

HLUET Special Meeting (Airport Business Plan Update) Debrief

Contributed by Mike Brogley
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SCAPA Members,

Thank you to all the airport supporters that turned out for the Special HLUET Committee Meeting Monday, Sept. 17, 2018. Between CAAPSO, SCAPA and the SJSU Aviation Department contingent, by my count supporters greatly outnumbered the anti-airport contingent. I also would like to everyone for their great comments and their very respectful tone. That even-tempered tone was also commended by the Supervisors.

After County Roads and Airports Department Director Harry Freitas presented the staff report on the Business Plan Update, comments were opened for both sides, and there were a lot of great points by speakers commenting on the pro-airport side.

The strongest point for me was the observation that the airport opponents were pushing a false choice between Santa Clara County Airports and helping the homeless as an either-or. That point was recognized by Supervisor Mike Wasserman in his remarks at the end of the meeting. Supervisor Wasserman noted that the county has a large amount of money available to spend on housing as a result of the voters approving Measure A back in 2016, which basically put \$750 million in the bank via bond sales to fund housing projects. The County has already approved a number of projects, with 10 low cost housing projects funded in the last 90 days that will build 850 housing units, and they are actively looking for more.

Supervisor Wasserman said the housing problem in Santa Clara County is real and needs to be addressed now, not after waiting 13 years for the existing grant assurances to run out at RHV, and then waiting further years for all the various inevitable lawsuits between the County and the FAA to finally be resolved.

Santa Clara County's housing problem is separate and distinct from any question of closing Reid-Hillview airport, and bringing up homelessness or low income housing need is simply a diversion from the main question.

Aside from the homeless issue red herring, airport opponents made a number of nebulous hand-wavium proposals that involved moving everything at RHV down to San Martin, with no recognition of the scale or difficulties of that land acquisition and development effort.

The SJSU Aviation students who would have to drive some 25 miles each way to get back and forth to their aviation classes after the expanding SJSU Aviation presence at RHV is once again evicted were also swept aside with another hand-wavium proposal to in effect build an entire new college campus at the newly expanded "world class airport" in San Martin.

I can report from first hand experience that during my time at SJSU commuting the 4 miles to the SJC Aviation campus

was a major timing issue - I cannot imagine how adding a 50 miles round trip to get to aviation classes would possibly be practical.

In the end the Business Plan Update, which included the county staff recommendation to restart accepting FAA AIP grants for both RHV and E16, but also including an alternative to accept grants for E16 only, was not officially accepted from county staff and passed on to the full Board of Supervisors as we had hoped would happen.

HLUET Committee chair Supervisor Dave Cortese spoke at some length about the monetary value of the land that RHV occupies, and how the value of his family's cherry orchards were in the end surpassed by the value of the land.

Supervisor Cortese then made an official referral to county staff for them to go back and add detail on what he called "option three" with the requirements of the process of closing RHV and selling the land to developers while massively expanding E16 to "replace (the) assets" and build "the finest airport in the western United States" in San Martin - basically the "hand-wavium" option that several of the opponent speakers brought up.

Supervisor Wasserman, speaking last, touched on just a few of the many, many hurdles that would have to be surmounted pursuing this close-and-sell-RHV-and-massively-expand-E16 path, including the need to acquire the half of the RHV property that is owned by the U.S. Government at current market value at whatever point in the future this were to happen. He noted that RHV serves as a vital reliever for the San Jose Mineta International Airport, and that he was not convinced that the Business Plan Update elimination of the majority of the current RHV FBOs makes economic sense.

Supervisor Wasserman emphatically did not join in the referral from Supervisor Cortese, stating he is in favor of the staff recommendation to resume taking FAA AIP grants money for both airports.

Bottom line: The fight is not over. The County Roads and Airports staff will go off and add another supplement report section to satisfy the referral from Supervisor Cortese, and the Business Plan Update will once again be on the HLUET agenda for acceptance and then sent back up to the full Board of Supervisors for their decision.

Your SCAPA Board will continue to work to advocate for the E16 community and make our positions clear to the decision-makers, and to keep you all updated.

Thanks for your time.

Regards,

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Mike Brogley, 2018 SCAPA President