

City of Colville
Airport Board Minutes
Special Meeting
12 August 2015

The special meeting began at 7:00 pm

In attendance:

Board Members: Chair Drew Hatch, Gary Brooks, Jerry Sater, Dave Shaw, Bud Budinger, Secretary Steve Pietroburgo Absent: Daron Tate

City Council: Doug Kyle, Mike Burch

Public: Harley Howell, Jr.

USDA Forest Service, Colville National Forest: Ben Curtiss, Deputy Fire Staff, Holly Hanson, Contracting Officer (detailed), Sean Cox, Unit Aviation Officer (detailed), Jay Jurgensen, Aerial Observer

Budget: There was no budget report

Old Business: None

New Business:

This special meeting of the Board is called to discuss and decide on action to take regarding the use of Colville Municipal Airport as a helibase¹

Background:

Drew briefed the meeting on background information. The development of the helibase currently residing at Colville Municipal Airport (63S) occurred rapidly due to an escalating wildland fire situation beginning in early July. Originally one or two helicopters were stationed there and currently there are seven aircraft ranging from light to heavy ships. Each helicopter has attendant flight crew, firefighters

¹ Helibase is a term used to denote a base of operations for helicopters of various sizes used in the support of some common mission, in this case wildland fire suppression efforts. The helicopters currently based at 63S are under contract to the USDA Forest Service and are under the operational control of the Colville National Forest. They are available, however, for loan to other agencies requesting their use for firefighting missions in their respective jurisdictions. Helicopter dispatch is handled through the Northeast Washington Interagency Communications Center, located on the Washington Department of Natural Resources compound adjacent to the airport.

and maintenance personnel. In addition, the aircraft have their own fuel trucks carrying “Jet A” fuel. Due to the rapid expansion of the helibase, normal pre-planning including logistical concerns and the need for possible repairs and remedial actions did not occur. The Colville National Forest (the Forest) did reach out to the City and Dave has been billing the Forest for vehicles and aircraft stationed at the airport according to the standard use rate.²

Heavy truck traffic as well as helicopter departures and arrivals have had some negative effects on the turf runway as well as paved and graveled taxiways. The fuel trucks are heavier than the taxiways are designed for and, in addition, the heavy water truck used for dust abatement has been used with poor technique effectively displacing fine surface material. Rotor wash has also served to displace surface material while heavy truck traffic on the turf runway has caused some soil compaction and damage to the turf.

Discussion:

Drew Hatch stated that the purpose of this meeting is to define in broad terms what type of agreement we could move forward with. He then summarized a telephone conversation he had had with Ben Curtiss pursuant to calling the Special Board Meeting. He recapped agreement between Mr Curtiss and himself that the standard vehicle use charge for daily and monthly charges were just that, standard vehicle fees charged to hunters, vacationers, etc. The standard rate was mentioned to the initial Forest cadre by the Manager when the fire base was first established simply as a starting point and should not in any way be construed as the ultimate daily compensation fairly due from the Forest to the City of Colville through the eventual use agreement. Hatch made clear that the City of Colville expects nothing less or more than the way they, the FS, compensate a farmer, for example, for the farmer's temporary loss of property use. Hatch summarized further that during the phone conversation Hatch and Curtiss agreed on that point, and also agreed that reparations to the property would be in addition to the normal FS daily use fee paid out to property owners. Hatch told the Board and other attendees that the phone conversation was concluded with parties in agreement on these two separate issues, as well as agreement that use-agreements for the remainder of the fire season and for future years would be necessary and in the best interest of all concerned.

Hatch then introduced Ben Curtiss to the group and invited him to tell his understanding of reparations to be made.

Mr Curtiss indicated that he felt a simple re-seeding of the turf area should bring the turf strip back to its former condition, and he asked if there was agreement on that.

Hatch expressed that the turf strip and surrounding areas had sustained much more damaging effect than simply denuding the grass surface. He explained that vehicles as heavy as the helicopter support vehicles always crush a turf growing surface, compacting the turf growing zones, which must be aerified if they are to support growth in the future. Also, the helicopters themselves had blown substantial amounts of growing media (dirt) off the runway, despite the efforts to keep those areas wet to prevent

² See current Airport Fees, Colville City Council Resolution 13-13.

same. In addition, the vehicles had used the entry road/taxiway extensively, and that damage to those areas may not be known until after the next freeze/thaw cycle this winter, or even later. And, that these unknown factors are what necessitate a fair and generous payment by the Forest so that repairs can be made without further claim to the Forest Procurement Office. Lastly, gravel taxiways had, to a great extent, been blown into adjoining ditches by what a Board expert testified was, faulty technique. Hatch said the reparations to the area the Forest had utilized will be substantive, and asked if the Forest had its own agronomists and/or biologists who might have experience with these issues.

On this last point, Ms Hanson, from the Forest, explained that they did have such expertise, but that in some cases, depending on timeliness issues, the Forest allowed the supporting entity, in this case the City, to obtain bids from contractors and submit them to Procurement, and, if acceptable, allow the supporting entity to proceed on its own timetable. Hatch mentioned that he had already contacted such a firm in Spokane, Wilbur/Ellis, Inc., which stood ready to examine the area(s) in question and produce estimates. Hanson indicated she knew the Company and said it might be possible.

Discussion then moved on to how best to craft the necessary use-agreements. After a good-degree of discussion, it was agreed by all that a three-tiered approach was best: a 'catch-up' agreement which would have stipulated a daily fire base use fee and reparations agreement; a use-agreement for the remainder of the 2015 fire season, and thirdly, a multi-year agreement for use, as necessary, for future year fire suppression.

Ben Curtiss stated that future agreements and lease rates should build in some amount of maintenance and repair monies to account for normal wear and tear. This would be the best way to handle those costs from the Forest's point of view.

Holly Hanson stated that in order to get repairs made we would need to come up with some cost estimates and quotes for work needed. She also stressed that repairs can only bring the runways and taxiways up to pre-existing condition, to which there was general agreement.

Several attendees, including Mr. Kyle of the City Council and Dave Garringer offered that the USFS presence on the airport is a positive factor for the community in numerous ways including economy and security. Both stressed the benefits of a collaborative approach to agreement development.

Decisions:

Board member Brooks motioned that the Airport Advisory Board (the Board) advise the Colville City Council (Council) to authorize the Board and the Colville Airport Manager (Manager) to draft an agreement with the U.S. Forest Service (USFS) to effect repairs to those portions of the Airport having been used by the USFS for Fire Protection this 2015 fire season, thence to produce to the Council that document for approval. The motion was seconded by member Sater, discussed, and unanimously approved by the Board.

Board member Brooks motioned that the Board advise the Council to authorize the Board and the Manager to draft an agreement with the USFS for its use of the Airport for the remainder of the 2015 fire season, as necessary, as a fire base operations area, thence to produce to the Council that document for approval. The motion was seconded by member Sater, discussed, and unanimously approved by the Board.

Board member Brooks motioned that the Board advise the Council to authorize the Board and the Manager to draft an agreement with the USFS for its use of the Airport in future years, as necessary, as a fire base operations area, thence to produce to the Council that document for approval. The motion was seconded by member Sater, discussed, and unanimously approved by the Board.

The meeting adjourned at 8:10 pm.

Respectfully submitted,

Stephen Pietroburgo, Secretary