

PDK Watch Newsletter, March 1998

Compatible Growth, Not Airport Expansion

On January 14 the Airport Advisory Board approved a recommendation and forwarded it to the Board of Commissioners to develop a comprehensive plan for the land being acquired between the airport and Clairmont as part of a noise abatement buy out program. This recommendation was submitted by the Drew Valley Civic Association whose members are concerned about plans to expand the airport boundaries. Rather than move aviation operations into an area acquired through a noise abatement program, nearby residents want development that is compatible with residential and commercial areas as well as with the airport. This provides the county an opportunity to act with a vision toward the future, and we are still waiting for this action.

Noise Abatement, An Airport Obligation

Last fall the staff at the airport tested a process for identifying and notifying the owners of aircraft violating the voluntary night curfew. When problems arose in the process, rather than make the necessary corrections in the procedure, the entire process was tossed -- a classic example of throwing the baby out with the bathwater.

If you want to have the voluntary nighttime curfew observed, write a letter to CEO Liane Levetan (who also wants it) requesting the airport staff to reinstitute this noise abatement procedure. Be sure to send a copy of your letter to the county commissioners. The address for CEO Levetan and the commissioners is 1300 Commerce Drive, Decatur GA 30030.

PDK Airport's boast of being a good neighbor rings hollow as long as it does not fulfill all of its obligations to the surrounding community.

Comprehensive Plan Amendments from PDK

DeKalb County won an award for citizen participation when it developed its Comprehensive Plan two years ago. More than thirty public meetings were held which involved citizens in contributing to a twenty-year vision for the growth of the county. Currently the county is in the annual process of amending the Comprehensive Plan. Mr. Lee Remmel, PDK Airport Director, has proposed four amendments. Although these changes were required to be submitted to the commissioners by January 1, they were not presented publicly by the director until hearings on February 3 and 4, despite a meeting of the Airport Advisory Board on January 14. While the two hearings did allow for public comment, there was not enough time to make a careful study of the proposals before providing comment.

Two of the proposed amendments call for the replacement of entire portions of text about PDK Airport. This is text that was written during the original thirty-plus meetings where citizens had ample opportunity to respond. The proposed changes from Mr.

Remmel expand the scope of the Airport from being one to serve DeKalb County to one that is defined in the context of a State resource. The radical changes the director has proposed are his views and have not been before the public in the manner intended for such an important document. Here is another example of how the airport is not living up to its claim as a good neighbor.

If you wish to voice your opinion about these proposed changes, attend the next public hearing on the Comprehensive Plan. The Planning Commission is currently scheduled to conduct this hearing on Wednesday, April 29, at 7:00 P.M. in the Maloof Auditorium in Decatur.

Unreliable, Incomplete Study Goes to Board of Commissioners

The cost/benefit study of PDK Airport, which was just presented at a public hearing, focused on existing economic benefits without giving cost a thorough investigation. An initial review of the study concludes that it presents unreliable policy data for our commissioners, and it shows contempt for all citizens of DeKalb County, especially those in the neighborhoods affected by PDK Airport operations.

Even though this assessment is supported by many statements, consider these three points:

- 1) The consultant valued the airport property at \$60,000 per acre. Three years ago our county paid over \$200,000 per acre for land adjoining the airport. Did the county overpay, or did the consultant devalue the airport property to preclude “highest and best use” discussion?
- 2) Our county commission has agreed to remove residences and soundproof others at a remaining estimated cost of \$75,000,000. The report ignored this cost. Why?
- 3) In considering alternative uses, the consultant did not suggest any commercial use of land at the airport despite the widely touted International Village and the 2000-employee IRS building now under construction. Since commercial land is the most valuable tax generator, we can only assume the consultant opted to fool our commission for the benefit of airport users.

It was also noted that the consultant accepted expansion of airport activity as part of the findings.

PDK Watch had hoped for a fair and honest cost-benefit study of the airport. Since this did not happen, we urge the commissioners not to accept the results until they are revised to give a balanced assessment detailing both costs and benefits.

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