

PDK WATCH UPDATE Newsletter January 2009

As we enter this New Year, with new leadership at the national, state, and local levels, PDK Watch Inc. also reports exciting new challenges and developments:

(1) New Legal Developments--Announcement from Open DeKalb Inc.:

Open DeKalb Inc. is on the move, having retained a new legal team to pursue enforcement of the 66,000-pound size limit on aircraft using PDK Airport.

Our new legal counsel, Berman, Fink & Van Horn, P.C., are experienced litigation attorneys in a medium-sized law firm in Buckhead. Ben Fink and Chuck Van Horn live in the neighborhoods directly affected by PDK Airport flight activity and are sympathetic and knowledgeable about our concerns. Open DeKalb board member, Susan Gouinlock, Esq., who worked on the successful Open Records case against DeKalb and PDK, has brought the new firm up to speed and will continue to work with them on the weight limit case.

Ben and Chuck's first action has been to seek full compliance by the County with our hard won Court Order of October 2006, pursuant to which the County was to produce ALL of the information it had withheld prior to the Open Records Case victory. As usual, the County is balking at doing its Airport business in public, but our lawyers are on it. Their primary focus is on obtaining compliance by the County with the 66,000-pound weight/size limit on aircraft using PDK, and they are using all available means to do so. We will announce specifics on that effort as soon as they can be made public.

We are deeply grateful for your ongoing support for the vital efforts of Open DeKalb to put a stop to the continued expansion of PDK Airport and maintain it as a safe and community-friendly public facility. As always, your financial support for Open DeKalb Inc., a 501(c)(3) not-for-profit organization, is tax deductible, and we ask for your continued donations in whatever amount makes sense for you and your family. For information on our efforts and how to contribute, please see our web site, www.opendekalbinc.org.

Fred Fuerst, M.D.

President, Open DeKalb Inc.

(2) A New Day in DeKalb County Government:

At the request of DeKalb County's newly elected Chief Executive Officer Burrell Ellis, a Transition Committee was formed to identify and review all aspects of DeKalb County government and operations in order to make them more responsive and effective. The resulting report, "Building a New Consensus for a Better DeKalb," published on December 19, 2008, calls for an overall review of County operations and makes

recommendations for each department of DeKalb County government, including PDK Airport, which is owned and operated by the County. For a link to the PDK findings and recommendations in the report, click here to download entire the report as a PDF document.

The underlying point made by the Transition Committee is that “the inclusion of viewpoints from the diverse communities and constituencies of the County is wise and will encourage active engagement from all sectors of DeKalb.” Throughout its report, the Transition Committee “urges the new administration to be intense students of best governmental practices around the country and to be open to reform and innovation based upon reasoned and careful analysis as to whether such best practices can be implemented in DeKalb.” (p. 17)

The PDK Watch Inc. Board has reviewed this Transition Report and finds both its overall tone and many of its suggestions promising. With regard to the specific findings and recommendations about PDK Airport given on page 60, the PDK Watch Board particularly finds promising the Report’s call for “a review of best practices of airports located in residential communities”; the call for the airport to develop “a detailed community relations plan” (which has never existed); and the commissioning of “an independent study to ascertain the economic impact of PDK to DeKalb County.” The PDK Watch Board is in the process of drafting a more detailed response and set of suggestions regarding these recommendations, which will be sent to CEO Ellis and the Board of Commissioners, and made available to the interested public.

(3) Noise Complaints: PDK Watch Inc. continues to receive many citizen complaints about noisy jets and helicopters flying low over residential areas. Nighttime flight activity remains among the highest citizen concerns and evidently has not been adequately addressed by the existing “voluntary” curfew between 11 p.m. and 6 a.m. PDK Watch believes that reducing Airport noise disruption remains one of the most important issues to be addressed in the future PDK Master Plan.

In the meantime, PDK Watch recommends that citizens concerned by noisy or low-flying PDK aircraft, report such problems and seek documentation of the flight disturbance, following the procedure indicated on the PDK Watch home page, www.pdkwatch.org, under “How to request flight information.” After securing that information, please email a copy of your complaint letter to the Airport Noise Director Mario Evans and to Commissioners Kathy Gannon and Jeff Rader, with a copy to me at PDK Watch Inc., as indicated in the directions on the “How to request flight information” document, above.

Despite concerns that such actions may not be effective, please remember that documenting the level of disturbance provides important data for PDK Watch Inc. to use in seeking to address these issues with CEO Ellis and the County Commissioners.

(4) Outreach to Elected Representatives:

Several important meetings with County officials were held in 2008. In April 2008, for example, several informational meetings regarding the legal evidence supporting the 66,000 lb. weight limit were held with Burrell Ellis, now DeKalb County's CEO, and with the PDK Airport Advisory Board. On May 2, 2008, PDK Watch's Executive Director Norma Herd, President Ron Dennis, and Dunwoody leader Bob Lundsten—who was a plaintiff in the original 1987 runway extension lawsuit—met with DeKalb County Commissioners Jeff Rader and Kathy Gannon to review the legal basis for the 66,000 lb. PDK weight limit and discuss its impact on the PDK Master Plan.

Following that latter meeting, Norma Herd sent a letter to the Commissioners pointing out that, contrary to their impression, the reason that the PDK Master Plan had been stalled so long was not due to PDK Watch's activities but rather to the Airport's own unwillingness to put forward a valid fleet mix document necessary for the plan Master Plan process to continue. For that letter and supporting documents, see "PDK Master Plan Letter to Commissioners Gannon & Rader" under the "PDK Master Plan" section on the PDK Watch home page at www.pdkwatch.org.

(5) PDK Master Plan Update:

As many of you may know, much of the PDK Master Plan process was put on hold in the summer of 2007 because of the FAA's failure to accept the PDK Environmental Assessment (which included the fleet mix) for the proposed flight path modifications. In the late fall of 2008, the County returned the portion of the PDK Master Plan funding provided by the FAA, for reasons that have never been fully clarified to the public. PDK Watch Inc.'s positive proposals for the Master Plan, should the full process be resumed, are provided in summary and in full form on "2006 PDK Watch Recommendations for Master Plan" under the "PDK Master Plan" section of the PDK Watch home page at www.pdkwatch.org. If other issues that are important to you are not covered in these documents, please contact Larry Foster at: larry.foster@earthlink.org.

(6) Reviews of PDK Airport Projects:

During 2008 PDK Watch Inc. investigated two major construction projects at PDK Airport to clarify what was being undertaken:

-1- Drainage Project: Responding to numerous questions that had been raised about large earth-moving activity at PDK during January 2008, PDK Watch Inc. requested that structural engineer Marc Sorenson review the engineering drawings related to the project. He indicated that all work shown on the 59 site drawings and the site technical specifications consisted of new earthwork and drain piping to improve site drainage around the runways, as well as new or relocated gravel airport security roads around the east and south ends of the main runway (2R-20L). He concluded that no runway work or new building structures were indicated on these documents.

-2- Slab Replacement Project: A major airport replacement project has been proposed that will replace 90 slabs of concrete (25 feet x 25 feet), comprising less than 10% of the total panels on the main runway. PDK Watch Inc. requested that Marc Sorenson review

the proposal and drawings for this project. He was able to determine that the thickness of these slabs corresponds to the thickness of the original runway and runway extension, so this project should not be considered a “strengthening” of the runway. Even if the new panels were of a slightly higher weight-bearing capacity, that should not affect the overall load rating of the runway, since the rating would be based on the weakest, not the strongest, panels.

(7) Ongoing PDK Watch Inc. Board Activities:

In addition to the above, PDK Watch Inc. continues to monitor a variety of activities related to PDK, including attending PDK Airport Advisory Board monthly meetings; reviewing Board of Commissioner agendas every two weeks for PDK-related items; and researching and sending recommendations to our Commissioners about PDK-related concerns.

Please feel free to share this information with others who may be interested. Thank you for your continuing encouragement and support.

Larry Foster
Director of Communications
PDK Watch Inc.