

Alaska Department of Transportation and Public Facilities

Birchwood Airport Master Plan (AMP) Update:

Stakeholder Advisory Group (SAG) Meeting #1 – NOTES



February 9th, 2021; 1:30 – 4:30 pm

Participants

- Alaska Department of Transportation & Public Facilities (DOT&PF): Jessica Wuttke-Campoamor (Birchwood AMP Project Manager), Shawn Gardner (Anchorage Area Planner)
- Alaska Railroad: Brian Lindamood (unable to attend; no alternate identified)
- Birchwood Airport Association: Lars Gleitsmann
- Birchwood Civil Air Patrol: Wally Parks
- Birchwood Community Council: Val Jokela
- Birchwood Recreation & Shooting Park: Melissa Himes
- Eklutna Real Estate Services LLC/Eklutna, Inc.: Greg McDonald
- Native Village of Eklutna: Aaron Leggett, Carrie Brophil
- Talon Hangar Association: Dennis Serie
- Project Consultants:
 - HDL Engineering Consultants: Mark Swenson (Consultant Project Manager), Heather Campfield
 - Agnew::Beck Consulting: Shelly Wade (Public Involvement Lead), Molly Mylius, Aubrey Wieber

NOTE: Summary of Discussion by Guiding Slide (note: minor technical updates were made to the slides, including an update to the base map in slides 19-22)

Project Overview – Slides 5-7

- The purpose of this meeting is to share what we have learned so far, to get SAG member feedback on emerging themes and findings and to share preliminary information on the March 4th public meeting.
- The Birchwood Airport boundaries are restricted by land owned by Eklutna Inc., Alaska Railroad, and Birchwood Recreation & Shooting Park.
- The master planning process started in Summer 2020 with an inspection of the facilities and airspace. The project team also started a series of stakeholder interviews to learn from airport users, businesses, and adjacent landowners how they use the airport, what they like, how they would improve it, and what their future plans are regarding lands surrounding the airport.
 - The information gleaned so far informs next steps in the planning process.
 - The first of three public meetings is scheduled for March 4th.
 - Second SAG and public meetings will be in the summer, and third meetings in the fall.
 - The estimated completion date for the Birchwood AMP Update Summer 2022.

What We've Learned So Far – Slides 12-17

- HDL Engineering Consultants and Agnew::Beck Consulting conducted 35 interviews with stakeholders including pilots, hangar owners, nearby businesses, business trade groups, adjacent landowners, and flight associations.
 - Most interviewees said they like how the airport operates today and do not expect significant changes in the next 20 years.
 - The biggest concern is growing the airport, moving to controlled airspace, and losing the community feel the airport has today.
 - Suggested areas for improvement were having an on-site manager for the airport, adding a locked gate (though some also stated they do not want this), and keeping up with the growth by adding new

tie-downs, electric outlets, and hangar space. Some asked for more designated parking and a new taxiway between E and G.

Areas for Improvement – Slides 18-25

- NOTE: Need to revise the base map for future project maps. Map in slides is dated imagery. Area shown as “monofil” is Birchwood Recreation and Shooting Park property. Slides 19-22 were updated after the meeting.
- Airspace & Approaches
 - Approach airspace is limited because of JBER Special Use Restricted Area. Most frequent airport users are familiar with this and can navigate it, but it could be confusing to new users. The project team can have conversations with the Air Force to see if they are willing to move some of the restricted airspace.
 - Some want published instrument approaches, though it was not something frequently asked for. The approaches are something Federal Aviation Administration (FAA) has unilateral control over.
- Runways, Runway Safety Areas (RSAs), & Runway Protection Zones (RPZ)
 - The fence on the southwest side creates a hazard.
 - There is a need for surface improvement on the gravel runway, but potential issue with FAA funding eligibility due to current runway configuration.
 - The RSA length does not meet FAA standards.
- Taxiways & Visual Aids
 - The lights need to get upgraded. The FAA knows this.
 - Pilots want a new taxiway between E and G.
 - The “supplemental” wind cone put up by users has started falling apart. It would be good to put a new/permanent one up.
 - Precision Approach Path Indicator (PAPI) or Visual Approach Slope Indicator (VASI) is wanted on the 02L side.
- Aprons & Weather Equipment
 - Vehicle parking is desired.
 - Pilots want electric outlets at tie-downs.
 - Permanent, well maintained public restroom facilities are desired.
 - Some want an apron designated for commercial use.
 - There is a hill south of the southern taxiway between the Southeast Apron and Taxiway A that blocks the view on approach that some have asked to have removed.
 - Taxi lanes and parking areas designated for B-II aircraft are desired.
- Facilities & Access
 - The bathroom at the pilots’ lounge is maintained by the Birchwood Airport Association; this is not a DOT&PF or FAA facility/responsibility. The Birchwood Airport Association does not currently have the funds to upgrade this facility but has been working on it.
 - Some stakeholders want a controlled access gate, some do not.
 - Some stakeholders want a terminal built, some do not.
 - Some want a south perimeter road with user access, some do not.
- Safety, Airport Maintenance & Airport Management
 - Stakeholders are overall appreciative of snow removal operations.
 - Some interviewees want an on-site manager, some say the cost of an on-site manager would outweigh the benefits. SAG members noted different experiences and approaches to contacting the DOT&PF airport management. Overall, users desire manager contact information be more prominently displayed, as it is currently unclear who to call when there are problems or concerns.

- Land Use & Planning
 - One stakeholder interviewed wants an extended runway.
 - Some want a separation of commercial and general aviation use.
 - Stakeholders want better enforcement of vehicle and aircraft moving violations.
 - Some are concerned about a potential public-private partnership.
 - Users desire more hangar space, which would require the airport to lease new land.
 - The gravel ski strip is important, but the configuration needs to be improved to be safer and eligible for FAA funding.

Results from Initial Forecasts – Slide 26

- The state installed a General Audio Recording Device (GARD) to track how many planes have taken off and landed between July 21 and August 12, and September 2 and October 2.
 - That device found the airport is primarily used by small aircraft.
 - There are no changes to current use identified or forecasted.

Financial Plan – Slide 28

- The financial plan is intended to address projected growth, funding needs and sources, and any proposed changes to lease rates or use fees.
- This plan will benchmark Birchwood Airport’s operating costs against other airports in the region that provide similar service.
- The plan will provide a cash flow forecast based on the technical data and stakeholder input. We will then evaluate financial sustainability and look at a potential public/private partnership.

Potential Public/Private Partnership – Slides 29-32

- This component of the AMP is an opportunity to identify and explore potential management options with a third-party interest. Nothing has been decided.
- The intent is to see if a public-private partnership would better meet user needs over the next 20 years.
- Part of this analysis will assess the strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats of potential third-party managers.
- Stakeholders are concerned that a third-party manager would raise rates and price out some existing and future users.
- Whether the airport would still get Airport Improvement Program and FAA funding under third-party management is something that is being investigated. Loss of such funds would result in loss of interest in securing a third-party manager.
- SAG members desire continued DOT&PF management, with increased communication and transparency between the agency and airport user groups.

Additional Questions/Topics to Consider

- Could the railroad on the east side be moved to allow for airport expansion?
- Could we change the flight approach pattern? The current pattern was set up for ultralight aircraft and helicopters on the mountain side. Ultralights are not currently used at the airport.
- Could there be a designated landing space for helicopters?