

# Airport runway expansion plan publicly opposed

**BY KASSIE PETERMANN SUN FOCUS**

A citizens group that opposes the potential for runway expansion at the Anoka County-Blaine Airport held its second meeting last week.

The Concerned Citizens of the North Metro, which includes Barbara Haake of Mounds View, Ron Holch and Barry Rice of Lino Lakes and Kathy Jackanich of Blaine, led the Feb. 24 meeting at Spring Lake Park City Hall.

Last November the Anoka County Board of Commissioners Airport Committee was scheduled to vote on a resolution that would expand the east-west runway from 5,000 feet to 6,000 feet, which would upgrade the airport from "minor" status to "intermediate" status.

A public meeting was planned for Dec. 2 at Kingswood Church in Blaine, but that was cancelled after residents and city officials expressed concerns and opposition.

The Concerned Citizens group is worried the Anoka County Board of Commissioners has and may soon again consider a vote to support expansion of the airport's east-west runway.

"We feel there is a threat that might be occurring," said Haake last week. "We're trying to be very proactive so we can maintain it at the 5,000-foot runway. We are very fearful that it could become more than that."

Jackanich said that since the group first met on Jan. 29 in Mounds View, Key Air, an aircraft management company that operates out of the Anoka County-Blaine Airport has hired two lobbyists.

"It does mean they have intentions of getting this expansion," said Jackanich. They could lobby to change the legal definition of a minor airport or get legislative approval to change the airport's status, she said.

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Representatives from Key Air chose not to comment on any information presented at the meeting.

Haake said airport expansion would require an Environmental Impact Study (EIS) and an Environmental Assessment Worksheet (EAW), which would outline and describe the potential project and assess the potential impacts of environmental issues.

"It would take a long time before this would really take place," she said. "Our whole concern is just don't change the law."

Rice said he first noticed jets flying over his home during the Republican National Convention last fall.

In September a new terminal or fixed base operation (FBO) opened and according to Key Air's Web site, the FBO features multiple hangars, an executive terminal and business center.

"This has blindsided me," said Rice, adding that he researched the area before he moved and was told it would remain a smaller airport.

Rice said he's concerned if the runway expands to 6,000 feet there is the possibility it may expand to 8,000 feet, which could accommodate Boeing 737s, with additional airport upgrades.

"Where does it stop?" Rice asked. "That's what I'm concerned about."

## **Blaine council, residents speak out**

"With all the issues we have in the country today, I think there are better ways to spend time," said Blaine Mayor Tom Ryan regarding the Concerned Citizens group's efforts.

"The statistics are not true. The airport flights keep going down and down," he said. "It was never intended to be an intermediate airport and it's not going to be an intermediate airport."

"I don't see a point in going out and creating this kind of controversy when it isn't going to happen."

Jackanich responded by saying she is concerned that the county considered the issue without public input.

"That put the cards on the table that the public had to do something to get some input, and that's why we felt the need to do this," she said.

Haake confirmed some of Ryan's statements, saying that flights at the airport have decreased from 150,000 in 1999 to 70,000 in 2008.

She also said it was reported during an airport advisory commission meeting that the only planned project is a \$1 million investment involving a taxiway pavement rehabilitation for 2010.

Ryan said the City of Blaine is trying to create jobs during a down economy, and that misinformation about the future of the airport could prevent employees from moving to Blaine.

"Are those jobs enough to qualify the change in quality of life for all those people who live around that airport?" questioned Jackanich.

A Blaine resident said, "I'm offended [Mayor Ryan] would tell me I'm wasting my time on a matter that is near and dear to me. It is well within our right as citizens to organize and discuss these issues."

"If they start bringing freight or other jets in here, our property values are going to decrease and no matter how many jobs and tax-based businesses are created, it is not going to make up for that," the resident said.

Blaine City Council member Dick Swanson tried to clarify Ryan's previous comments, stating that a group like The Concerned Citizens of the North Metro needs to be careful when spreading its opposition because misinformation may halt other kinds of economic development from entering the region.

"Be responsible with what you are saying because it can undo twenty years of work [done by the council] as far as bringing economic development," said Swanson.

Blaine Councilmember Mike Bourke encouraged the informational process The Concerned Citizens of the North Metro is undergoing. "I think you're doing a good job," he said.

Bourke emphasized the City's opposition to the runway expansion.

"That's always been our position, and I don't think anyone on the City Council has wavered from that."

Blaine resident Joe Leon said safety issues have been brought to the public's attention on a regular basis, but he questions who or what needs to be protected—the pilots, the cargo, the passengers or the people at the airport.

"No one ever mentions protecting the citizenry of the area, which should be our primary objective," said Leon.

## **County, state officials address issue**

Anoka County Commissioner Robyn West said if the resolution to expand the airport to 6,000 feet comes up again, she would not support it because it's not what the citizens want.

District 51 state Sen. Don Betzold, who represents northeast Fridley, Spring Lake Park, Mounds View and most of Blaine, confirmed that Key Air has hired two lobbyists and said he doesn't want to see the airport expanded.

"With the budget (issues) at the

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Capitol, I would be surprised if anyone tried to do anything this session," Betzold said. "Nothing has happening so far. I'm monitoring it and I'll keep my eyes and ears open."

## Future of the CCNM

Members of The Concerned

Citizens of the North Metro encouraged people at the meeting to sign a petition against expansion of the Anoka County-Blaine Airport and asked for people to sign up for committees that would focus on aspects like community outreach and fundraising.

The group also encouraged people to contact elected officials and write letters to their local newspapers.

"This is going to take a lot of volunteer power," said Rice. "If you don't want the noise, you're going to have to step up and be heard."