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www.aopa.org

September 15, 2010

Honorable Levin Harrison, President
Talbot County Council
Courthouse
11 North Washington Street
Easton, MD 21601

Dear President Harrison:

The Aircraft Owners and Pilots Association (AOPA) is a not-for-profit membership organization representing the general aviation interests of over 412,000 members nationwide with over 7,180 in the State of Maryland. Since 1939, AOPA has been committed to ensuring the safety, future viability and development of general aviation facilities as part of our state and national transportation system.

We are writing you to urge swift action to advance the airport administration's proposal regarding the topping or removal of trees that currently impact Federal Aviation Administration (FAA) required airport safety zones at Easton/Newnam Airport (ESN). The need to undertake this project was first identified in 2003 during an Environmental Assessment study for another project at the airport. Without removal or topping, these trees reduce the full utility and even the overall safety of the airport, which could be a violation of the County's obligations to the federal government as the sponsor of the airport.

Most elected officials are unfamiliar with the FAA's Federal Grant Assurance requirements. These assurances are codified in federal law as Title 49 United States Code of Federal Regulations §47107. Such technical matters are left to airport administration. However, when an airport sponsor such as Talbot County accepts airport development funding from the FAA, a contract is entered into with the FAA which includes 39 grant assurances.

There are several FAA Grant Assurances that come into play with the aforementioned project.

Grant Assurance 20 – Protection of Approaches

To prevent, insofar as it is reasonably possible, the growth or establishment of obstructions in the aerial approaches to the airport. (The term "obstruction" refers to natural or man-made objects which penetrate the imaginary surfaces as defined in Federal Air Regulation Part 77, or other appropriate citation applicable to the specific agreement or conveyance document.)

Grant Assurance 21 – Compatible Land Use

To take appropriate action, to the extent possible, to restrict the use of lands in the vicinity of the airport to activities and purposes compatible with normal airport operations.

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The airport's administration has gone to great lengths to meet the requisite legal process and mitigate any environmental impacts that might be associated with the removal and trimming project. Additionally, the County is to be commended for taking action to purchase a 21-acre easement as part of this mitigation process. Yet, the trees remain uncut.

We ask that you move rapidly to gain all additional approvals and approve completion of a project that is long overdue. Doing so will restore the full utility and safety of Easton/Newnam Airport.

Thank you for considering our views on this important matter.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Bill Dunn", with a long horizontal flourish extending to the right.

Bill Dunn
Vice President
Airport Advocacy

cc: Councilman Phillip Foster
Councilman Dirck Kartlett
Councilman Thomas Duncan
Councilman Cory Pack