

Chatham Municipal Airport FAQ

What is the History of the Airport?

Wilfred Berube assembled eight parcels (103 acres) of land in the late 1920s to fulfill his vision of creating an airfield in Chatham. Following more than a decade of private ownership and operation, in 1940 the Massachusetts Aeronautics Commission approved the airport for commercial use. Nauset Airways conducted scheduled commercial flights to and from Boston, New York, Nantucket, and Martha's Vineyard from the late 1960s to early 1970s.

In addition to the runway paving in 1951 there were facilities for seaplanes to land in White Pond until the early 1990s.

In 1949, Berube sold the property to the Town of Chatham with the stipulation the land be used as an airport in perpetuity. The airport has since been recognized in the Federal Aviation Administration's (FAA) National Plan of Integrated Airport Systems (NPIAS), making it eligible for Federal and State Airport Improvement Program (AIP) funding.

Chatham Airport has been the starting point for numerous aviation careers: military and civilian pilots, aircraft technicians, airport managers and aviation business owners, including that of Dan Wolf – former state senator – founder and president of Cape Air.

How is the Airport Funded?

A revolving fund supports ongoing operations and general maintenance. Revenues for this fund are currently derived from:

- 1) the Airport Service Management, a lease agreement between the Town of Chatham Airport Commission and the Fixed Base Operator, Cape Cod Flying Circus.
- 2) 12 Town/Airport owned hangers
- 3) A fishing-gear-storage area
- 4) Land leased to the adjacent VFW Post

Additionally, major repairs of the Town owned airport buildings are funded via capital requests, in the same manner as other Town Departments such as the Harbormaster, Parks and Recreation, and Conservation. Expenses are shared for most big ticket items with FAA and MassDOT Aeronautical. These expenses include Runways, Taxiways, Airport Lighting, Aids to Air Navigation, Fencing, Security Enhancements, SRE Buildings, Snow Movers, etc. The airport gets an allocation from the FAA and Mass DOT each year which it can save or use for approved projects on the Airport 20 year Master Plan. The FAA and Mass DOT recognize that small towns/cities cannot fund all these items by themselves that benefit the general public by having an airport. In these big projects the FAA typically pays 90%, the state 5% and the Town 5%.

Similarly, capital improvements projects (CIP) for airport infrastructure, safety, navigation aids and planning projects are typically eligible for federal Airport Improvement Program (AIP) funding. The breakdown of the funding for these is generally 90 percent federal, five percent state and five percent

Town contribution. As an example, the Town approved a \$16,000 contribution toward the purchase of a \$330,000 loader for snow removal, thereby relieving the Town DPW of responsibility for snow removal at the airport.

During the past 10 years, more than \$6 million has been provided through the federal AIP for major safety and infrastructure improvements. These federal and state funds provided not from taxes on the general population but rather from the Airport and Airway Trust Fund, which draws support from sources such as aviation-fuel taxes and user fees.

How is the Airport managed? Chatham Municipal Airport is overseen by the Chatham Airport Commission, which consists of seven commissioners appointed by the Board of Selectmen for three-year terms. Larger airports are frequently managed and staffed by municipal employees who report directly to the airport commission. For a small airport like Chatham such a structure would be expensive and unwieldy. Many small airports have agreements that combine the functions of airport management and fixed base operation into a single contract. Chatham has adopted an Airport Management Services Agreement with Cape Cod Flying Circus Inc. (CCFC) to run and manage the airport's daily operations as well as provide specific aviation services to the public at no cost to the Commission/Town. The Agreement includes a \$35,000 yearly escalating lease payment to the Commission. In exchange for this the Commission grants CCFC the right to collect rents from one of two sets of Town owned hangars and other concessions at the airport.

Are there any plans to expand the airport? No. The main feature of any airport, which determines its capacity, is the runway length. Chatham Airport has had a 3001-foot runway for decades, which is, thanks to both physical and environmental barriers, its limit.

How does the Airport benefit the Town of Chatham?

First and foremost, Chatham Airport provides a gateway for both residents and visitors to travel to and from Chatham. In the summer season, it offers an alternative to automobile and boat transport, and brings thousands of visitors into our Town. These visitors become customers of businesses in town including shops, restaurants, hotels and our many other attractions. Although it is impossible to directly measure the exact economic benefits which are attributable to the airport, the Massachusetts Department of Transportation periodically conducts a study to estimate these benefits. In the last study conducted in 2019, Chatham Airport was found to have an annual economic benefit of approximately \$14,000,000. For more details, click on the following link: <https://www.mass.gov/massachusetts-statewide-airport-system-plan>.

The airport also provides 25 full-time, part-time and seasonal employees with jobs, thus generating some \$450,000 in payroll for the local economy. Work is also generated for Cape and regional contractors to maintain and repair airport facilities.

In addition to the economic benefits, there are numerous tangible and intangible benefits to having the airport. Students in Chatham periodically visit the airport and have a unique opportunity to learn about aviation. The airport also provides an internship to a Monomoy High School student. In June, the airport hosts a free open house family event to educate the public with displays of aircraft,

cars, and model trains. Recent years have also featured warbirds and military helicopters. Attracting over three thousand visitors in 2019, the event also holds raffles to benefit local charities such as the Monomoy Community Services, Angel Flight N.E. and Turtles Fly Too.

For some who are visiting Chatham, the airport itself is an attraction, offering not only an award-winning restaurant – the Hangar B Eatery – but also the opportunity of seeing Cape Cod from the air. Many local Cape residents have discovered a new perspective seeing the shifting sands, beaches and new sea life from the air.

In addition, the airport offers a valuable public safety and emergency response capability. It is the farthest east location in Massachusetts which can provide a base for air/sea rescue for Atlantic fishing vessels. In case of storm disaster with disruption to roadways, the airport also provides a vital link for medical evacuation and relief supplies.

Recently Chatham Airport based pilots and businesses are participating and helping develop an informal grass-roots white shark spotting network with volunteers on the ground to attempt to give warning to beachgoers.

How busy is Chatham Airport?

Chatham has a seasonal economy, with the number of flights dramatically higher during the summer months, and much less in the winter months. Flight activity is measured in “operations” where an “operation” is defined as one aircraft either departing from, or landing at, the airport. In the last few years, the airport has employed a system to indirectly measure the number of operations by counting aircraft radio transmissions in the airport vicinity. Since pilots are not required to transmit their intentions at non-towered airports like Chatham, this measurement technique cannot be entirely accurate, and will typically understate the number of operations.

The anecdotal information from those who have used Chatham Airport over many years is that airport usage peaked in the 1980s and 1990s, with frequent lines to take off in the summer months. More recently, usage dropped substantially in the Great Recession, with activity gradually picking up as the economy has improved during the last 9 years.

Weather and wind greatly affect the direction and frequency from which an aircraft must approach the airport for landing and takeoff. Most aircraft that use Chatham Airport operate under visual flight rules (VFR) although Chatham has some instrument flight rules (IFR) navigation and landing aids. The Airport Commission is working with the FAA to bring more accurate and safer GPS-based navigation aids to the airport in the future.

How noisy is Chatham Airport?

Aircraft are inherently noisy. Chatham Airport is surrounded by residential development. This means that airport noise is an important issue. Most of the aircraft operating in Chatham have a single engine, which generates the least noise. However, to minimize the noise from all aircraft, Chatham has published noise abatement procedures in its “Fly Friendly” program. These procedures involve management of engine power and RPM as well as approach and departure procedures to impact the

least number of airport neighbors. A tri-fold brochure is available at the airport, or can be seen at: <https://www.chatham-ma.gov/airport-commission/files/cqx-fly-friendly-voluntary-noise-abatement-program>. Although the brochure is primarily intended for pilots, it can also be useful to residents who may be interested in the flight paths that aircraft generally fly in and out of Chatham. This information has also been published in the Airport Facilities Directory which pilots typically use before visiting an airport for the first time. In a continuing effort to reduce noise and also improve safety, the information in the brochure is subject to change based on input from the community and from pilots using the airport.

There are a few small jets that are capable of operating at Chatham, but historically, the number of jet operations is small. With the evolution of aircraft technology it is conceivable that small-jet operations may become more common at Chatham. However, most of today's latest small jet aircraft generate less noise than that of their older piston engine powered propeller brethren.

Do pilots pay fees to use the airport?

Pilots who have aircraft based in Chatham all pay fees for hangar or tie-down space. These fees are consistent with, or somewhat higher, than the fees charged by comparable small airports in New England. For visiting aircraft, the fees depend on whether it is a commercially operated or private aircraft and whether the stay is overnight or just for the day. Private aircraft staying for the day are not charged a fee, a policy consistent with those in effect at most small, non-tower airports like Chatham.

Why do Chatham taxpayers need to support capital projects at the airport? Doesn't the FAA require airports to be self-supporting?

From time to time, Chatham Airport has made requests to the town for capital funding. In this regard, Chatham Airport is very similar to other small airports without regularly scheduled commercial airline service. Very large airports like Logan International can be self sufficient by charging substantial fees to the airlines. The FAA recognizes that many small airports cannot achieve 100% self-support and does not require them to do so. However, as a strategy to meet the goal of becoming self-sufficient, the Chatham airport commission continues to strive for a higher level of income for the airport, without negatively impacting the number of aviation visitors. There are two ways to increase airport income that will be studied as part of the Airport Master Plan Update. The first is to build a new set of hangars and lease them. The second is to build a solar array on the Northwest portion of the airport property. Both projects promise to increase income to the airport and yet keep Chatham a "pilot friendly" airport.

On average over the past ten years, Chatham taxpayers have invested less than \$60,000 per year (approx. \$10 per person per year in the town of 6,000) in airport, and the State and Federal governments have contributed over \$600,000 per year. In return, the airport has generated over \$10,000,000 per year in economic activity for Chatham and surrounding towns. This is based on aforementioned independent studies commissioned by the Massachusetts Department of Transportation. The excellent return on investment is why the Chatham Selectmen and Finance Committee consistently recommend the continued support for capital projects at the airport.