owners and Pilots Association (AOPA) represents the general aviation interests of 415,000 members, more than two-thirds of the nation's pilots – including 7,078 of our members in the state of Massachusetts. 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 this letter concerning the granting of a variance to allow vehicular access to a parcel of land adjacent to the Taunton Municipal Airport from Westcoat Drive, which we understand to be a private driveway leading to the airport. Our primary concern is that this access will allow residential development within and under the traffic pattern for Runways 12 and 22 and adjacent to the T-hangars area. Such development is generally considered an incompatible land use so close to an active airport due to noise and over flight considerations. AOPA strongly recommends not allowing such a development and requests that the Zoning Board of Appeals rescind the variance. Furthermore, from discussion with some of our local members, it appears that Westcoat Drive may not meet the statutory requirements to be used as a public way to provide access to the property.

It is important to note that the property in question would be subject to over flight by aircraft regularly using Runways 12 and 22 for normal aeronautical activities, including takeoffs and landings. Our experience indicates that the repetition involved with these activities may prove less than acceptable for persons occupying potential dwellings in that location, prompting them to eventually call for restrictions on the access to and use of the airport. This would negatively impact the utility and efficiency of the airport and may cause the City to be in non-compliance with their Federal grant obligations with respect to compatible land use. It is a far better application of public policy to encourage a more compatible use such as commercial or light industrial activities. Please remember that the airport represents a significant public investment, and care should be taken to allow it to function as planned.

It is for these reasons that AOPA must strongly object to the variance and requests that it be rescinded. Thank you for your consideration of our views on this matter. If we can be of further assistance please contact our staff at 301-695-2200.

Sincerely,

John L. Collins
Manager
Airport Policy