

Heliports and Helicopter Operations – Stakeholder Input Process

First Stakeholder Meeting – Wednesday, January 23, 2013

Meeting Attendees

A variety of stakeholders were able to attend the meeting, including neighborhood representatives, event representatives, helicopter operators, and property representatives. All brought different opinions and view points and spurred an interesting discussion of what would be best for Austin, as well as the different stakeholders.

Stakeholders	
Name	Organization/Group
Jeff Jack	Zilker Neighborhood Association
Max Woodfin	South River City Citizens
Pat King	Austin Neighborhood Council
Richard Hatfield	Planning Commission
Mark Richard	McRae Aviation
John Lawson	Fins Up Aviation
John Conley	Conley Sports/Live Strong Marathon
Lou Vasta	Circuit of the Americas
Steve Henry	Henry Aviation
Cyndi Collen	Bouldin Creek Neighborhood Association
Melissa Hawthorne	Barton Hills Neighborhood Association
Randy Riggs	Austin Helicopters
Brian Taylor	Capital Wings
Kurt Rohert	Austin Police Department

Staff and Consultants	
Name	Organization/Group
Dale Murphy	Austin Airport Advisory
George Farris	Austin Airport Advisory
Ernie Saulmon	Austin Airport Advisory
Shane Harbinson	Aviation Department
Loren Litner	Aviation Department
Joseph Medici	Aviation Department
Scott Madole	Aviation Department
Stephen Dick	Aviation Department
Lynda Courtney	Planning and Development
Greg Dutton	Planning and Development
Christopher Coons	RW Armstrong
Byron Chavez	RW Armstrong
Arin Gray	CD&P
Julie Richey	CD&P

Meeting Summary

The Heliport Stakeholder Meeting was started with a brief presentation to give the attendees an overview of the current permitting processes, F1 operations, and the resolution to involve stakeholders. This presentation was brief as the purpose of the meeting was to hear from stakeholders and the City wanted to be sure they had the majority of the meeting time to share information and discuss their concerns and suggestions.

The attendees were then divided into two groups to read the code, discuss their concerns and develop recommendations for improvements to the code. All came back together to hear a report from each group on what was discussed and what recommendations were made.

Presentation Overview

Following is the presentation outline with description of what was covered.

- **Introductions** – Included Airport Advisory Commission Members, Aviation Department Staff, COA Planning and Development Review Staff, and facilitators
- **Meeting Details** – Explanation of meeting format
- **Resolution** – Discussion of Resolution No. 20121108-052 including why the stakeholder process was started, that the group should work to clarify and enhance temporary helicopter facilities permit process (appropriate uses, limits on permits, public and property owner notice, authorizing permits, compliance with FAA requirements for noise and compatibility, and condition use permits), and items that the City does not have jurisdiction over (airspace, heliports outside of COA)
- **Authorizing Heliports** – Review of the current process for authorizing temporary and permanent helicopter facilities including description of City Codes Article 4 Heliports and Helicopter Operations and Chapter 25-2-861 Facilities for Helicopters and Other Nonfixed Wing Aircraft
- **2012 Formula 1 Helicopter Operations** – Comparison of helicopter traffic to a normal weekend, highlight of the effectiveness in terms of safety, maps of helicopter flight density, maps of noise complaints received, and highlights of Travis Heights neighborhood flight density and complaints
- **Working Group Structure** – Description of working groups, ground rules, and that we needed volunteers to serve as scribes and spokespersons; groups were decided by numbering 1,2 around the room
- **Breakout into Working Groups** – Each group had a facilitator and stakeholders and City staff was available to each group to answer specific questions and give interpretations of the existing code. Groups were given nearly two hours to work through the code and their comments, questions and suggestions.
- **Full Group Discussion** – Each groups' spokesperson reported on their discussion and recommendations, and next steps were shared (meeting again Wednesday, January 30 and then a final meeting a few weeks after that, City Manager would share recommendations with Council, and Council would direct to move forward with Code Amendment Process)
- **Closing** - It was requested by an attendee that in the Code Amendment Process this information be presented to the Zoning Commission before the Planning Commission; attendees were thanked for their time and participation and reminded to return for the next meeting on Wednesday, January 30

Group 1 Notes

Participants

Pat King – Austin Neighborhood Council
John Conley – Live Strong Marathon
Steve Henry – Henry Aviation

Randy Riggs – Austin Helicopters
Jeff Jack – Zilker Neighborhood Association
John Lawson – Fins Up Aviation

Scribe and Spokesperson

John Conley

Summary

Group 1 started by reading the City Code and then discussing some of the current code that they felt should remain the same. The participants in group 1 were very familiar with City Code and had a very detailed discussion about very specific recommendations to the code. The group developed points for detailed clarification of the code in general as well as the details that made up the process for temporary permits.

The three helicopter operators as participants shared a lot of detail on what happened during the 2012 F1 weekend, how helicopter operators felt the weekend could have been better, and what solutions would be good for them. Helicopter operators felt that in future years the F1 helicopter flights would be reduced by 30% to 40% as the vehicular traffic was not as bad as most predicted. These participants were also able to share a lot of information on FAA requirements, and other heliports outside of the City of Austin and Texas. Generally, the helicopter operators as well as other participants did not feel temporary use permits were the answer for F1 services.

A discussion was held by all that the City might benefit from building a permanent helicopter facility to service the central business district and the City's long range needs. Though no discussion was held on funding, it was generally agreed that the City should look into this.

The group felt that the new restriction of 18 takeoff and landings was an appropriate number for temporary permits. In addition, they agreed that public notice was not necessary for temporary permits as the new restrictions of 18 takeoffs and landings did not warrant the notice.

The group mentioned possibly having some new category or criteria for temporary facilities but did not get to complete the conversation. They felt the current temporary restrictions were suitable for events like marathons, construction, and special appearances.

Formal Recommendations

1. 13-1-184 – Insurance of \$1 million per occurrence may be low. A range of \$5 to \$10 million may be more appropriate. Ask City of Austin risk assessment department to evaluate the insurance levels. Levels may be cost prohibitive because value of helicopters may not qualify for higher limits. Establish a scale depending upon aircraft, size, and number of landings.
2. 13-1-185 C – Consider removing requirement could not be marked by "H" for private heliport. FAA requires it in some conditions.
3. 13-1-185 D – Consider changing to a private heliport could (delete "shall") use an authorized logo...
4. 13-1-180 no. 12 and 13-1-187 B – One item lists architect and engineer, the other item only lists engineer. Consider changing one of the items for consistency.
5. 13-1-181 no. 3 – Consider defining topographic features within 4,000 feet of proposed helistop.
6. Code needs to address criteria for director's decision including hours of operation, number of flights, dates for use, etc. Need to evaluate if this should be under section 13-1-182 or create a new section for temporary helicopter facilities.
7. City should consider building a permanent helipad inside the City of Austin.
8. Group approves the definition of temporary helistop.
9. City should consider adding a requirement that temporary applications should be replied to within 30 days.

10. Public notice is not necessary for temporary helistops.
11. Group 1 also approved the following sections of Article 4 as they are currently written:
 - 13-1-172
 - 13-1-175
 - 13-1-179
 - 13-1-185 A, B, E
 - 13-1-187 A, C
 - 13-1-188
 - 13-1-189

Group 2 Notes

Participants

Max Woodfin – South River City Citizens
Richard Hatfield – Planning Commission
Lou Vasta – Circuit of the Americas
Cyndi Collen – Barton Creek Neighborhood
Association

Kurt Rothert – Austin Police Department
(Spokesman)
Mark Richard – McRae Aviation
Brian Taylor – Capital Wings (Scribe)
Melissa Hawthorne – Barton Hills Neighborhood
Association

Scribe

Brian Taylor

Spokesperson

Kurt Rothert

Summary

Group 2, rather than immediately addressing the current code as written, chose to take some time to ask questions and discuss the helicopter operations during the F1 Event. They then opened a broad discussion with more of a big picture approach to this process. The following issues were raised and answered/addressed as noted:

In regards to the number of takeoffs and landings allowed for temporary permits, the group asked if the word “cumulative” referred to daily, or per event. Staff clarified that cumulative refers to the duration of the permit.

It was noted by a the South River City Citizens representative that much of the anger and frustration occurred because residents were under the impression the new ordinance referencing 18 take-offs/landings was in effect for the F1 weekend. He asked that there be very clear communication of the changes that are made before the next event.

The Barton Hills representative noted that there should be a requirement for some sort of environmental review before approving a site. This would take into consideration topography which amplifies sound (canyon) fire danger features such as greenbelts, especially considering drought conditions, etc.

A discussion of how many events would make temporary permits economically viable yielded conditions for an answer, for example it would depend on the duration of the permit. Operators noted that 18 events during a special event would not be adequate for the investment. This led to various discussions

of events vs. duration, how many permits could one operator have, and what geographic constraints would be viable.

Neighborhood representatives noted that there should be better public notifications for temporary permits and opportunity for public input before a decision is made.

The group widely agreed that the long-term solution would be to construct a permanent helicopter facility in the downtown area. One operator noted that he would not be prepared to make that kind of financial investment at this time. Several in the group agreed a City owned facility is appropriate in the future.

It was noted that there seemed to be too many events at one facility (Embassy Suites). Several agreed that there should be an increase in sites in the downtown area to accommodate the traffic, or limits on numbers of events per hour. Operators noted that limiting events per hour might prompt them to bring in larger aircraft – which do take longer to load/unload.

It was noted that there is currently no enforcement or penalty written in the code. Residents want there to be accountability and penalties if the ordinances are not followed. No specific objections were noted.

Creating a special tax, comparable to the hotel tax, to fund a City-owned permanent facility downtown was discussed, but not at great length.

One member asked if it would be legal to ask operators to comply with the fly friendly zones, and then possibly deny a permit on a subsequent request if they did not comply. Staff responded that this would not be legal based on air space jurisdiction limitations of the City.

The group discussed the possibility of requiring additional departments to review and approve the permit and the possibility of allowing approval or denial to be appealable to City Council was discussed. Neighborhood representatives encouraged a multi-department review, including environmental criteria. It was noted that any requirements that included council approval would lengthen the process and potentially discourage applicants and thus potentially affect event related revenues.

Formal Recommendations

Group 2 determined that they were all agreeable to leaving the current code as written, if a third type of permitting for special events is created. It was generally agreed that the language regarding 18 events per temporary permit was sufficient for operations such as that at construction sites. The group agreed that this third category should be a hybrid of the existing permits and that within this “special event permit” the items below would need to be addressed. They determined it would be best to return to the details of these items at the next meeting.

- Details of duration and frequency allowable, including possible geographic restrictions
- Public input in the process of approval
- An enforcement and penalty element
- Additional department review/approval/recommendation process