

VERO BEACH AIRPORT COMMISSION MINUTES
Friday, April 21, 2023 – 9:30 a.m.
City Hall, Council Chambers, Vero Beach, Florida

PRESENT: Chairman, Louis (Buck) Vocelle; Vice Chairman, Arthur Hodge; Members: Carole Jean Jordan, Joseph “Danny” Markford, Alternate Member, Dr. Stephen Kepley and Alternate Member, Philip Canal **Also Present:** Airport Director Todd Scher; City Attorney, John Turner and Senior Administrative Assistant, Rita Chartier

Excused Absence: Carlos Halcomb

1. CALL TO ORDER

The Chairman called today’s meeting to order at 9:30 a.m.

2. APPROVAL OF MINUTES

A) January 20, 2023

Mr. Hodge made a motion to approve the minutes of the January 20, 2023 Airport Commission meeting. Mrs. Jordan seconded the motion and it passed unanimously.

4. PUBLIC COMMENT

Mr. Vocelle opened and closed public comment with no one wishing to be heard.

5. NEW BUSINESS

None

6. OLD BUSINESS

None

7. AIRPORT DIRECTOR’S MATTERS

A) Update on Breeze Airways

Mr. Todd Scher, Airport Director, stated he sent out a report that outlines what they are working on at the Airport (on file in the City Clerk’s office). He reported that Breeze Airways began their flight service to the Vero Beach Regional Airport on February 2, 2023. They really did not know what to expect or how well the service would be received, but in the first two (2) months Breeze carried 11,000 people through the Airport. He said that is a figure that amazes him, because he did not expect those types of numbers this early in the process. He explained that airlines use the term “load factor” to determine if a route is viable or profitable. He said load factor is the number of seats available compared to the number of seats that are sold. Airlines like to see a 65 to 68 percent load factor as a breakeven point and a 75 to 80 percent load factor as a profitable route. He announced that in the first two (2) months of operation in Vero Beach, the combined inbound and outbound load factor for Breeze Airways was at 88.9 percent. Even in April there were seven (7) or

eight (8) outbound flights that were oversold. He said the Airport recently received an updated flight schedule from Breeze and they are currently selling tickets through November with two (2) flights per day and seven (7) days a week. He explained that they did experience a few delays flying up north due to the weather, but more than 90 percent of the flights are within 20 to 30 minutes of their scheduled time.

Mr. Canal asked how are the logistics with C.J. Cannon's and the baggage claim area working out.

Mr. Scher reported that they have an outdoor baggage claim area under a tent and after the passengers pick up their luggage they exit through the lobby of C.J. Cannon's Restaurant. At this point, everyone seems to like it and they think of it as quaint. They were originally worried about parking issues, but that has not materialized. In Vero Beach people don't tend to drive to the Airport and park their car, but instead they have a neighbor or family member drop them off and pick them up. The Airport has 80 parking spaces in the long term parking and there are seldom no more than 10 cars in there. Logistically, getting the people from the terminal to the baggage claim and out to be picked up is a little rough, but it only lasts for about 10 minutes. He said they are working on modifying two (2) former banquet rooms that C.J. Cannon's used to lease into a dedicated baggage claim area with restrooms, but that will probably take a year or two.

Mr. Hodge said the load factors Mr. Scher quoted are certainly impressive, but he is curious to know how many of those passengers are from outside of the local area.

Mr. Scher replied that he does not have those figures, but he would imagine that a good amount is from outside of Indian River County.

Mr. Canal asked if Breeze has talked about expanding flights to other destinations.

Mr. Scher said they have, but they have not been specific as to where they might go.

Mrs. Jordan stated that when some people get off the plane they like to stop at C.J. Cannon's for a meal, but doing that with their luggage is a problem. She asked if there is a way people can store their bags while they eat.

Mr. Scher replied that with incoming flights they can leave their bags in the banquet room while they go eat. However, the outgoing passengers have to keep their luggage with them and not leave it unattended. He has seen people take their luggage and sit outside where there is a little more room and their bags are in plain sight the entire time.

Mr. Scher explained that the Airport never had a check baggage screening machine, but the Transportation Security Administration (TSA) just installed one on April 11, 2023, at their expense and it really expedites the process of checking the passengers in.

Mr. Canal asked if TSA is having any problems with the Breeze Airway expansion.

Mr. Scher replied not that he is aware of. They will have to see how things go over the next few months when they start staggering their flights in the morning and afternoon.

Mr. Scher said another hot topic is the Airport Master Plan. He said there is a dedicated website for the Master Plan, which is *vrbmaterplan.com* and anyone can go on there and see a video on the planning process, the deliverables that have been made public, and the deliverables that will be coming up. There is also a place for the public to leave comments or questions about the Airport Master Plan or things they would like to see. He explained that in the first eight (8) to 10 months of the process there is very little planning involved. That time has been dedicated to doing an inventory of the Airport facilities and coming up with a forecast of additional needs for the future. Those two (2) items have to be submitted to the FAA for concurrence and they will be looking at them and the Airport should have their reply by the end of next week. He said four (4) months after the concurrence date is the review of the facility requirements and eight (8) month afterwards is the alternatives identification. This is where the consultant will give them some alternatives of what they project that the Airport can handle in the future and once he has that he will be reaching out to the Airport Planning Action Committee, the Airport Commission, and City Council to receive feedback. The Facilities Implementation Plan happens 12 months after the concurrence date, so that is about a year away.

Mr. Vocelle commended them on the transparency and having a website that allows for comments.

Mr. Scher stated that their Consultant has been very easy to work with and they have a lot of experience working with Master Plans. He said the Airport Commission will have the opportunity to meet them.

Mr. Scher stated that there are a couple of Capital Project coming up, which includes the installation of a new emergency generator in June. This generator will run the entire building and is powered by natural gas. In May, they will also be doing extensive work on the air conditioning systems for the terminal building. The award of contract for the way finding signage project will be on the May 2, 2023 City Council agenda. He said the next project on the aviation side of the Airport will be the design and bidding process for the rehabilitation of Taxiway Bravo.

Mr. Vocelle asked if the collapsed culvert that was repaired will be rebuilt when they redo Taxiway Bravo, or is it sufficient as it is.

Mr. Scher stated that the design phase will tell them, but the plan was to do a full reconstruction of the taxiway. The repair he is talking about was a band-aid, but it will be addressed in a conventional manner with the reconstruction.

Mr. Scher reported that the Airport Leasing Team is busy and it has not let up. He said that Diversified Aviation will be developing a hangar complex in the midfield. This is one of the first developments to happen in that area.

Mr. Vocelle asked what is the extent of their development.

Mr. Scher replied that it will be on the property between the wind instruments and Corporate Air and is identified on the capital projects identification key that was provided to the Commission members (on file in the City Clerk's office). They will build different size hangars and a meeting room. They have also expressed an interest in expanding further

to the west, but the wind instruments are located there and they would have to be moved at someone's expense.

Mr. Scher mentioned that lease compliance is something the Airport has been lax about in the past, but now the Airport Leasing Team and Code Enforcement have been very proactive and making great strides to bring some of the long term leases up to code and to their lease requirements. The Leasing Team is also fighting a never ending battle for insurance, because insurance companies don't offer what they used to.

Mr. Scher said he had a request to talk about Safety Management Systems (SMS), because the FAA now has a rule that all Part 31 Airports must implement a SMS plan. He explained that Mr. Brandon Dambeck, Airport Operations Manager, has a background in aviation safety, so they are developing this plan in house. Mr. Dambeck is more than half way done drafting the plan, which will then be sent to their consultant for review. They have a year to submit their SMS plan to the FAA from the effective date of the ruling, so they are well ahead of the game.

Mr. Canal said he read that Skyborne Airline Academy is trying to recoup some money to cover the repairs for damages caused by Flight Safety.

Mr. Scher explained when Skyborne purchased the building from Flight Safety they felt there were some issues that should have been corrected, so Flight Safety is working with them to reimburse them for those repairs.

Mr. Scher announced that the Vero Beach Airshow will held on May 3rd, 4th and 5th, 2024 and the Blue Angels have already committed to being there. The Airshow Board will be announcing later on what other military performances will be participating.

Mrs. Jordan asked how many simulators does Skyborne have.

Mr. Scher said he does not know.

Mr. Canal replied that they have a big one (1) and a few built into desks, but he has not had a full tour of their facilities yet.

Mr. Hodge asked if there have been any discussions about Delta having any flights from here once they lease the building from Skyborne.

Mr. Scher replied no, but they just never know what might happen.

There was a brief discussion on the development of the Saint Lucie County Airport and what they are doing in regards to commercial airline service.

Dr. Kepley asked if there has been any communication with Elite Airways.

Mr. Scher replied no. He said the last time he spoke with them was in January when he requested them to remove their maintenance shed that was still on the property.

Mr. Vocelle asked for a report on the proposed Skyports lease.

Mr. Scher explained that Skyports is a company that develops infrastructure for electric vertical take-off and landing (eVTOL) vehicles. It is technology that everyone is excited about and there are some big players who have invested in it. At the moment it is still a concept and there are only a couple that are flying in concept mode. The people who leased this property want to develop it into an eVTOL terminal.

Dr. Kepley asked what would that look like.

Mr. Scher said it would probably be some landing pads and a terminal building for passengers. The vision for these vehicles is that they would carry maybe up to eight (8) people for a range of 100 to 150 miles. It has still not been determined if they will be piloted or unpiloted. It is an interesting concept and a lot of airports are delving into this and they are being encouraged by the Florida Department of Transportation Aviation Office to consider and support this technology. They are working on the lease with them now, but it will be quite different since there will be no fuel or fuel taxes involved.

Mr. Canal asked what is the reason for the Aviation Museum withdrawing their lease for Airport property.

Mr. Scher replied that the proposed rental rate for the property was a little too steep for a start up museum. He explained that as a federally obligated Airport, the use of Airport property has to be at a fair market value. They are allowed to reduce the rate for aviation educational type uses but it was still not low enough, so they are looking for an off Airport sight.

8. CHAIRMAN’S MATTERS

None

9. MEMBER’S MATTERS

None

10. CITY ATTORNEY MATTERS

None

11. NEXT MEETING DATE

A) July 21, 2023

The next Airport Commission meeting is tentatively scheduled for Friday, July 21, 2023 at 9:30 a.m., in the City Hall, Council Chambers.

12. ADJOURNMENT

Today’s meeting adjourned at 10:08 a.m.

/rc