

**Chatham Airport Commission
Response to
Dr. Michael Tompsett's Letter
November 2020**

Note: Responses are in blue text.

Tompsett Letter
Cape Cod Chronicle
Nov.11, 2020

Airport Com Not Acting In Good Faith

Editor:

I am sure that Mr. Fessenden is a nice guy, but like other pilots, he shares their lack of consideration for the residents of West Chatham and shows an ignorance of FAA airport design for safe airports. For the record, the town signs FAA agreements that as “owner and sponsor of the airport, it shall not give up its rights, powers and authority to own and operate the airport.” Those economic numbers for Chatham Airport are misleading. They appeared in a brochure apparently designed to enhance state funding for MassDOT, using undisclosed data and a stated multiplier of 3.

MassDOT Aeronautics routinely conducts surveys and collects data on the economic impacts associated with airports on the Commonwealth’s economy. The details of the modeling employed in the State’s study can be found at <https://www.mass.gov/economic-impact-study>.

Neither the airport commission (AC) principals nor the AC have acted in good faith. They have approved plans without public participation and disregarded FAA directives to engage the community. The first plan required 30:1 approach surfaces, which did not even clear houses at the top of Great Hill, and required 40-plus objectionable avigation easements at great cost to the homeowners and their property values.

The Airport Commission has built-in public participation at its regularly scheduled Commission Meetings since the inception of the Master Plan project. The idea of combining the public participation process into regularly scheduled Commission meetings was discussed and approved by MassDOT and the FAA during the scoping of this project. Both funding agencies approved the scope of work and funded the Master Plan project with this exact process in mind. There is no record or statement by the FAA or MassDOT claiming that the Commission has disregarded their directives for community engagement. Both MassDOT and FAA have been part of the Master Plan project since it was funded.

The latest plan proposes the same approach guidance but stripped of all the FAA requirements for safety. Chatham has a 3,000-foot runway but the FAA says in AC150/5300-13A that “The runway must be at least 3,200 feet.” This plan still requires avigation easements, and removal of eight acres of trees and the bike path on the far side of the airport. There are already homes, stores and a state highway designated by the FAA as “unacceptable” in zones required at the ends of the runway to protect people. Most concerning is the fact that approaches in poor visibility are recognized by the FAA as more dangerous than visual approaches, and accordingly the areas of these zones would be increased to include more homes.

The Airport Commission does not have the power or authority to implement approaches, nor would it pursue implementing approaches that would “strip away requirements for safety.” Any proposed approach must be reviewed and vetted by the appropriate FAA lines of business for safety and approval rests solely with the FAA.

If the Airport Commission chooses to “do nothing” regarding new approaches, there are still trees that represent safety hazards to the existing approach surface that must be mitigated.

The Airport Commission is evaluating the impact of the proposed Master Plan projects, including any effect on the bike path. At this time, it is unclear what impact, if any, the Master Plan projects will have on the bike path.

Regarding the RPZ's, the Airport Commission is seeking to remove obstructions to the approach surface and RPZ to increase safety for pilots, passengers, and neighboring properties. Removal of a known safety hazard (trees) is a first step to increase the safety.

Nowhere in the Master Plan, including the ALP does it show an increased RPZ as suggested.

The plan would obviously encourage more five-ton noisy charter turbojets. There is no proposal to change the physical configuration of the runway; therefore, the various aircraft operating at Chatham today is not expected to change. Further, the forecast of aircraft operations and type of aircraft utilizing the airport is not expected to change. This is outlined in Chapter 4, *Forecast*. The design aircraft (which all projects at the Airport are designed for) is not changing. This is also stated in the Master Plan.

The plan allows approaches in poor weather to 250 feet above the runway before the pilot needs to see the runway, putting planes at approximately 100 feet above the houses on Great Hill.

Presently, the approach minimum ceilings are 600-ft at CQX. While Approach Procedures with Vertical Guidance may provide vertical guidance down to 250-feet, there are many other factors that FAA Flight Procedures consider when publishing an approach. Not all approaches with vertical guidance are afforded minimums of 250. There is nothing in the Master Plan that suggests 250-foot minimums. FAA Flight Procedures will evaluate any proposed approach and if the proposed approach is in fact unsafe, the FAA would not allow for this. Minimum ceilings do not affect height above the ground and objects on the ground during any approach.

The plan includes straight-in, which is regarded by airline association pilots as dangerous, where there is no control tower.

Numerous pilots, professional and recreational, speaking during Airport Commission meetings and in conversation with commissioners, have stated that straight-in approaches are safer than circling ones.

The AC has approved a 10,000-gallon jet-fuel tank, and further the airport manager was given a concession for turbojet charters. Chatham Airport is also a member of the National Plan of Integrated Airport Systems, which allows scheduled service for 2,500 boardings a year. The cost of the proposed plan would just be a down payment leading to spending \$15 to \$20 million, including a \$5 million terminal building.

The Master Plan is a blueprint for long-term development. However, the Master Plan does not commit the Airport, MassDOT, or FAA to funding any of the proposed development projects. Each year, the Airport meets with the funding agencies to review development proposals and evaluate their justification, merit, and need. It is not unusual for projects to be deferred based on lack of funding, need, or a change in Airport priorities.

The airport is constrained by a short runway, Great Hill, and residential development with “unacceptable” populated safety zones. Safer bad weather landings can continue to be made at nearby Barnstable Airport. The goals of the airport commission’s plans seem to be not to preserve the airport, but to develop it for increased commercial traffic, change the character of Chatham, decrease residential property values and decrease safety, for the benefit of a few.

The AMPU does not call for increasing commercial traffic. Chapter 4, *Forecast*, which is approved by the FAA does not support an increase in commercial traffic. Further, the Master Plan does not have plans for amenities/facilities to specifically serve commercial traffic. Commercial traffic is limited by FAA regulation as well as runway capacity (for specific types of aircraft). The Commission is not making plans, nor are there any plans, for it to become a Part 139 airport (an airport permitted to facilitate scheduled passenger-carrying operations using aircraft originally designed with more than nine passenger seats).

The Commission’s emphasis has always been on increasing safety, preserving the airport and minimizing impact on the neighbors and the community.

Michael Tompsett
Chatham