

## Rebman, Kevin

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**From:** DVStarr@aol.com  
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Finance, Development, and Environment (FD&E)

The FD&E agenda called for a discussion of the Crystal Airport Long Term Comprehensive Plan Update. In November, Committee discussion had shown that some Commissioners were giving serious consideration to the City of Crystal request to close MIC. As a result, the issue had been tabled to give staff an opportunity to respond to Commissioner questions. The Crystal tenants took advantage of the one month delay to organize a strong showing of support for their airport.

Bridget Rief, MAC Assistant Director of Airside Development, presented the Committee a summary of previous action and responded to questions they had posed. She also provided handouts of these questions and responses. Additionally presented were copies of tenant letters and staff responses to questions raised. There were ten letters including one from Bill Dunn, AOPA Vice President-Airports.

Ms. Rief had data showing that the ring of airports beyond the seven county metropolitan area did not have the capacity to house all of the MIC tenants if the airport were closed. She also reviewed potential revenue from non-aviation commercial development that is expected to help support MIC. She mentioned the Very Light Jets that are just coming on the market as being potential users of MIC. She said that there has been a trend around the country to close small privately owned airports (no federal funding) and sell the property to developers. However, there is no such trend in public airports that have received federal grant monies.

She noted that all MAC airports support business and recreational flying and there is no way to make a distinction between them. She used an analogy to highways that have commercial, business, and recreational traffic intermingled, saying that just as highways do not (indeed cannot) discriminate, neither can airports. She went on to say that many small single engine planes are used for business. She also clarified that Light Sport Aircraft currently coming on the market will need to be registered with the FAA to use MAC airports. She said that although the total number of private pilots has declined, the business share of flying has been increasing. Presently, less than one-third of general aviation operations are purely recreational.

Following Ms. Rief's presentation, Commissioner Peilen said that although she had very mixed feeling about the issue, they had nothing to do with the fine staff work that had been done. She asked Ms. Rief about FAA requirements for closing. Ms. Rief responded that since Crystal had received federal grant money, MAC would have to get FAA approval to close the airport. Commissioner Nelson clarified the description of Light Sport Aircraft, saying that both Cirrus and Cessna were building planes in this category that will be FAA registered and have an N number. They will therefore be permitted to use all MAC airports.

Next, Committee Chair Bert McKasy opened the floor to public comment, asking that comments be held to two minutes. The Crystal Airport Community Group, led by Kevin Rebman (AOPA Airport Support Network Volunteer), was ready. First to the podium was Gary Grimes, representing American Legion Post 511 and a member of the Crystal City Council for Ward 4 which includes MIC. He told the Commissioners that he was also the Chair of Crystal Airport Open House! He said the Post has been active for over 50 years and owns a hangar at Crystal. He added that they concur with the two runway plan and want to keep the airport open.

John Breitlinger, who owns a hangar with two partners, said that MIC needs more investment to make it more attractive. He added that it is a significant asset to encourage development in the surrounding communities. Mr. Breitlinger is himself a real estate developer.

Bruce Wiley, owner of 113 hangar rental units, said that his facilities housed twenty corporations' aircraft including one used regularly by the Chairman of OPUS. He added that in ten years half of the Northwest Airlines pilots will retire and MIC offers great potential for training new pilots. Mr. Wiley assured Commissioners that the poor performance of the airport was due to the cloud of closure that has been hanging over the airport. At present, he has twenty hangars available for rent. He concluded that he will invest in upgrading his properties when the cloud is lifted.

Lt. Col. Dick Johnson from North Hennepin Squadron of the Civil Air Patrol (established 1942) told the Commissioners that theirs was the first composite squadron in the United States and they had a very long history at Crystal Airport. They own their own hangar which was purchased with member contributions. Among the volunteer services they perform is educating youth in aerospace careers, flying search and rescue missions, and providing homeland security support. As an example, he mentioned flying search missions over the flooded valleys of southeast Minnesota earlier this year. He concluded by saying the cloud of closure must be lifted.

Kevin Bauder introduced himself by saying he was not a pilot but lived next door to the airport—in fact the tower crew could see what he was watching on his television! He said people he knew do not think closing is a good idea. He likes attending the annual open house. His opinion was that the airport is a good neighbor and the open space is an area benefit. He said his neighborhood is suffering just like the airport and the cloud needs to be lifted so improvements will be made. He told the commissioners that it is time to make a decision.

Calvin Fogelman said he was a flying club member at Crystal Airport. He urged the Commissioners to make a decision. He noted that the City will never be satisfied and their goal will continue to be closure. However, he said, the MAC has an obligation to be good stewards of aviation resources.

Next, Cindy Sherman, Brooklyn Park Planning Director, who had just arrived, went to the podium and said that Brooklyn Park supported the City of Crystal position. She was not aware that the FD&E Committee was taking pro-airport comments first.

John Schleter, the second member of the American Legion to speak, emphasized that Crystal Airport was the closest airport to the booming Northwest corner of the metropolitan area.

Alex Haak came to the podium to speak on behalf of Thunderbird Aviation. This flight training school operates both at Crystal and Flying Cloud Airports. He said they do not want to spend money upgrading their facility until the cloud is lifted. He pointed out that they are an employer of the City of Crystal residents.

Greg Reigel, a Crystal tenant and a director of Minnesota Aviation Trades Association, said staff had prepared an excellent plan for Crystal Airport but he had not seen any plan prepared by the City of Crystal for the land. He added that the reality of aviation use at MIC is both business and recreational.

Glenn Weibel, Chair of the Reliever Airports Advisory Council (RAAC), said that the discussion was covering items included in Chair Jack Lanners Reliever Airport Task Force Study that had been started two years ago. He said MAC had developed a business plan for Crystal Airport. He added that the city claim about safety concerns was a cover for private development. He concluded by asking the Committee to vote to keep Crystal Airport open.

Ray Zitzloff, owner of North of Sixty Flying based at MIC, said that 911 devastated Crystal Airport. He noted that his largest accounts were all corporate. He just purchased a Very Light Jet which will be able to land at MIC. He had received an inquiry from a manufacturer about setting up a service center, but at present he cannot move forward with this because of the cloud of closure.

Kevin Rebman, leader of the Crystal Airport Community Group and AOPA volunteer, reminded the Commissioners that last year his group collected 1000 signatures on a petition supporting keeping the airport open. He urged the Commissioners to vote to keep Crystal Airport open.

Ward Anderson, Crystal hangar owner and pilot, said he used his aircraft for both personal and business travel. He told of a conversation with a local resident who does not want to see the airport closed.

John Schmidt, a private pilot from St. Paul Downtown, said all pilots have an interest in keeping Crystal open. It is convenient to downtown Minneapolis just as STP is convenient to downtown St. Paul. Its safety record compares favorably with MSP and STP. He described his participation in the Young Eagles program that provides airplane rides to youngsters. He concluded that once the cloud of closure is lifted, Crystal will become a beautiful airport.

There were fourteen speakers supporting the airport. Committee Chair McKasy noted that this must be some sort of record.

Commissioner Boivin said staff had not made a proposal to close. Nigel Finney, MAC Deputy Executive Director of Planning and Environment, said that the Committee action requested was a vote for or against Option 4 (2 runways at MIC).

Next, Committee Chair McKasy invited opponents of the airport to speak.

Ann Norris, Crystal City Manager, said the Mayor had other commitments and could not attend. Ms. Norris said the City had sent in a long list of questions that had not been included in the packet. She requested the questions be answered before a vote.

Mr. Guest said he works for the city and had helped prepare the list of questions. He said the methodology used by MAC did not reflect what was actually happening at the airport. He said the fate of Crystal Airport should be a regional decision.

Committee Chair McKasy asked for comments and questions from Commissioners. Mr. Finney, MAC Deputy Executive Director of Planning and Environment, said that staff had received the city questions and were preparing answers. He committed staff to meet with the City next week to review the responses.

MAC Chairman Jack Lanners said that the vote that was about to be taken would reflect what is expected of the Full Commission. This indicated a vote for Option 4 would indeed be a vote to support keeping Crystal Airport open.

Commissioner Segal asked if comments from the two other cities involved, Brooklyn Park and Brooklyn Center had been received. Cindy Sherman, Brooklyn Park Planning Director noted that she spoke earlier supporting whatever the City of Crystal wanted.

Commissioner Williams noted that MAC does have a System of Reliever Airports. It is there for safety. The Lanners' Task Force Study made a recommendation not to close any Relievers. He said he was ready to move the motion.

Commissioner Boivin asked to table the motion until the Full Commission meeting on Dec. 17 in order to get answers to all the City's questions. He suggested that the Commissioners needed more information and made an analogy to being a school board looking at closing a school building. He said they needed to decide what was best for both the tenants and the community. He felt more study was necessary. He concluded that a vote today was just to put the issue in the Long Term Comprehensive Plan (LTCP), and not a vote to keep it open or close it.

Commissioner Nelson said he disagreed with the school analogy. He said this airport was a regional transportation asset that we need. We, MAC, cannot get it back if we lose it. "We should vote today."

MAC Chairman Lanners strongly urged the Commissioners to vote today in favor of keeping Crystal Airport open. He said that they had a duty to the long term viability of the airport system. He noted that MAC future planning was in a twenty to thirty year time frame. He concluded, "We can't close the fifth busiest airport in the state."

Commissioner Peilen, whose MAC district includes both the City of Crystal and Crystal Airport, said she had great sympathy with the City wanting to increase their tax base. However, she said, she had finally decided she must look at it from her position as a MAC Commissioner. She added that Option 4 does free up some land for commercial development. Then she concluded that after much soul searching, she would be voting "Yes."

Commissioner Segal said she would never make a demographics comment in a public forum again. She went on to say that the issue must be looked at from an economic perspective and therefore she would support the staff recommendation.

Commissioner Williams said he applauded Glenn Weibel (RAAC) and Gary Schmidt, MAC Director of Reliever Airports, for all their work.

Commissioner Williams then moved to recommend to the Full Commission that Option 4 (maintaining one primary runway and one crosswind runway) be placed in the LTCP update. Commissioner Nelson seconded the motion. Commissioner Boivin moved an amendment to table the motion. There was no second for the amendment so it failed. Chair Lanners noted that it was very important for staff to answer all the City questions prior to the full Commission meeting.

At this moment, Commissioner Landy, MAC Management and Operations Chair, arrived. After regaling everyone with the story of his drive from St. Cloud, he said that he supported the motion.

All the present Committee members except Commissioner Boivin voted yes. Those voting yes were Chair Lanners, FD&E Chair McKasy, M&O Chair Landy, as well as Commissioners Nelson, Peilen, Segal, and Williams. Other Commissioners attending but not voting because they are not FD&E Committee members included Commissioner Rehkamp and Warner. Absent Committee members included Commissioners Foley and Mars.

Due to Commissioner Boivin's nay vote, the Recommendation will be on the Full Commission Discussion agenda.

Following the meeting, Tim Anderson, MAC Deputy Executive Director of Management and Operations, commented to me that the Crystal tenants had done an outstanding job. Each speaker was brief, made a distinct point, and the audience behind them was respectfully silent.

**The Full Commission meeting will be Monday, Dec. 17, 2007 at 1 PM in the Lindbergh Terminal at MSP.** It will be very important for MIC tenants to be present to show their support for MIC. The issue will be

discussed. Public comment can be expected. Eight yes votes are needed for the motion to pass the Full Commission. So far seven Commissioners have gone on record as supporting keeping Crystal open. It is not over yet!

Vivian Starr

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