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Contact:

Gwendolyn Mitchell/Lingxia Meng
Office of Public Affairs
(408) 299-5119

County Supervisors to Consider Legal Options for Reid-Hillview Airport

Proposal to Study Closure Failed to Garner Support

SAN JOSE, CALIF.— Today, the County of Santa Clara Board of Supervisors considered a request from Board Chair Supervisor Pete McHugh to direct administration to study the possibility of phasing out operations at the Reid-Hillview Airport. McHugh's initial proposal included a request for reports to the Board of Supervisors regarding phasing out airport operations at Reid-Hillview and developing the site for other uses, including: 1) At the June 3, 2008 Board meeting, providing information on the short and long term potential net financial benefits to the County's General Fund, and also providing an off agenda report analyzing the legal issues associated with closing the airport; and 2) At the August 26, 2008 Board meeting, describing the formal process the Board must follow to phase out airport operations.

Under the Board of Supervisors' operating procedures, individual requests for the administration to engage in analyses and studies have to be approved by a majority of the Board members. On a split decision (2-2) McHugh's motion failed to pass. Supervisors McHugh and Blanca Alvarado supported the initial motion, Supervisors Liz Kniss and Ken Yeager opposed the motion. Supervisor Don Gage was absent.

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“The county is facing a \$225 million deficit in the coming year. With limited resources from the state and federal governments, the county will not be able to sustain the current services without creating new revenue sources,” said McHugh. “It is our obligation to look at the properties we own and understand our options.”

Supervisor Blanca Alvarado, in whose District the airport is located, initially called for the Board to support the economic benefit analysis citing the need for additional revenue and the importance of examining what the county’s needs are likely to be over the next 20 years. “We ought to take this opportunity to be visionary,” said Alvarado. “In addition to generating ongoing revenue for vital community services, this site could serve many uses including perhaps as an incubator for green businesses.”

Both Supervisors Kniss and Yeager expressed concern about the legal issues that would be associated with closing the airport and favored a more narrow review to have a report back on legal issues. They also expressed confidence that the county is moving in the right direction with the development of assets to generate revenue. One such proposal the Board will consider in June is for the development of the County Fairgrounds.

“It is premature to consider closing the airport,” said Kniss. “There are so many complex legal issues that need to be evaluated and my preference is that we gain a better understanding of those issues.”

The revised referral is limited to the legal issues pertaining to Reid-Hillview Airport and passed (4-0). The staff will report back to the Board within 45 days.

About Reid-Hillview Airport

Reid-Hillview Airport is located four miles southeast of downtown San Jose. The Airport was originally constructed as a privately owned, public-use facility in 1939. In 1961, the County of Santa Clara purchased the Airport. Presently, the Airport has two parallel runways, 726 aircraft parking spaces, and is a site for aviation-related and non-aviation related businesses.

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