

The posts below, were originally published in 2011 on the stopcta.info "Factoids" blog.
Note that many of the verification links to the original sources no longer exist due to technological 'advances' and the demise of local news publications, many through corporate media acquisition. RIP community news.

JANUARY 2011

Monday, January 10, 2011

Oh, merde

These comments were presented during the citizen's comments at the Bastrop County Commissioners Court session on January 10, 2011.

The attitude of the audience at the infamous April 13, 2009 presentation which introduced the proposed Central Texas Airport to Bastrop County is undoubtedly the reason there was almost no public mention of it again until the 381 Agreement was signed, sealed and delivered over a year later.

It's unthinkable and unforgivable that in a supposedly democratic society, a project of this magnitude would be imposed on the people of this county without any public debate as to its merit.

The whole deal stinks to high heaven.

Since the 381 was signed in June 2010, concerned citizens have been conducting research in an attempt to shed some light on this steaming pile of merde.

And since October, many of us have provided comments based on that research which criticize the deal, the project and the questionable decisions made by the Court that jeopardize the county's safety and future.

In all those months, I don't remember anyone speaking in support of the airport. The closest thing was the County Engineer's remarks solicited by the Court at the last session.

Comments to articles posted online follow much the same pattern. I think there has been one Letter to the Editor that offered support for the project.

In fact, the last memorable public support for the CTA was the Bullock Museum which happened under tight security and in Travis county far away from those who are gonna get screwed should the CTA ever come to fruition.

The CTA isn't flying with the people of Bastrop County. We know it. And you know it.

Heaping even more excuses and rationalizations and recitations of bureaucratic BS and propoganda on the pile just isn't gonna cut it. It's so sad and pathetic that our democratic system of governance has come to this . . .

Posted by noairport at 15:31 in Players, County, Voices, stopcta

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Wednesday, January 12, 2011

Truisms and Foolisms

Abe Lincoln once famously quipped, "You can fool some of the people some of the time and all of the people some of the time, but you can't fool all of the people all of the time." He was right of course, but neglected to include "I can fool myself any old time."

That's the kind of odd behavior that the opponents of the Central Texas Airport are fooling themselves with when they continuously berate the Commissioners Court with the same old information which the Court has been hearing and ignoring for months.

Nobody likes re-runs. We usually turn them off.

It's time to stop appealing to these elected 'Agents' of Carpenter & Associates, and present them with a credible legal threat to this ill-conceived project. Or we can just go home, wait for the first inaugural 737 flight and watch Jim Carpenter descend from the doorway framed with a 'MISSION ACCOMPLISHED' banner.

Face it. The Commissioners will NEVER call a public hearing because it's NOT in their interest to do so.

It IS in their interest to keep us blathering uselessly in our allotted three-minute theatre time every two weeks.

It IS in their interest to avoid legal action that WILL make news.

It is in OUR interest to have competent legal counsel question them and de-bunk their position in public.

So, what's it gonna be?

Reality?

Or SOS?

Posted by noairport at 20:06:35 in Players, County, Voices, oracle

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Saturday, January 15, 2011

Moore of the same

Regular readers of this blog know that those of us opposing the airport have been speaking out during the Citizen's Comments at every Court session for several months. Week after week, the Judge and Commissioners have sat impassively while we marched to the lectern one after the other.

Our appearances have been reported in the local papers. And there have been quite a few LTE that received a number of comments.

First week of the New Year, brought an unexpected surprise. Judge McDonald initiated contact with the most vocal participants who have been regulars at the Citizens Comments.

The more experienced and cynical of us were skeptical that much would come of it but we went through the motions anyway. And as predicted, it was more of the same old, same old just slightly repackaged and with a twist.

We were given an 'assignment' to send a list of our concerns to the Court. Duh!! Haven't we been doing just that for months on end? Do they think that will somehow make us feel like part of the 'team' so we'll go away and leave them alone?

Well, StopCTA still isn't buying what they're selling.

What we need from the Commissioners is ACTION not the illusion that somehow what we say matters to them.

Posted by noairport at 14:38 in Players, County, County, stopcta

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Tuesday, January 18, 2011

Citizens speak

Part 3: Citizens speak

By Cyndi Wright

Bastrop Advertiser

January 15, 2011

Coined in 1980, the phrase NIMBY means "not in my backyard" and aptly describes what happens when people find out something they don't want may be built or developed in their neighborhood.

No one can argue that the proposed Central Texas Airport has brought forth its share of 'nimbies' with their concerns about the commercial airport that is planned in the Cedar Creek area.

But not everyone is against the idea of the airport project – and the developer's promises of lots of new jobs and increased land value.

In part 1 of this series, the Advertiser examined the county's responsibility to its citizens and potential developers. In part 2, the city of Bastrop explained how it regulates new development in its extra-territorial jurisdiction, and some of the tools it uses to insure responsible development.

In part 3, citizens who will be impacted by the new airport – or any major development in the county – weigh in with their views.

Concerns

Darlene Pendell lives near the site of the proposed airport. She and her husband have lived in the area for seven years. She is a board member of GUARD, Groups United to Advocate Responsible Development. She says the thought of airplanes flying over her home is just a minor part of her concerns.

"Planes will fly directly over our new high school," Pendell said. "Fifty percent of all aviation accidents occur during take off and landing. Why would we put our children in jeopardy like that?"

Pendell also pointed to the possibility that jet fuel contains carcinogens.

"It's incredible," she said. "There are suggestions that jet fuel causes cancer. Jet fuel is toxic to aquatic organisms."

There have been studies by the U.S. Department of Health and Human Studies and the University of Colorado that report that some jet fuels may be carcinogenic but the risk to humans is inconclusive. However, according to Exxon Mobil, an ingredient in some commercial and military jet fuels called Stadis 450 is acutely toxic to aquatic organisms.

"The end of the runway is roughly 2,500-feet from the Colorado River," Pendell pointed out.

She also mentioned that because the proposed airport sits on top of the aquifer that provides the county's water, the jet fuel could potentially pollute that water supply.

A main concern of Pendell's – and GUARD – is the fact that since the airport will be privately funded, it is excluded from rigorous environmental impact studies.

According to GUARD's chair Murray Altman-Kaough, the fact that airport developer Jim Carpenter and Associates will not submit to environmental studies speaks louder than any words.

"While the developer is selling the project as 'green,' he is not willing to undertake any form of regulatory approval to bolster his claim," Altman-Kaough wrote in a letter to the Advertiser. "We submit that otherwise, 'green' is nothing more than a marketing ploy. Airports are by nature highly polluting, as are manufacturing facilities! We have nothing but the developer's word that the project is inherently benign."

Some other concerns cited by Pendell include traffic impact in the area and the proximity of the airport to IH-35 and 130.

"Each and every time I call an agency, federal, state or local, they say they don't have jurisdiction," she said. "It's very frustrating."

For now, Pendell and other opponents are hoping to stop the developer in his tracks by putting a halt to his attempts to establish a taxing district within the boundaries of the proposed airport.

"I think it would be a very good tactic to stop the MUD (municipal utility district)," she said.

And if that's successful and the developer moves on without it?

"It is a matter of citizens taking action at each step along the way," she said.

Growth is good

For other county residents, the price a few might pay for something that will benefit all is worth the cost.

"I'm for controlled development," said Pete Sommers, a six-year county resident. "If it's too fast, too soon – that's still better than a dying town."

Sommers applauds the airport opponents for being diligent about making sure that Carpenter – and the county and city – cross their Ts and dot their Is.

"I do applaud their diligence on keeping these people on their toes," he said. "I want it done right."

But he still believes, as do others, that growth in the county will attract jobs and other businesses, helping to keep the area healthy and alive. The proposed airport is part of that forward growth.

"I'm very much for the airport. I think it will draw other businesses," he said.

But, he added, misinformation does not help the credibility of those who oppose the project.

"I'll be the first to criticize when they say things that are not true," he said, citing the concern about birds along the river causing airplane accidents if they fly into an engine.

"They give the impression that these people are going to be cruising up and down the Colorado River when they will only cross the river at one point."

He said the amount of money the county receives now for the land taxes is minimal, since it has an agriculture exemption and no improvements. The county's 381 agreement with the developer offers a kickback of taxes paid for a certain number of years.

"Twenty-five percent is a lot better than nothing," Sommers said. "We're not getting anything right now."

He also said he understands that Carpenter is a businessman and does not expect that he would develop this airport without the expectation of making money.

"Hello? Why else would you do it?" he asked. "I do sympathize and empathize with the folks in the flight path, but this is going to be a boon for the whole county."

See: <http://bastropadvertiser.com/2011/01/15/part-3-citizens-speak/>

Posted by noairport at 11:34:51 in News, Media, Players, The 'expendable'

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Monday, January 24, 2011

Citizens speak (response)

FYI . . . this comment has been awaiting moderation since January 16, 2011 at 12:35 pm at the Advertiser online. What's with that?

Mr. Sommers' reliance on flights of fancy rather than fact to prove a point is nothing new to those of us who visit here regularly.

But it is more than dishonest to fabricate an idea, attribute it to others and then use that 'evidence' to discredit those on whom the ruse was perpetrated.

No one opposing the airport has ever suggested that all airplanes "are going to be cruising up and down the Colorado River". We have no idea how he arrived at that ludicrous conclusion.

The only credibility in question is Mr. Sommers'.

It seems a little odd that the Advertiser would print such nonsense. But then . . . maybe not.

As to NIMBY . . . I actually know the person who coined that phrase. A NIMBY approach was already considered to be outdated by around 2000 and it is no longer considered a viable tactic for those seeking relief from corporate and government schemes of one sort or another.

If you'd bothered to interview StopCTA as part of this 'opposition' article, we would have been happy to set you straight and save you the embarrassment. :)

You would have also gotten a perspective from long-time residents of the county who have been involved in many local issues before this one and have an excellent track record for getting the job done. Not that there's anything wrong with newbies joining in the fray. The more the merrier!

Posted by noairport at 12:23:59 PM in News, Media, Players, The 'expendable'

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Monday, January 24, 2011

'Fessing up' (at last)

These comments were presented during the Bastrop County Commissioners Court Citizen's Comments on January 24, 2011.

The exemption to the 'FAA 14 CFR, Part 139 Rules' in the 381 Agreement first came under scrutiny late last August in a letter sent to the Bastrop County Commissioners Court.

The response from the County's legal team advised:

"The county does not have any records relating to 'AOC 14 CFR, Part 139'."

See: https://www.stopcta.info/docs/court_response.pdf

We found it rather odd that there weren't any records about an exemption that had such far-reaching consequences on the County's future. Had the attorneys missed it?

A few weeks later in mid-September, there was a meeting with you Judge McDonald, Ronnie Moore and Commissioner Pina. The exemption to the 'Part 139 Rules' was a major part of the discussion. Then as now, Mr. Moore did most of the talking. At the end of that meeting we were assured our concerns would be addressed. Instead they fell into a black hole.

In the following weeks there were emails and a few phone calls. Part 139 had become quite a contentious topic! And we were getting nowhere.

Then in early November, we received the Freedom of Information Act documents consisting of over 1400 pages of correspondence relating to the proposed Central Texas Airport. It was over whelming.

But with perseverance the documents were sorted and BINGO! We discovered just why the County had been less than forthcoming about the Part 139 exemption. **It was included at the County's not the developer's request!**

Note that the County never bothered to correct our assumption that the developer was responsible for the exemption. You were quite happy to have us pointing a finger in the opposite direction.

Fast forward a few weeks and suddenly the spin is dizzying. This exemption the County had been dancing around for months is now the poster child for the wonderful ways the 381 is protecting us. Give me a break!!

If it's so wonderful now, why wasn't it just as wonderful 6 months ago? Why were there months of evasions and failure to accept responsibility? Did you think we wouldn't figure it out?

Well, as responsible citizens we did our homework and found undeniable evidence that the County HAD to acknowledge. Maybe next time you'll come clean up front. That would save you the embarrassment and us the trouble of having to sort things out.

It's no fun and a lot of work having to babysit County officials who are supposed to have OUR best interest in mind. Whose interests ARE you protecting and WHY?

Hmmm . . . I wonder just what else remains to be unearthed. See ya next time!

Posted by noairport at 12:23:59 in Players, County, The 'expendable', Voices, stopcta

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Wednesday, January 26, 2011

Large Bizjet ban nixed

Court Nixes Santa Monica Large Bizjet Ban

By Benet Wilson

Aviation Week

Jan 24, 2011

The city of Santa Monica, Calif., Jan. 21 lost its long battle with FAA over the city's effort to prevent large business jets from landing at Santa Monica Municipal Airport (SMO) after the U.S. Court of Appeals for the District of Columbia rejected the city's petition.

The court ruled that FAA was not being "arbitrary and capricious" when it said SMO's ban would make the airport unavailable on "fair and reasonable terms and without unjust discrimination, to all types, kinds and classes of aeronautical use."

Randal Fiertz, FAA's director of airport compliance and field operations, says he hopes this is the end of "a very long" process. "But the city can appeal the decision back to the court of appeals or to the Supreme Court, and we will carry on if necessary," he says.

In March 2008, the Santa Monica City Council approved an ordinance banning larger, heavier business jets from SMO (BA March 31, 2008/4). This caused FAA to issue an order to show cause, "giving the city 10 days to provide information why the agency should not pursue enforcement under Part 16 of the Federal Aviation Regulations, the section that deals with the responsibilities of airports and airport sponsors.

A month later, FAA issued an interim cease-and-desist order, which called on Santa Monica city officials to set aside an ordinance prohibiting Class C and D business jets—those with approach speeds greater than 121 kt.—from operating at the airport, warning it would use "all means" necessary to resolve the issue (BA, April 28, 2008/12). The interim order reiterated FAA's arguments detailing why it believed the ban was unlawful, including the fact that SMO accepted federal grants, thus obligating the airport to make the facility available on "reasonable terms, and without unjust discrimination."

In May 2008, the U.S. District Court for the Central District of California issued a preliminary injunction preventing the city from enforcing the ban at SMO (BA, May 26, 2008/16). The court acknowledged the city's safety concerns in adopting the ordinance, but said the local government had not provided a persuasive argument that FAA's process of issuing the cease-and-desist order was flawed.

The Court of Appeals concluded that FAA's intermediate conclusions on the ban were based on substantial evidence. "The only question that remains is whether those conclusions support the FAA's ultimate conclusion that the ordinance violates Grant Assurance 22," which requires the city to make the airport available "for public use, without unjust discrimination, to all types, kinds, and classes of aeronautical uses."

In its latest decision, the court wrote that FAA concluded that the large aircraft ban at SMO was inconsistent with the city's contractual obligations to the federal government to make the airport available for use on fair and reasonable terms. It also found FAA's decision was not arbitrary, capricious, an abuse of discretion or otherwise not in accordance with the law, so the city's petition for review was denied.

The significance of the outcome for FAA is that it stops the city from implementing the ban at SMO, Fiertz says. "Another outcome, which is very important to us at the airports division, is it upholds our grant assurances," he adds. "The court's decision was quite clear that the action Santa Monica was trying to take was inconsistent with its contractual obligations. And the court also affirmed the analysis done and decisions made by FAA in regard to Santa Monica. We were able to support our actions."

"We haven't had opportunity to review the decision, speak with the city council or outside council, so it's too soon to say what the next step will be," says Kay Wenzel, spokeswoman for the city of Santa Monica.

See: <https://www.aviationweek.com/aw/generic/story.jsp?id=news/bav/2011/01/24/01.xml&headline=CourtNixes%20Santa%20Monica%20Large%20Bizjet%20Ban&channel=busav>

Posted by noairport at 14:37:10 in News, Media, Costs, Quality of life

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Saturday, January 29, 2011

More FOIA material

Additional documents received from Bastrop County and the State of Texas are now being amended to the 'FOIA Follies' page.

See: <https://www.stopcta.info/foia.html>

Update . . . everything relevant has now been posted.

Posted by noairport at 18:43:53 in Announcements

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Friday, February 04, 2011

Capitol Conundrum

This morning, February 3, four ambassadors from StopCTA and GUARD braved the frigid temperature to meet with Rep. Tim Kleinschmidt in his Capitol office.

Rep. Kleinschmidt, looking quite dapper in a lavender shirt and tie, had obviously been briefed, was fairly conversant with the issue and fielded our questions with the assurance and skill of an experienced politician. The atmosphere was relaxed and conversational. As any politician, he was careful to avoid taking a position and gave the impression that he will predictably follow the least controversial course.

Early on he quipped something like "when Carpenter comes to town, we keep a close eye on him". But at the same time we were reminded that as a private developer, he can do pretty much what he wants. This is a mantra we've heard all too often from our County officials.

Wake up folks! The 'private' sector is running roughshod over public protections and the will of the people around the globe . . . all for profit in the guise of 'economic development'.

We tried our best to explain the Wildlife Hazard issues but Rep. Kleinschmidt didn't seem to 'get' it and kept deflecting the discussion every time we tried to come back to it.

Something however did seem to click when he was reminded first of the Joe Stack Echelon attack and then of the proximity of the CTA - which will only have 'private security' - to the state Capitol. The mention that 737's will be using the CTA seemed to take him by surprise.

He advised that should the bill for the MUD go forward, we need to watch closely, follow its progress in committee and make our concerns known at that time. He has not yet seen a copy of the bill.

But then he went on to explain that if certain conditions were met, the bill would be passed regardless of any citizen objections. Those conditions are a 'green light' from EISD, BCCC, BISS and the City of Bastrop. He was firmly reminded that those entities did not elect him. That the people of Bastrop County did!

And there's the crux of the problem. Wouldn't it be nice if politicians asked, "What can I do for you" instead of telling us "This is how the system works and your voice doesn't count for much" . . . except, of course, during the charade of cyclical, corporate-funded elections.

than a marketing ploy. Airports are by nature highly polluting, as are manufacturing facilities. We have nothing but the developer's word that the project is inherently benign."

Some other concerns cited include traffic impact in the area and the proximity of the airport to the new high school and the Colorado River.

MUD through ETJ

Another way to get a MUD is to have it approved by the city that has jurisdiction over the extra-territorial area - in this case the City of Bastrop.

But after Carpenter's associates presented the query to the Bastrop City Council in November 2010, city officials responded they would need a lot more information before approving such a deal - and Carpenter would have to pay for the city to do its due diligence.

In an article in the Feb. 26 edition of the Advertiser, City Manager Mike Talbot expressed his frustration at Carpenter's lack of a response to the city's request. Talbot's letter to Carpenter states, "The council and I have been disturbed to have heard complaints voiced, over the past several weeks, in various forums and directly by local citizens, to the effect that the City of Bastrop has been 'non-responsive and/or obstructive' to you and your team in your development of the project. In the City's view, nothing could be further from the truth."

Talbot also said in the letter that the city looked forward "to meeting with your team in a specially scheduled workshop session." Talbot added the city cannot "perform a meaningful evaluation" of the airport project without such a meeting and better overall communication with Carpenter.

Since then, Talbot said, the developer has acknowledged receiving the city's letter, but little else has resulted.

Legislature revisited

During this legislative session, Carpenter had asked Rep. Mark Strama (D-Austin) to carry his request for a MUD in, but according to Strama's office staff, the drafted bill was turned over to Carpenter for review six weeks ago and there has been no response.

Hegar and Watson sent only filed S.B. 1257, the new bill that would make it illegal for an existing district to annex property in another county without that county's support, they sent a strongly-worded letter to Mark Reynolds, the treasurer of Cottonwood Creek WCID No. 3.

"It has been brought to our attention that the Cottonwood Creek WCID No. 3 is exploring the idea of annexing land in Bastrop County for development of the Central Texas Airport project. This despite the fact that the entirety of your District is located in Travis County and an estimated 15 miles from the proposed annexed property...There are significant safety and environmental issues that must be given serious consideration during your deliberations...It is of substantial importance that you work in conjunction with the Bastrop County Commissioners, the Bastrop City Council and the citizens of both communities to address any concerns they may have before moving forward with this proposal."

The letter seemed to end with what could be considered a threat - or a promise: "In the event that the land annexation is confirmed ... we fully expect that you will participate in all civil and county proceedings as they relate to the District ... that you will take an active role in the community. Any lesser involvement will cause us to become much more involved in your deliberation as a District and as board members."

Reynolds said the CCWCID board only meets on an as-needed basis and he was not that familiar with the plan for annexation.

"We have not met on that at all," he said. "I received an e-mail on it two to three weeks ago that he (Carpenter) was thinking about it but we haven't talked about it recently."

The president of the CCWCID board seemed enthusiastic about the prospect of annexing the land in Bastrop County.

"We've not been asked to do anything yet," Jon Pieratt said. "Hopefully we will. If the demand is there, we would be interested in serving those needs."

Among those listed by TCEQ as an official or consultant for CCWCID is Janet Marsh, who lists her place of business as the legal firm of Armbrust & Brown LLP. However, a call to that office resulted in a staff member denying that Marsh works there. A call to the phone number listed for Marsh resulted in the call being answered by Carpenter and Associates office in Austin.

Marsh did not return a phone call by press time.

Posted by noairport 20:22:06 News, Media, Players, Developer, County, State

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Monday, March 14, 2011

Crunching data

These comments were presented at the Bastrop County Commissioners Court on Monday, March 14, 2011. Also, be sure to read the excellent comment posted below describing this morning's events.

Today we're going to revisit the troublesome October 13, 2009 fundraiser that brought in over \$8,000 in contributions to your campaign, Judge McDonald.

In the Bastrop Advertiser, Steve Miller, your campaign treasurer, defended the windfall saying:

"The filing deadline was December 31, 2009. The campaigning starts in earnest on January 1, 2010, so it's best to prepare early."

At first glance that sounds reasonable. However, the numbers just don't support that defense. Before the December 31 filing deadline, before you knew you would be unopposed, almost ALL of the funds in your account had already been spent! Then in the new year, the remaining \$3,250 took a big hit of \$2,200 for a loan repayment on February 1.

The fundraiser which took place at Threadgill's in Austin is a bit of deja vu reminiscent of the big Eco-Merge unveiling at the Bullock Museum far away from the actual location of the project. Just why is a Bastrop County candidate doing election business in Austin and not on his home turf?

That is possibly explained by the fact that of the 33 contributions collected at that event, only 2 came from Bastrop County. The other 31 flowed in from Austin and elsewhere in the state. In fact, of all the contributions from 2008, 09 and 10, only 4 came from Bastrop County.

The contributors roster tells yet another story. There are corporate donors, attorneys, politicians, and plenty of contractors who just might benefit from the proposed Central Texas Airport project that was under consideration at the time.

In addition to the previously mentioned \$500 check from Jim Carpenter, there was another donation from Walter Taquard the VP of Development & Construction on Carpenter's team and one 'unnamed' contribution. Mr. Miller eventually identified this 'mystery contribution' as coming from Klotz Associates, who according to their website "builds the airports that build our communities".

All in all, it looks suspiciously like 'outside interests' who attended that fundraiser might have bought and paid for the County's consideration.

The 'funny business' that went on that evening is quite enough to question how and why the '381 Agreement' was negotiated and approved. In a perfect world it should be grounds for invalidation of any and all instruments relating to the Central Texas Airport.

There's no better time than now to pull the plug on this ill-conceived and tainted project.

Just do it!

McDonald campaign contributions:

See: https://www.stopcta.info/docs/campaign/McDonald_contributions.pdf

McDonald finances

See: https://www.stopcta.info/docs/campaign/McDonald_finances.pdf

Original documents

See: <https://www.stopcta.info/foia.html#contribs>

Posted by noairport at 09:26:16 in Players, Developer, County, Voices, stopcta

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Monday, March 14, 2011

"Texas Voter" comments on the above event

Steve Miller had a lot to say about these "Crunching data" remarks after they were delivered during citizen comments before the Commissioner's Court on March 14th. Miller railed about the remarks, characterizing the speaker's observations as "leaps" and "not even close to the truth." He even accused the speaker of "bearing false witness."

He obviously came not to comment to the Commission, but to disparage the speaker who gave the comments shown here, even turning his back on the Commission at one point to direct his attentions to the former speaker and illuminate his numerous refutations.

He complained that the inferences of improper influence were inappropriately maligning the judge's character, insisting that McDonald is "an all around good man," presumably suggesting that the Judge's character is beyond reproach.

Miller was obviously very agitated and felt compelled to strenuously defend Judge McDonald even after citizen comments were concluded, following people out into the lobby and then outside the building, trying to speak over whoever might be trying to make a point in conflict with his interpretations.

That's actually a sound a tactic for Miller, based on the my examinations of the judge's campaign finance reports, which bear the names of both McDonald and his Campaign Treasurer, Miller. Neither of them should want those reports to be scrutinized, because I doubt that either of them could have completed them properly even if it meant the difference between their damnation or everlasting salvation.

Obviously, Miller is largely responsible for getting the Judge into this predicament and he feels obligated to try and absolve him. Unfortunately, it is the Judge who is ultimately responsible for both the appearance of impropriety and the questionable contents of the campaign finance reports. So, in this matter, Judge McDonald is inextricably tied to Miller and his apparent incompetence, unless of course it was actually the Judge himself who botched these documents so terribly.

Like any good campaign operative, Miller kept going back to his basic point about whether or not there was actually any improper influence associated with the Oct. 2009 fundraiser at Threadgill's and the County's approval of the 381 Agreement. He insisted that there was no such improper influence and he called that the "truth," even though such influence cannot be conclusively proven or disproven, only alleged and admitted or denied.

I attempted to engage Miller to point out that the truth is just an interpretation of the facts, and that the most salient fact in this case is that the Judge egregiously failed to avoid the appearance of impropriety.

Miller had no ears for that point, which is understandable. He thinks the Judge is in some considerable trouble and that is something about which I think Miller and I agree.

Posted at 13:47:16 by "Texas Voter"

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Wednesday, March 16, 2011

Up a creek?

UPDATE: SB1257 has been referred to the Natural Resources Committee chaired by Sen. Frasier.

The saga of the Cottonwood Creek WCID#3 is not yet over despite the fact that the bill drafted by the Rep. Strama's office at Jim Carpenter's request was not filed this Legislative session. StopCTA has obtained a copy of the draft for those who want to compare it to the 2009 bill which also was never filed:

See: https://www.stopcta.info/foia/cottonwood/11-03-01_Cottonwood_draft.pdf

Senator Hegar responded to the Cottonwood Creek controversy by sponsoring 'SB1257' which would provide deterrents to developers attempting to annex non-contiguous land without the blessings of the community who would suffer the consequences of unwanted, potentially harmful development. The joint Press Release with Sen. Watson explains the possible annexation scenario that could still come to haunt Bastrop County:

See: https://www.stopcta.info/foia/cottonwood/11-03-08_SB1257_press.pdf

The strongly worded joint letter to the Board of Directors of Cottonwood Creek WCID#3 mentioned in this Press Release - puts the Board on notice to read thoughtfully before taking any action should a proposal be submitted to them.

See: https://www.stopcta.info/foia/cottonwood/11-03-02_HegarWatson_annexation.pdf

Hopefully 'SB1257' which will give some control to communities facing annexation, will work its way through the Legislature quickly. But even if it passes, a major player in the final decision will be the Bastrop County Commissioners Court which has a less than stellar record regarding the Central Texas Airport.

See: https://www.stopcta.info/foia/cottonwood/11-03-08_SB012571.pdf

So it looks like the Cottonwood Creek WCID#3 issue isn't going away any time soon. We can only hope that the final denouement won't leave Bastrop County up a creek.

Posted by noairport at 01:36:42 in Players, Developer, State, Voices,

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Monday, March 28, 2011

Facts vs truth

These comments were presented at the March 28th Bastrop County Commissioners Court session. Thankfully, Mr. Miller was not present this time 'round.

Steve Miller's passionate and rather outrageous outburst at the last Court session proved once again that 'truth' is both relative and subjective.

Data on the other hand, is impersonal. Like the data in your campaign contribution records, Judge McDonald, for which you and Steve Miller are ultimately responsible. There is no way to deny that the data in question was entered, signed and submitted to the Bastrop County Elections Administrator by Mr. Miller. He can rail and bluster all he wants but nothing is going to change those facts.

A comment left on the StopCTA.info blog by someone who was present that morning summarizes the events quite eloquently:

"Like any good campaign operative, Miller kept going back to his basic point about whether or not there was actually any improper influence associated with the October 2009 fundraiser at Threadgill's and the Court's approval of the 381 Agreement. He insisted that there was no such improper influence and he called that the 'truth', even though such influence cannot be conclusively proven or disproven, only alleged and admitted or denied."

"... the 'truth' is just an interpretation of the facts, and the most salient fact in this case is that the Judge egregiously failed to avoid the appearance of impropriety."

The fact that those contributions were ACCEPTED opens the door to speculation that there was indeed some funny business going on. The fact that neither you, Judge nor Mr. Miller, saw any impropriety in doing so is both puzzling and disturbing. How could you NOT anticipate this scenario?

Bottom line ... there is no way to ever know whether the questionable contributions affected the Court's decision. But with that data on record the possibility can never be completely excluded.

In any case, attacking the messenger is just predictable political spin and posturing. On the other hand, accepting responsibility might at least earn a modicum of respect. That's something Mr. Miller should consider doing.

Posted by noairport at 12:12:00 in Players, County, Voices, stopcta

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APRIL 2011

Monday, April 11, 2011

Take action NOW!

The deadline for filing comments has just been extended to MAY 9!!!!

Public Notice of a www.stopcta.info/docs/PN_SWF-2010-00506.pdf was posted by the Army Corps of Engineers on March 25, 2011:

The request was submitted by ACI Consulting on behalf of CTA, LLC. The USACE regulates all work or structures in or affecting the course, condition or capacity of navigable waters of the United States. The TCEQ is also reviewing this application to determine if the work would comply with State water quality standards. Public comments are being requested by both of these agencies until the deadline of May 9.

Please note that the ONLY issue that TCEQ will address is water quality in segment 1428 of the Colorado River Basin below Lady Bird Lake. Letters to the TCEQ must include that specific text. This info from the Environmental Stewardship website is helpful.
See: <https://environmental-stewardship.org/ColoradoRiver.asp>

Classified Stream Segments - This segment of the Colorado River is divided into two state classified stream segments. The Colorado River downstream of Town Lake in Austin is Water Quality Classified Stream Segment 1428. The segment extends from Longhorn Dam to just upstream of FM 969 near Utley in Bastrop County. The Colorado River downstream of Segment 1428 to La Grange is Water Quality Classified Stream Segment 1434. These two segments are designated for contact recreation, exceptional aquatic life, and as a public water supply. These segments have habitat characteristics that are outstanding for their natural variability, an exceptional or unusual species assemblage, an abundance of sensitive species, exceptionally high species diversity and richness, and a balanced trophic structure. The 'exceptional aquatic life' designation requires that the segment meet the highest standards for temperature, pH, dissolved oxygen, chlorides, sulfate, total dissolved solids, and bacteria. The Colorado River throughout this segment has been identified by the TPWD as an ecologically significant stream segment due to the presence of the state threatened blue sucker and the stream segment's overall use (TPWD 1999a).

PLEASE SUBMIT COMMENTS DEBUNKING THE BASIS FOR THIS APPLICATION AND ALSO REQUEST THAT BOTH THESE AGENCIES HOLD PUBLIC HEARINGS BEFORE A DETERMINATION IS MADE.

Take action NOW!

Posted by noairport at 13:31:01 in News, Announcements

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Monday, April 11, 2011

Redemption? Or not . . .

These comments were presented at the April 11th Bastrop County Commissioners Court session.

It's not often that politicians have an opportunity for redemption. But one has now come knocking on your door.

On March 25 a permit application for work on the Central Texas Airport was accepted for review by the Army Corps of Engineers. The TCEQ will also be looking at the application. In addition, these agencies may provide an opportunity for a Public Hearing which, need I remind you, has been repeatedly denied by the County. The deadline for public comments is April 24.

I called the Planning Department last week to ask if the County had received the documents and if they were going to submit comments. I was stunned to learn that the County has no plans to submit comments at this time.

Then I had a chance meeting with one of the County Commissioners who didn't have a clue that this application had been in the public record for nearly a week and a half.

So I called the Judge's office. My call was the first they'd heard about it.

Just what is going on in this county? The Central Texas Airport is one of the most politically sensitive and contentious issues at this time. Why was the Commissioner's Court kept out of the loop?

While this could be perfectly standard operating procedure between the Planning Department and the Court, the lack of communication on such a charged issue is puzzling. One has to wonder if the Planning Department might have been trying to keep this under wraps hoping that the deadline would pass unnoticed.

Well, it hasn't since the day the announcement was posted. I'm assuming all the Commissioners now have a copy of the application?

The question is . . . what are you going to DO about it?? This is the perfect opportunity for the Court to redeem itself by submitting critical comments to both the Army Corps and TCEQ. It is also an opportunity for the people of this County to FINALLY be heard in public hearings. The Court should do everything it can to ensure that happens.

So . . . are you going to step up and start protecting this County and its citizens or is it going to be more of the same inaction that would once again illustrate the Court's complicity and role as a proactive agent for the Central Texas Airport.

Time to show your true colors. Are you working for Carpenter & Associates or the citizens of this county???

And pu-leeze. No more excuses.

Posted by noairport at 01:31:01 PM in Players, Developer, County, State, Voices, stopcta

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Sunday, April 17, 2011

SB1257 Public Hearing

Sen. Hegar's bill 'SB1257', which would place some restrictions on the annexation by certain conservation and reclamation districts of this noncontiguous land in another county, is scheduled for a Public Hearing before the Natural Resources Committee this coming Tuesday, April 19th at 9:00am in Hearing Room E1.012 in the Capitol building. If you cannot come, PLEASE at least call members of the Natural Resources Committee to encourage them to move this bill out of Committee.

Chair: Sen. Troy Fraser (512) 463-0124

Vice Chair: Sen. Craig Estes (512) 463-0130

Members: Sen. Bob Deuell (512) 463-0102

Sen. Robert Duncan (512) 463-0128

Sen. Kevin Eltife (512) 463-0101

Sen. Glenn Hegar (512) 463-0118

Sen. Juan Hinojosa (512) 463-0120

Sen. Mike Jackson (512) 463-0111

Sen. Robert Nichols (512) 463-0103

Sen. Kel Seliger (512) 463-0131

Sen. Carlos Uresti (512) 463-0119

Agenda for the Tuesday Hearing: https://www.stopcta.info/docs/19th_agenda.pdf

Posted by noairport at 13:51:26 in News, Announcements, Players, State

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Friday, April 19, 2011

SB1257 passed

Yesterday, 'SB1257' was passed by unanimous vote of those present. It has now moved on to the House for consideration.

Rep. Kleinschmidt's Chief of Staff has said the Representative was disinclined to support the bill because it gives too much power to the Commissioners. Speakers at the Senate Natural Resources Committee Public Hearing last week expressed similar concerns.

Update: On Friday April 29, the Bill was referred to the House Land & Resource Management Committee of which Rep. Kleinschmidt is the Vice Chair. This might be another chance to get the language improved.

Posted by noairport at 11:57:43 in News, Announcements

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Tuesday, April 19, 2011

SB1257 Hearing report

These comments were presented at the Senate's Natural Resources Committee Public Hearing on April 19, 2011. In addition to StopCTA, Mike Talbot, Bastrop City Manager spoke. A representative from Bluebonnet was acknowledged but did not speak. All other interested parties were MIA. Pretty pathetic. . .

Thank you for considering 'SB1257'. I would especially like to commend Sen. Hegar for taking an unscrupulous with regard to the issue of annexation. The citizens of Bastrop county welcome any and all restraints on aggressive developers looking for creative ways to work the system.

However, it is rather troubling this bill stipulates that the County Commissioners have sole power to grant or deny an annexation proposal. Please understand that to date, the Bastrop County Commissioners have exhibited less than stellar judgment with regard to the proposed Central Texas Airport. Specifically, no opportunity for citizen input or public discussion on the merits this project was ever offered. Instead the people of the County who would be affected by the airport development were totally excluded from the process - a rather unforgivable political blunder that residents of the County will not soon forget.

More transparency, not less, concerning projects that would have significant impact on a County's future is needed to ensure that the democratic process remains intact.

This bill would be greatly improved if some mechanism for citizen participation, perhaps in the form of a public hearing, were required prior to a final decision. Without an open debate on the merits of an annexation proposal, backroom deals like the 381 Agreement with Carpenter & Associates will continue to be the norm.

So while this bill is headed in the right direction, it falls a little short in its current form. Hopefully, some citizen protections can be added.

Posted by noairport at 15:08:54 in News, Players, County, City, State, Voices, stopcta

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Friday, April 22, 2011

Commissioners Court alert!

StopCTA's challenge to the Bastrop Commissioners Court has been heard! This item is on the agenda for Monday April 25th at 9am. A substantial presence encouraging them to submit critical comments would be helpful. Hope to see you there!

21. Discussion and possible action re: response to US Army Corps of Engineers Public Notice for Permit Application No. : SWF-2010-00506

This permit application is to satisfy Section 404 and 401 of the Clean Water Act, for proposed drainage modifications associated with the proposed Central Texas Airport; Ronnie Moore

See **'Redemption or not'** posted above on April 11

Posted by noairport at 12:44:11 PM in News, Announcements, Players, County

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Sunday, April 24, 2011

SB1257 action!

StopCTA's comments to the Senate Natural Resources Committee outline the deficiencies in 'SB1257' which is on its way to the Senate floor.

See **"SB1257 hearing report"**, posted April 19, 2011 immediately above.

This bill leaves the approval of annexation of non-contiguous land across a county line up to the County Commissioners. In Bastrop County that would likely be another rubberstamp further enabling the proposed Central Texas Airport. Some sort of citizen notification and participation would offer protection to the citizens of Bastrop County. **Please call Sen. Hegar's office at 512-463-0118** and request that language be added to 'SB1257' to give citizens a voice on annexation.

Call Sen. Hegar NOW!!

Posted by noairport at 20:00:37 in News, Announcements, Voices, stopcta

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Monday, April 25, 2011

Senate Adventure

These comments were presented at the April 25th Bastrop County Commissioners Court Citizen's Comment session. Additional comments were made during the discussion of agenda item #21 regarding the USACE permit application for work on the CTA.

On Tuesday I attended the Senate Natural Resources Committee Public Hearing on 'SB1257'. This bill filed by Sen. Hegar addresses the issue of annexation of non-contiguous land across a county line - a scenario which came up recently regarding Cottonwood Creek WCID #3 in Travis County and the proposed Central Texas Airport. The intention of this bill is to safeguard that the County being annexed would have a say in the matter.

While it's commendable that Sen. Hegar (and Sen. Watson) have been rather aggressive on this issue - as evidenced by their March 2 joint letter to the Cottonwood Creek WCID #3 Board of Directors - this bill may not offer the protection intended . . . at least in Bastrop County.

Considering the less than stellar judgment that this Court has exhibited to date on the Central Texas Airport, the language in this bill that gives the commissioners of the county in which the land to be annexed is located the sole power to consent by order or resolution to the proposed annexation is quite troubling. Would the Bastrop County Commissioners stand up and say "NO!" or would it be another rubberstamp to a reckless and unneeded project?

The two speakers at that Hearing - Mike Talbot, Bastrop City Manager, and myself - had similar concerns about shortcomings in the bill's language. The City would like to ensure that its authority in the ETJ is not compromised and I suggested that there be a provision for open, public participation perhaps in a public hearing, before any decision was made by the Commissioners. I am hoping that the language of this bill will be amended to include additional protections when it gets to the Senate floor.

It is unfortunate that there was not a greater grassroots presence at that hearing . . . opportunities like this should not be squandered. But there is still time to call Sen. Hegar's office and request that language be added to this bill to ensure the citizens of this county would have a voice in any annexation decision. All the information you need to do that is posted on the StopCTA.info website. Please make that phone call today!

Should 'SB1257' become law in its present form, this Court's integrity will be on the line to honor Judge McDonald's repeated promise that a public forum would be called if the creation of a Municipal Utility District was ever under consideration. We will be watching closely.

Posted by noairport at 15:04:26 in Players, County, City, State, Voices, stopcta

Monday, April 25, 2011
Show your true colors!

These comments were presented during discussion of the agenda item dealing with the USACE permit application for work on the airport. Some adjustments were made on the fly in response to Ronnie Moore's presentation at the beginning of the discussion.

Mr. Moore was quite happy to let the USACE do its job without input from the County. This would be a sure way for the developer to have his way with the Corps! However, the Court finally stepped up to the plate and agreed to address concerns about water quality in the comments that will be submitted by the County to the Corps. The Court even discussed if there was a possibility to upgrade the 'Environmental Assessment (EA)' to a full 'Environmental Impact Statement (EIS)'! The possibility of the Corps holding a Public Hearing and having the EA be made available for public review before a final determination is made was also discussed.

In addition to presenting comments, Steve Box of Environmental Stewardship submitted a detailed letter listing environmental and water quality concerns:
See: <https://www.stopcta.info/factoids/2011/docs/ECC-C-25A-pril11.pdf>

He was also asked to contribute appropriate wording to the County's letter to the Corps. A letter on behalf of Sierra Club was also submitted:
See: https://www.stopcta.info/factoids/2011/docs/SC_letter_BCCC.pdf

Please consider submitting comments to the USACE before the May 9th deadline.

At the last Court session, I challenged Bastrop County to do the right thing and submit comments to the Army Corps and TCEQ on the permit application that is the subject of this agenda item. Thank you for taking that challenge seriously.

This flawed application is pretty much what we have come to expect from the developer of the proposed Central Texas Airport. It contains incomplete and misleading information and is really unworthy of serious consideration. All in all, it's more pipe-dream than reality.

The question is . . . will Bastrop County choose to debunk this fantasy or will it grant another free pass to this ill-conceived project?

If there is any upside to this application, it is that there is an opportunity for the reviewing agencies to hold public hearings. In addition to submitting CRITICAL comments, Bastrop County should request that those hearings take place.

It's time to show your true colors. Are you going to do everything you can to protect the Colorado River and the taxpaying citizens of this county? Or do your loyalties lie elsewhere.

I guess we'll know soon enough . . .

Posted by noairport at 15:39:33 in Costs, Environment, Players, County, Voices, stopcta

MAY 2011

Tuesday, May 03, 2011
So not the news

On April 30, the Bastrop Advertiser printed a lengthy op-ed by T. R. Reid, the infamous Carpenter & Associates spokesperson, extolling the wonders of the proposed CTA/Eco-Merge project. This blatant advertising spiel brought nothing new and was so NOT the news. The sheer size and intensity appears to be more an act of desperation than information as the sinking ship nosesdives towards oblivion.

StopCTA was the first to respond. However, our comment languished in 'moderation hell' for days. Finally, this morning the comment was permanently removed. Here it is for your edification.

It is shameful that the Advertiser would print this misleading infomercial while continuing to ignore the real news about the proposed airport. But then, this paper has elevated social inanities and puff pieces to an art form . . .

As any good PR flack, Mr. Reid is quite skilled at his craft. And an uninformed and gullible public is likely to feed at the trough. How Orwellian!

So is the Advertiser going to give the opposition equal time IN PRINT? This swill is over 1300 words - about 1000 more than we've ever been allowed. Or are you going to continue to keep the debate safely marginalized in these online comments?

Posted by noairport at 14:07:31 in News, Media, Players, Developer, Voices, stopcta

Wednesday, May 04, 2011
Timing is everything

Well, the Carpenter team has managed to score yet another chance to present their well-worn arguments in an unchallenged format. Their first opportunity was the infamous April 2009 presentation at the Bastrop County Commissioners Court. When the opposition asked to be heard, they were promised an opportunity in some nebulous future that never materialized. We are still waiting. Now we have requested equal time at the Advertiser. It looks like that's not going to happen either.

Everything in Mr. Reid's infomercial has been debunked repeatedly by well-informed citizens so no need to do that again.

In addition to the sheer size and intensity, the most obvious aspect of Mr. Reid's spiel is the timing which makes it appear to be more an act of desperation than anything else.

As readers of this blog are aware, on March 25, a permit application was submitted to the US Army Corps of Engineers for work on the proposed Central Texas Airport. Thanks to Tom Thompson's vigilance, we all knew about it on the day it was posted.

However, the Bastrop County Planning Department kept it quietly tucked away and under wraps for nearly two weeks. We were also told the County had no plans to submit comments on the application. Outrageous!

Interestingly, neither the Commissioners nor the Judge had been informed that the permit application even existed until StopCTA let the cat out of the bag. Copies of the document were immediately distributed to all concerned.

At the Court session on April 11th, StopCTA challenged the Court to defend the public's interest by submitting CRITICAL comments to both the USACE and the TCEQ. It was an offer they couldn't refuse.

At the next Court session on April 25th, The Commissioners agreed not only to submit comments but we were under the impression that those comments would include information that could make the approval process more troublesome for the proposed CTA.

NEWSFLASH: StopCTA has just received a copy of the pathetic letter that the County is submitting to the USACE/TCEQ:
See: https://www.stopcta.info/factoids/2011/docs/Letter_to_USACE_05-03-2011.pdf

It leaves no doubt that the County is the CTA's number one cheerleader. It is especially telling on the heels of the publication of Mr. Reid's glowing propaganda in the Bastrop Advertiser.

In addition to the Court, StopCTA has been networking to get word out to all stakeholders in the County's future none of whom were aware of the permit application. So now comments seriously challenging every aspect of the application are flowing in to the regulatory agencies.

The Carpenter crew and their friends in the Planning Department might have thought this was going to be a slam-dunk but watchful citizens and other entities aren't going to let that happen.

Note that none of the above events were considered to be newsworthy by the Bastrop Advertiser.

Posted by noairport at 17:02:36 in Players, Developer, County, The 'expendable', Voices, stopcta

Monday, May 09, 2011
Airport project sputters

Skepticism added to criticism as Bastrop airport project sputters

By Asher Price
Austin American-Statesman
May 7, 2011

Developer Jim Carpenter had hoped to break ground on his Bastrop County airport in December, but no dirt has moved. Instead, some neighbors have united to oppose the airport, haranguing county officials, dialing up the media and starting two websites. They initially argued that the airport would be a nuisance. Now they argue that it's a sham project.

See: <https://www.statesman.com/news/local/skepticism-added-to-criticism-as-bastrop-airport-project-1461582.html>

Posted by noairport at 14:24:48 in News, Media, Players

Monday, May 09, 2011
'Sound science'?

These comments were presented during the citizen's comment period of the May 9th Commissioners Court session.

I'd like to begin by thanking Ronnie Moore for the timely forwarding of the letter that Bastrop County prepared in response to the permit application filed by developers of the proposed Central Texas Airport:
See: https://www.stopcta.info/factoids/2011/Letter_to_USACE_05-03-2011.pdf

For a fleeting moment, there was a glimmer of hope that the Court might finally advocate for the people of this County. But that glow didn't last for long.

The first reading was a bit of a shocker. The bulk of the letter is a reiteration of the County's position as a supporting agent and primary cheerleader for the proposed project that leaves no doubt where the County's allegiance lies. The inclusions addressing water quality approved at the last Court session were tucked in at the end - almost an after thought from which the Court safely distanced itself.

But the nugget that really got me going was the request that the Corps follow 'sound science' in making its determination.

There are certain catch phrases that are red flags to any activist who has engaged corporate America and their regulatory henchmen. One of the most often heard is the mantra of 'sound science'. That phrase is often intoned to justify rulings harmful to the public interest or to rationalize approval of risky and unproven technologies. Of course, the 'sound science' referred to is usually generated by the perpetrators. Hence the lack of trust when that phrase pops up.

I'm not exactly a newbie to the regulatory charade that passes for public protection. Those of you who have been at this Court for a while are aware of my ongoing mission regarding genetically modified foods (GMOs). In fact, in February 2001 this very Court sent official letters to Senators Phil Gramm and Kay Baily Hutchison, Representative Ron Paul and the FDA in support of **'mandatory labeling, independent long-term health and environmental safety testing, industry product liability and more critical oversight of the technology'**.



February 26, 2001

FDA Commissioner
Dockets Management Branch (HFA 305)
Food and Drug Administration
5630 Fishers Lane, Room 1061
Rockville, MD 20852

RE: Dockets 00N-1396 and 00D-1598

Dear FDA Commissioner,

Bastrop county citizens have repeatedly expressed concern over inadequate labeling and safety testing of genetically engineered foods. The recently released FDA Rules continue to ignore their concerns.

The Commissioners Court has been advised that this is not an issue that is under the authority of the county. However, we feel their concern for more consumer responsive regulation including mandatory labeling, independent long term health and environmental safety testing, industry product liability and more critical oversight of the technology is legitimate and deserves attention. Please take the concerns of Bastrop County citizens under consideration re: possible revisions of FDA regulation of genetically modified foods.

Sincerely

Ronnie McDonald
Ronnie McDonald, Bastrop County Judge

John A. Sanders
John A. Sanders, Commissioner Pct. 1

Don Loucks
Don Loucks, Commissioner Pct. 3

Charles McKeeva
Charles McKeeva, Commissioner Pct. 2

Lee Dildy
Lee Dildy, Commissioner Pct. 4

804 PECAN STREET • BASTROP, TX 78802 • 512/322-7100 • METHOD 512/981-7101 • FAX 512/981-7103

Most of my experience has been with federal agencies that supposedly regulate agriculture and food safety. While I have no experience with the Corps, just seeing the phrase 'sound science' tells me that the County is conversant in corporate/regulatory catch-phrase lingo. Seems that you've been taking lessons from Monsanto and other corporate baddies that are destroying this planet and poisoning us for profit. That mentality does not bode well for the future of Bastrop County.

Perhaps the Army Corps will actually do the right thing. Or perhaps it will follow the pattern all too familiar to those of us in the trenches trying to stem the tide. Time will tell.

Posted by noairport at 14:34:59 in Players, County, The 'expendable', Voices, stopcta

Monday, May 09, 2011
Talking to the USACE

Selected comments regarding the proposed Central Texas Airport's permit application to the USACE are posted below. Some of these documents were obtained through a May 11 FOIA request to the USACE. Others were secured independently prior to the FOIA. Only selected documents are posted. A more detailed discussion of the responsive comments is available below at [USACE FOIA factoids posted June 23, 2011](https://www.stopcta.info/factoids/2011/docs/USACE_comments_posted_June_23_2011.pdf).

Government: <https://www.stopcta.info/factoids/2011/docs/LCRAComments.pdf>
Texas Parks and Wildlife: https://www.stopcta.info/factoids/2011/docs/TPWD_comments.pdf
City of Bastrop: https://www.stopcta.info/factoids/2011/docs/COB_usace.pdf
Bastrop County Commissioners Court: https://www.stopcta.info/factoids/2011/docs/BCCC_USACE.pdf

Environmental groups: https://www.stopcta.info/factoids/2011/docs/ES_USCE_TCEQ.pdf
Sierra Club letter: https://www.stopcta.info/factoids/2011/docs/Sierra_CTA.pdf
Sierra Club resolution: https://www.stopcta.info/factoids/2011/docs/SC_res.pdf

Concerned citizens by location:
See: https://www.stopcta.info/factoids/2011/docs/ACE_TCEQ_final.pdf

Cedar Creek 1
Cedar Creek 2
Cedar Creek 3
Cedar Creek 4
Cedar Creek 5
Cedar Creek 6
Cedar Creek 7

See: https://www.stopcta.info/factoids/2011/docs/TA_comments.pdf

Elgin 1
Elgin 2 (USACE)
Elgin 2 (TCEQ)
Elgin 3
Elgin 4
Elgin 5
Elgin 6
Elgin 7

Letters of support

One sentence scribbled on an ECO-Merge letter: https://www.stopcta.info/factoids/2011/docs/ECOMerge_Letter.pdf
EISD: https://www.stopcta.info/factoids/2011/docs/EISD_Letter.pdf

Posted by noairport at 21:21:11 in News, Announcements, Players, County, City, State, The 'expendable'

Thursday, May 10, 2011
'Awaiting moderation'

StopCTA has posted several online responses to T. R. Reid's op-ed propaganda published in the Bastrop Advertiser on April 30. But not one of those comments has been released for public viewing.

The first languished in 'awaiting moderation' for several days before being unceremoniously deleted.
See: **'So not the news'** posted above on May 03

Additional comments summarizing recent events at the Bastrop County Commissioners Court were posted on May 4th. One was an announcement that StopCTA had just received a copy of the letter that the BCCC sent to the USACE and that it would soon be posted on this very site (which it was). Those very informative comments are also still 'awaiting moderation' at the Advertiser but is quite similar.

See: **'Timing is everything'** posted above on May 04

Just what is going on with the Advertiser?? Are their newspapers supposed to publish the news? Evidently, not in this county.

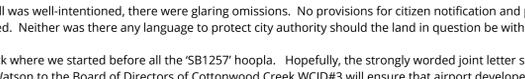
Today, two weeks after the fact, a summary of the April 25th agenda item concerning the proposed Central Texas Airport's permit application to the USACE titled 'Airport developers seek permit' finally made it into the online Advertiser.
See: <https://bastropadvertiser.com/2011/05/10/airport-developers-seek-permit>

Included in the article is all the information citizens would need to submit comments themselves. A lot of good that's going to do because the deadline for submitting comments was yesterday!!

A conspiracy buff might think the timing was calculated to stymie citizen participation while cynics might just chalk it up to garden variety incompetence.

Maybe it's time for heads to roll at the local rag . . .

NEWSFLASH: About an hour after this was posted, the article referenced above was removed from the online Advertiser. Since first posting this we have learned that the article was actually published in the print version on May 5th:



That was still considerably after the permit application filing date and it is unlikely anyone seeing that information for the first time would have been able to write comments on short notice. Of course, there was no mention that the Commissioners didn't learn about the application from Ronnie Moore but rather from StopCTA.

Posted by noairport at 16:15:50 in News, Media, Voices, stopcta

Sunday, May 22, 2011
Just 'Squeeze' it

Recently, this blog has been silent and with good reason. It was finally time to tackle a hardware and operating system (OS) challenge that has been looming on the horizon for months. By the time I got through, I realized I have more skills than I give myself credit for.

Hardware is really no my thing. I even get nervous when I open the case to blot out the dust bunnies so it was pretty stressful to switch the graphics card and rearrange the hard drives. But it got done and everything works. Hallelujah! Then came the fun part . . . installing 'Squeeze', the latest stable version of Debian:

<https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Debian>

a Linux-based OS:
<https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Linux>

It's only been a few days but so far, 'Squeeze' has performed nearly flawlessly and I'm LOVING it!

I started my Linux adventures in February of 2005. The first steps were daunting but it didn't take long for Linux to become my preferred operating system. Bye, bye Windows and good riddance!

Over the years, I tried many of the major Linux-based distributions:
https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Comparison_of_Linux_distributions

but eventually settled on Ubuntu which is one of the many distros based on Debian code:
https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/List_of_Linux_distributions#Debian-based

After a few years, Ubuntu started to go places that didn't work too well for me so, I decided the next time I upgraded my OS, I'd go to the source - pure Debian.

Just what's so great about Linux? Well, for starts, it not Microsoft or Apple! If issues of top-down corporate control and proprietary software trouble you, welcome to the world of free and open source alternatives that are for the most part developed by a community of volunteers from around the globe:

<http://www.debian.org/intro/>

If you value cooperation, community and transparency, Linux is a perfect fit for you.

Idealism, not often in evidence in these days of money grabbing corporate rule, is a cornerstone of the Debian community as illustrated by their social contract. But apart from philosophy, a properly configured Linux system is rock solid and much more secure than the popular commercial alternatives. In fact, while Linux has not yet taken over the desktop market, Linux servers dominate and power the hosting market.

Should you decide to take the plunge, be prepared - Linux is a whole new world. You WILL be challenged! But the rewards are well worth it.

Posted by noairport at 00:11:58 in News, Announcements, Voices, stopcta

Monday, May 23, 2011
Closure

These comments were presented during the citizen's comment period of the May 23rd Commissioners Court session. Shortly after, Judge McDonald appointed Lee Dildy's widow to fill the empty Precinct 4 Commissioner's seat.

This courtroom seems really empty today . . .

I knew Lee Dildy for over a decade, not as my precinct commissioner but as a member of this Court. We met when the County was dealing with the Alcoa situation which dragged on for years. The Commissioner and I developed a friendly, working relationship during that time.

After that intense period, I was not seen much around these parts until the airport issue raised it's nasty little head. When I got back on the horse, there were familiar faces around county government. One of them was Commissioner Dildy.

He called me about ten days before he died. It was a call that had been promised last October but not made all fall or winter. Over those months, that overdue phone call became quite an amusement that he and I shared before the Commissioners Court sessions.

We talked for a long time that afternoon . . . about an hour. We reminisced and shared personal thoughts. He said he considered me to be a friend and I assured him I felt the same. I can't say that we cleared the air because, at least from my perspective, there was no air to clear. I did give him a message which he promised to pass on to the other members of this Court. I hope he kept his word to do so.

When that cordial conversation ended, I felt a sense of peace and closure. In retrospect, it was a call that seemed to be putting things in order and saying goodbye. I am very grateful that he finally picked up the phone and dialed my number.

The last of months of his life, the Commissioner had not been looking well so in a way, I was not all that surprised to hear the news but his final exit certainly left a mark! Undoubtedly for the rest of my years, I'll be thinking of him whenever a Friday the 13th rolls around.

Unfortunately, the Commissioner's sudden departure leaves many unanswered questions regarding the proposed Central Texas Airport project - questions that only he could answer. That is a great loss to those of us who will suffer the consequences if the project should ever move from pipe-dream to reality.

Oh well, there are other questions and other answers that will help us stop this project in its tracks. Then there's the 2012 election when the people will have an opportunity to elect new representation for Precinct 4. We may have lost a key player but the game is far from over.

Posted by noairport at 12:24:31 in Players, County, Voices, stopcta

JUNE 2011

Wednesday, June 01, 2011
SB1257 . . . RIP

'HB1257' died quietly in the House 'Land and Resource Management Committee' at the end of the legislative session on May 31. The slight possibility that the bill would be amended to other legislation just before the close of the session never materialized.

The bill, introduced by Sen. Hegar, intended to place restrictions on the annexation of non-contiguous land across a county line. The Commissioners Court of the annexed county would have been responsible for the decision. In Bastrop County, putting the Commissioners in charge would have been a bit like the proverbial fox guarding the hen house.

This bill was drafted specifically because of a push by developers of the controversial proposed Central Texas Airport project to annex land in Bastrop County to the Cottonwood Creek WCID #3 in Travis County. Annexation would allow developers to issue bonds to recoup cost of airport infrastructure.

While this bill was well-intentioned, there were glaring omissions. No provisions for citizen notification and participation were included. Neither was there any language to protect city authority should the land in question be within their ETJ.

So we're back where we started before all the 'SB1257' hoopla. Hopefully, the strongly worded joint letter sent by Sens. Hegar and Watson to the Board of Directors of Cottonwood Creek WCID#3 will ensure that airport developers do not run roughshod over this county and its residents with a backroom deal.

See: https://www.stopcta.info/foia/cottonwood/11-03-02_HegarWatson_annexation.pdf

Posted by noairport at 16:01:24 in News, Announcements, Players, Developer, County, City, State, Voices, stopcta

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Wednesday, June 08, 2011
USACE FOIA stalls

The FOIA sent to the US Army Corps of Engineers on May 11 for all public comments submitted in response to the permit application for the proposed Central Texas Airport has stalled. This news arrived the day before the documents were to be mailed.

Instead the documents have been sent to the Southwestern Division Office "for review and determination of their release". It's impossible to know when or if that will happen.

Fortunately StopCTA has obtained a number of the comments from other sources.
See: [Talking to the USACE](#) posted May 09

We may not have the documents yet but we do have a few new factoids about them . . .

A total of about sixty-five comments were submitted. Of those, fifty-two requested a public hearing which the Corps is currently considering. Only two comments favored the project, the rest opposed it.

Posted by noairport at 20:39:33 in News, Announcements, Voices, stopcta
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Thursday, June 09, 2011
Reworked airport opens

Reworked Austin-area airport opens to corporate, private flights
By Shonda Novak
Austin American-Statesman
June 8, 2011

After more than three years of construction and a \$33 million makeover, the former Bird's Nest Airport celebrated its official reopening Wednesday as the Austin Executive Airport.

More than 400 people attended festivities at the airport, which is on 585 acres in Pflugerville.

Officials say that the airport will fill a void in the region, which has had a shortage of general aviation airport facilities since the late 1990s, when the former Robert Mueller Municipal Airport in East Austin and the original Austin Executive Airport, north of the city, closed.

Austin has been one of the nation's largest cities without a general aviation reliever airport, Austin Executive Airport officials say.

The new airport now has a 27,000-square-foot terminal; a runway that is 6,025 feet long by 100 feet wide; hangars; a fuel farm; a lounge and office space for pilots; and a conference room.

Work on the expansion started in 2008.

Though the new runway could accommodate aircraft as big as a Boeing 737, that won't be the primary market.

Rather, the airport will serve corporate and private aircraft, said Andrew Perry, the airport's executive director.

"We feel that we've created a premier airport for the greater Austin area," Perry said.

He said traffic has ranged from 10 to 80 flights a day since the new airport opened unofficially May 11.

Already, all hangar space is filled with more than 40 private and corporate planes, "and we're already going to have to look to expand," Perry said.

The man and money behind the airport is Ron Henriksen, a former corporate pilot who made his fortune in the telecommunications industry.

Henriksen also owns the Houston Executive Airport, which opened in 2007 in the Katy/Brookshire area west of Houston.

"For more than a decade, the state of Texas has been trying to build an airport in the Austin area," Henriksen said. "There is no doubt that it will be a draw for further economic growth, and will improve aviation infrastructure throughout the state."

Perry said Austin-Bergstrom International Airport's main focus is commercial and cargo aircraft and that it can get congested.

Now, corporate and private aircraft pilots will have another alternative close to downtown and 15 minutes from the Capitol, Perry said.

The new airport also is about 16 miles from the Formula One racetrack under construction in eastern Travis County. The first race, tentatively scheduled for June 2012, is expected to attracting thousands of fans, including many who might arrive by private or corporate planes.

After Bergstrom opened in 1999, "we lost a lot of our general aviation services," said Dave Porter, senior vice president for economic development at the Greater Austin Chamber of Commerce. "It's great to have additional general aviation services available in the Austin area."

At the end of its first year, airport officials project the new facility will be serving 100 aircraft a day, growing to 575 a day within 10 years. The facility will generate both sales and property tax revenue.

"The facility will surely have a huge positive economic impact," said Pete Dwyer, a developer with real estate interests in the area.

In nearby Bastrop County, developer Jim Carpenter hopes to build another general aviation airport, but that project has encountered some headwinds, including opposition from some residents.

See: <https://www.statesman.com/business/reworked-austin-area-airport-opens-to-corporate-private-1527811.html>

Posted by noairport at 11:25:46 in News, media
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Friday, June 10, 2011
Unanswered questions

The deadline for public comments on the USACE's Public Notice concerning the application permit for work on the proposed Central Texas Airport project was May 9th. But StopCTA still has questions about how the Commissioners Court was notified and decided to get involved in the comment process. Here's a timeline of events from the date the notice was posted until the end of the comment period:

March 25 - The USACE posts a Public Notice of the permit application for work on the proposed Central Texas Airport. Public comment is requested.
See: https://www.stopcta.info/docs/PN_SWF-2010-00506.pdf

April 4 or 5 - StopCTA is informed that the Bastrop County Planning Department has received a copy of the notice but does not have plans to submit comments 'at this time'.

April 6 - StopCTA learns that at least one of the Commissioners hasn't heard anything about the USACE permit application.

April 7 - The County Judge's office also confirms they know nothing about it. The document is promptly downloaded from the StopCTA site and hard copies given to all members of the Court.

April 11 - This is the only Court session when the Commissioners could have considered the possibility of submitting comments before the original April 24 comment deadline. It was NOT on the agenda. But it WAS the subject of StopCTA's three minute presentation during the citizen's comment period that morning.

See "Redemption? Or not . . ." posted above on April 11

The cat was out of the bag now!

April 18 - StopCTA is informed by the USACE that the comment period has been extended to May 9.

April 25 - Finally, the permit application notice makes it onto the agenda! After hearing comments from the public, the Court votes to amend a draft letter presented by Ronnie Moore, the County Planning Director, with some language provided by Environmental Stewardship.

May 4 - StopCTA receives a copy of comments submitted to the USACE by Bastrop County signed by Judge McDonald:
See: https://www.stopcta.info/docs/usace/BCCC_USACE.pdf

May 9 - The comment period closes.

That timeline holds a number of unanswered questions. Why wasn't the Commissioners Court alerted immediately to the USACE's Public Notice when it was issued on March 25? Why did this information have to come from a concerned citizen rather than through internal county channels? Is there an established protocol for information flow from the Planning Department to the Commissioners? Why wasn't the County Planning Director considering sending comments on behalf of the County? Why wasn't it brought up as an agenda item ASAP since the Commissioners could weigh in on it? Or was this such a routine occurrence that it wasn't worth a mention?

A chat with the USACE helped to shed some light on that last question. Since 2006, only four projects in Bastrop County have warranted a Public Notice. So this is not something that happens on a regular basis. Considering it was a rather unusual event and in addition, for a contentious project, why did the Planning Director choose to bury it until he had no choice but to go 'public'? Was he hoping the April 24th deadline would pass unnoticed?

In an effort to get some answers and understand a little better how county government works, StopCTA called Ronnie Moore earlier this week. We talked in a deadlock for several minutes. His consistent answer to questions was a firm 'no-response' which is basically another version of 'taking the fifth'! You would think that a County employee who's salary is paid by our tax dollars could do better than that. But, no, he wouldn't budge. So much for transparency . . .

Looks like those unanswered questions are going to remain unanswered . . . for now.

Posted by noairport at 20:50:37 in Players, County, Voices, stopcta
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Monday, June 13, 2011
The big picture

These comments were presented during the citizen's comment period of the June 13th Commissioners Court session. Once again StopCTA was alone in representing opposition to the airport. That's unfortunate because today provided a significant milestone for reflection and commentary - the infamous 381 Agreement was approved exactly one year ago!

After nearly seventy years on this planet there isn't much that doesn't qualify as 'been there, done that'. Over decades, cyclical patterns become familiar and a 'big picture' that can help put what's happening in Bastrop County into perspective begins to emerge.

There are a lot of folks who are frustrated with the reality that an airport, about which they have no say, might destroy both their personal lives as well as a peaceful river valley. But those of us who've been around for a while have observed this kind of displacement and destruction for decades at home in the US and around the globe. It's just that this time we're on the receiving end. It's euphemistically called 'progress' or in our case, 'economic development'.

One way of dealing with the fear and anger is to target the perceived perpetrator. The object of choice in this county is currently the airport's developer, Jim Carpenter. Mr. Carpenter's colorful history certainly has all the makings of tabloid fodder. But that kind of titillation isn't gonna put the brakes on the airport. So what's the point . . .

Besides, Mr. Carpenter's resume certainly didn't stop this Court from partnering with him to the tune of a 30 year 75% tax rebate via the 381 Agreement signed exactly one year ago. Targeting the Commissioners Court is a more logical choice since you not only inked the deal but are supposedly representing your constituent's best interests, the operative word being 'supposedly'.

Here's the lesson. The nightly news is filled with stories of corporate scoundrels and the political, legal, administrative and media flacks that serve them. They are definitely running the show and we have very little to say about it. In a few choice words . . . "it's the system, stupid".

An even broader perspective would point the finger at 'human nature' which all too often turns down the wrong path out of greed, emotion or confusion leaving a wake of misery and destruction. Don't expect that to change anytime soon either.

So what can be done when all too often imperfect decisions are made for imperfect reasons by imperfect beings? Acceptance that the world and its inhabitants will always be unpredictable, fraught with suffering and stubbornly deaf to our wishes. Detachment from the whole contaminated mess is a logical conclusion that not only reduces stress but opens a space within which well-thought-out actions just might make a difference.

Posted by noairport at 13:39:56 in Players, County, The 'expendable', Voices, stopcta
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Monday, June 13, 2011
TPWD checks in

FYI, there's been an important addition to the list of comments submitted to the USACE:
See: "Talking to the USACE" posted above on May 09.

Texas Parks and Wildlife!
See: https://www.stopcta.info/docs/usace/TPWD_comments.pdf

Posted by noairport at 14:30:24 in News, Media, Players, State
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Tuesday, June 14, 2011
One year later . . .

Today is a milestone but not a very happy one. On June 14, 2010 the Bastrop County Commissioners Court unanimously approved and Judge McDonald signed the infamous 381 Agreement for the proposed Central Texas Airport. Jim Carpenter signed the instrument one day later on June 15.

See: <https://www.stopcta.info/docs/381.pdf>

Since that fateful day, the Court has endured relentless criticism for both the document and the decision to endorse the project which includes a 30 year 75% tax rebate. Opposition to the proposed airport continues to grow. We're not going away any time soon.

It's encouraging to reflect that one year later the proposed airport is still stalled. By this time next year just maybe the project will be nothing but a fading memory.

Posted by noairport at 21:17:23 in News, Announcements, Voices, stopcta
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Tuesday, June 21, 2011
To boldly go . . .

There have been quite a few requests for a StopCTA Facebook page.

Sooo . . . with some trepidation here it is:
See: <https://www.facebook.com/pages/StopCTA/181602748564036?sk=wall>

Resistance was futile. We have been assimilated!

UGH!!!

(Maybe it was the split infinitive that pushed us over the edge!)

Posted by noairport at 11:52:04 in News, Announcements
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Thursday, June 23, 2011
USACE FOIA factoids

Here are some interesting factoids about the USACE comments received today.

A total of 60 comments were in the USACE packet.

Of those, 4 were from official entities - LCRA, TPWD, City of Bastrop and Bastrop County. Only 2 environmental organizations were represented - Environmental Stewardship and Sierra Club. StopCTA has previously obtained and posted all these documents.

Of the remaining comments, 52 were from concerned citizens. With a total of 35, Cedar Creek residents posted twice as many as Elgin residents who came in with 17 (including a comment missing from the packet but obtained earlier). Only a few of the more original and informative submissions will be scanned and posted to the site because most of them are very repetitive (often word for word). Look for the new additions in the next day or two.

As anticipated, only 2 comments supported the airport and neither discussed issues germane to the USACE permit. These two offerings revealed some of the most interesting factoids.

The first, received April 25th, consists of one sentence scribbled at the bottom of a letter that ECO-Merge appears to have sent to its supporters on March 24 in an attempt to generate positive input to the USACE Public Notice. It took a good while to decipher the handwriting which simply says "I strongly support the Ecomerge project". The signature is pretty illegible but might be D. or Don Hill.

Interestingly, the ECO-Merge call-to-action note is dated the day BEFORE the USACE posted the Public Notice on March 25th. Most likely it was blasted to anyone who ever expressed support for the project. As usual, it begins with the hype we've come to expect. But please note that the USACE contact addresses are different than those in the Public Notice and it appears that a second page, which would have contained the signature, was not included in the submission.

The second letter received on May 9th, the deadline for comments, comes from Bill Graves, the Superintendent of the Elgin Independent School District. Mr. Graves appears to have imbibed a good dose of Carpenter Koolaid! It's all about money and how Carpenter is going to save the day! (Maybe he believes in the tooth fairy too.) There is praise and confidence that the developers are addressing 'sound, safety, and infrastructure' issues in a proactive manner and he sees 'no downside in the project'. It's sad that this 'educator' hasn't done his homework. There is none so blind as he who dreams of a windfall . . .

That's about it for now.

Posted by noairport at 23:54:32 in News, Announcements, Players, Voices, stopcta
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Friday, June 24, 2011
FOIA docs received!

This morning a stack of paper several inches thick arrived via Priority Mail from the USACE. The total number of submissions doesn't quite tally with what we expected. While there was no indication in the cover letter that what they sent was incomplete, at least one previously obtained comment seems to be missing. Hopefully there will be an explanation for the discrepancies.

From a cursory review, it appears that the most important submissions have already been posted. The majority of the newly obtained comments seem to be quite (and understandably) repetitive so there will be no need to post every one. However, it is likely that after a thorough reading, some containing new and relevant information will be found, scanned and added to those previously posted.

Please be patient while we slog through the stack.

Posted by noairport at 18:35:10 in News, Announcements
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Monday, June 27, 2011
CTA support MIA

These materials were presented during the citizen's comment period of the June 27th Commissioners Court session. The material is a rework of the post immediately below. Please note that this was Vivian Diddy's first appearance since her appointment to the vacated Precinct 4 Commissioners seat. Welcome on board!

The comments that were submitted to the Army Corps in response to the March 25 Public Notice were requested by a FOIA on May 11. They finally arrived last week. Here are some interesting stats about them.

There were a total of 60 comments. Of those, 4 were from official entities - LCRA, TPWD, City of Bastrop and Bastrop County. There were 2 from environmental organizations - Environmental Stewardship and Sierra Club. Of the remaining comments, 52 were from concerned citizens. With a total of 35, Cedar Creek residents posted twice as many as Elgin residents who provided 17. Only 2 comments supported the project and neither of them dealt with issues germane to the permit on which the Army Corps will be ruling.

The first of the two, received April 25, consists of one sentence scribbled at the bottom of a letter that ECO-Merge appears to have sent to its supporters on March 24 in an attempt to generate positive input to the Public Notice. It took a good while to decipher the handwriting which simply says "I strongly support the Ecomerge project". The signature is pretty illegible but might be D. or Don Hill.

Interestingly, the ECO-Merge call-to-action is dated the day BEFORE the Public Notice was posted on March 25th. Most likely it was blasted to anyone who ever expressed support for the project. Please note that the Army Corps contact addresses are different than those in the Public Notice. Are improperly addressed comments even valid?

The second letter, received May 9 and also improperly addressed, came from Bill Graves, the Superintendent of the Elgin ISD. It's all about money and how there is 'no downside in this project'. It's sad that this 'educator' hasn't done his homework and considered the collateral damage. There is none so blind as he who dreams of a windfall . . .

So it seems that ECO-Merge's pre-notification plea for support was pretty much of a bust. Is there ANY credible public support for this project? In contrast, submissions from the official entities, environmental organizations and well-informed citizens provided responsive, detailed comments. A selection of the more original and informative submissions have been scanned and posted to the StopCTA website.

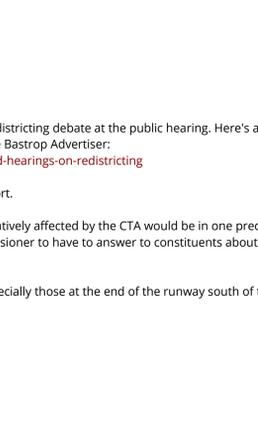
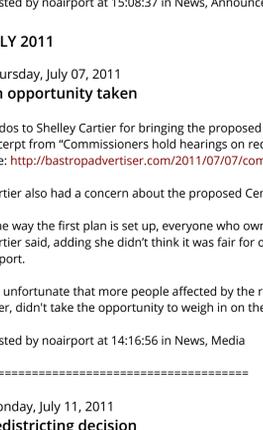
The people have spoken loudly and clearly: THIS PROJECT IS A VERY BAD IDEA AND NEEDS TO BE STOPPED NOW! But will our voices be heard?

Posted by noairport at 11:08:10 in News, Players, Developer, The 'expendable', Voices, stopcta
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Monday, June 27, 2011
Redistricting

Redistricting was on the agenda this morning. There will be another Public Hearing this Thursday, June 30, 2011 at 7:00 P.M. in the Commissioners Courtroom.

Those living in the area north of 71 and south of the river - River Crossing, Pope Bend etc - need to pay special attention. No matter which plan is adopted, you will no longer be in Pct. 3. For the next 10 years, you will be in either Pct. 1 or Pct. 4. If you have a preference, you have an opportunity to weigh in at the Hearing on Thursday.



Posted by noairport at 15:08:37 in News, Announcements
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JULY 2011

Thursday, July 07, 2011
An opportunity taken

Kudos to Shelley Cartier for bringing the proposed CTA into the redistricting debate at the public hearing. Here's an excerpt from "Bastropadvertiser.com" regarding the redistricting in the Bastrop Advertiser:
See: <http://bastropadvertiser.com/2011/07/07/commissioners-hold-hearings-on-redistricting>

Cartier also had a concern about the proposed Central Texas Airport.

"The way the first plan is set up, everyone who owns property negatively affected by the CTA would be in one precinct," Cartier said, adding she didn't think it was fair for only one commissioner to have to answer to constituents about the airport.

It's unfortunate that more people affected by the redistricting, especially those at the end of the runway south of the river, didn't take the opportunity to weigh in on the plans.

Posted by noairport at 14:16:56 in News, Media
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Monday, July 11, 2011
Redistricting decision

This morning the Bastrop County Commissioners chose Plan 2 as their preferred redistricting option. In this Plan, the area south of the river and North of Hwy 71 is now in Precinct 1. A big thank you to all who participated in the process.

Posted by noairport at 13:44:28 in News, Announcements, Players, County
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Monday, July 11, 2011
A long and winding road

These comments were presented during the citizen's comment period of the July 11th Commissioners Court session.

We've been traveling together down a long and winding road every second and fourth Monday for the last nine months. Unfortunately, there doesn't seem to be any end in sight.

Initially there were other Monday morning travelers that over time have mostly disappeared. But even though I've often been the lone voice opposing the proposed Central Texas Airport, don't think for a minute that the opposition to the project has evaporated.

Coming to this courtroom week after week takes a commitment and tenacity which many folks have neither the temperament nor circumstances to sustain. It might be family or job obligations that get in the way. Or maybe it's the entertainments and other distractions that follow us wherever we go. Or perhaps as is all too often the case in our 'me' culture, it's just easier to sit back and let someone else do the work.

Exploring the genesis of the proposed airport and projecting its potential consequences has been a journey in itself and remains an ongoing process. There are always more things to discover. More dots to connect. Another rock to look under.

I often wonder if anything that has been presented during the citizen's comments has been helpful to the Court or possibly provided previously unknown information about this controversial project which you have unilaterally imposed on our County. If you know then what you know now, would there even be a 381 Agreement or would it have been written with more public safeguards and consideration? Has anyone on this Court ever had second thoughts or considered remedying the flaws in the 381 or better yet, pulling the plug? But I digress . . .

At first, the press actually paid attention to what was being said on these Monday mornings. Or maybe as the numbers dwindled, so did media interest. Perhaps a lone voice just isn't considered newsworthy. Or maybe poking into the dark corners of the County's business is now considered off-limits for public consumption in the local media.

In recent months some rather disturbing news concerning the proposed airport has not been given one drop of ink and that's a real shame. The people have a right to know! And as is so often the case when institutions fail us, it's up to ordinary citizens.

Fortunately, the internet is the great equalizer that has made the job much easier. Documents, research and editorials about the proposed Central Texas Airport project that aren't available anywhere else are posted regularly on the StopCTA.info website.

When this airport and industrial fantasy finally collapses, that's where an unsanitized version of the story will break.

Posted by noairport at 13:49:44 in Players, County, Voices, stopcta
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Monday, July 15, 2011
Performance evaluation

These comments were presented during the citizen's comment period of the July 25th Commissioners Court session.

At the last Court session, I mentioned several reasons why more people aren't coming on Monday mornings to voice their opposition to the proposed Central Texas Airport. But one very important item was omitted from that list. One that doesn't stem from personal circumstances but rather from a perception that local government is indifferent to the voice of "the people".

Here's a court-appropriate version of what some of your constituents have had to say regarding the effectiveness of engaging local officials about the proposed airport. Consider this an ear-to-the-ground performance evaluation and please take note:

"They won't listen so why bother?"

"The Commissioners have sold out."

"The good of boys are running the show and they don't care."

"It would be a waste of time."

That sense of hopelessness and lack of confidence that local government is working for 'the people' should trouble you. I know it troubles me. But although their sense of frustration is understandable, is inaction an appropriate response? I think not. If 'we the people' don't step up to try to frigate the ship, who will?

The citizens' comments are usually prefaced with an explanation from you, Judge McDonald, that although the Court won't respond to our comments or questions at that time, the Court does listen and take everything we say into account.

If indeed you ARE listening, there has been much evidence of it. You have yet to engage the public in an open forum or acknowledge in any way the facts and positions that have been presented to you week after week. Instead, the county's most notable response to date has been damage control.

The local press has been all too willing to regurgitate ad nauseum the County's well-worn positions, chapter and verse. And last December, after months of very public criticism a rather Orwellian Mission Statement appeared in the lobby outside this very courtroom. Oh . . . and then there was the impromptu gathering also outside this courtroom last December to explain the circumstances under which the County WOULD hold a public forum.

So all in all, it seems the lack of confidence in this Court is not unfounded. And the divide will only increase if the Court continues its impasse status quo. How will you regain the trust of those who have been alienated by the County's unilateral decisions regarding the Central Texas Airport? Or are those who feel disconnected and abandoned just not politically relevant enough for you to bother? That would be so very sad.

Posted by noairport at 14:07:15 in Players, County, The 'expendable', Voices, stopcta

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AUGUST 2011

Monday, August 08, 2011

Mythbusting

These comments were presented during the citizen's comment period at the August 8 Commissioners Court session.

Today there's going to be some respectful mythbusting!

There is still lingering confusion about the role that Rep. Mark Strama played in the failed bill that would have annexed land under the jurisdiction of the proposed Central Texas Airport to the Cottonwood Creek WCID #3 in Travis County.

Since the beginning of the Legislative session, Strama's staff has explained that creation of the bill was facilitated through his office as a 'courtesy' that would be offered to anyone requesting assistance in drafting possible legislation. Somehow this legislative 'service' was misinterpreted as pro-active support and a myth quickly surfaced that the Representative was going to sponsor the bill.

In reality, Rep. Strama never took a position. In part because legislators are reluctant to meddle in another district's business . . . especially concerning a contentious issue. In part because staff research quickly revealed substantial deficiencies in the project.

There was a collective sigh of relief when the Legislative session ended and no one had stepped forward to sponsor the bill. This gave rise to the myth that the issue is dead until the next legislative session. NOT SO! While the legislative approach is the easiest and therefore most desirable to developers, it is not the only way to create a MUD or WCID.

Last week I talked to the TCEQ to learn a little more about the process. Generally, the application process seems to require filing a petition to appropriate agencies and entities, a timely Public Notice in the local paper and consent from local entities including the affected county and/or city. Be prepared. This is not easy reading.

Title 30; Chapter 293 of the Texas Administrative Code describes the TCEQ's role in the formation of water districts: See: https://texreg.sos.state.tx.us/public/readactxev?View=ACT7&ac_view=4&t=30&pt=1&ch=293

Texas Statutes: Chapter 51 details requirements for WCIDs: See: https://texas.public.law/statutes/tex_water_code_title_4_chapter_51

and Texas Statutes: Chapter 54 details those for MUDs: See: <https://statutes.capitol.texas.gov/Docs/WA/htm/WA.54.htm>

So we are anything but free and clear until 2013. Vigilance is especially warranted now that airport interests have acquired the Falcon Seaboard property. Either a MUD or WCID spearheaded at that location would not bode well for the county's future.

Judge McDonald, you have stated publicly that any MUD-related activity would "require a public meeting". Should one of these non-legislative options arise, the citizens of this county are going to hold you to your word and we will expect this Court to do more than rubberstamp such a proposal.

Posted by noairport at 12:06:27 in Players, Developer, County, City, State, The 'expendable', Voices, stopcta

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Monday, August 22, 2011

Buyer's remorse?

These comments were presented during Citizens' Comments at the Bastrop County Commissioners Court on August 22. Due to time constraints, the quotations from the 381 Agreement were truncated but are presented here in their entirety. It is quite encouraging that the last few weeks there has been a better turnout for the citizen's comments. Let's keep the momentum going!

I doubt that many Bastrop County citizens, even those present in this courtroom today, have actually read the infamous 381 Agreement between Bastrop County and the Central Texas Airport. Most of it is rather uninteresting but don't let that fool you. This document contains some jaw-dropping nuggets.

Today, I want to acquaint you with 'Section 10' titled 'Mutual Assistance: County Cooperation and Assistance'. Keep in mind that the wording is nearly identical to the original draft submitted by the CTA's attorneys in September 2009.

There are only two sub-sections but they are real doozies. 'Sub-section (a)' cements the relationship between the County and the Company:

"To promote the ability of each Party to realize and obtain the economic benefits contemplated by this Agreement (regardless of changes in public policy or taxes or assessments attributable to Company facilities), County and Company will take or cause to be taken such actions as are commercially and reasonably necessary or appropriate
i) to carry out the terms and provisions of this Agreement and
ii) to aid, support and assist each other in carrying out such provisions."

But the real meat is in 'Sub-section (b)':

"In addition to County's agreement to reasonably aid, support and assist Company in carrying out the terms and provisions of this Agreement and in recognition of the substantial benefits that the County will realize and obtain as a result of the successful completion of the Project (including the fulfillment of an essential company purpose), upon the request of the Company, County shall take such action as County in its sole discretion determines reasonably necessary and appropriate to cooperate with and assist Company in any Company application to an Infrastructure Agency, for such approvals, consents or permits and any regulatory, financial or other forms of assistance as shall be deemed reasonable, necessary or appropriate for the planning, design, acquisition, development, construction, equipment, operation and financing of the Project."

Why not just offer you your first-born while you're at it? Basically, all Carpenter has to do is ask and the County, "at its sole discretion," will grease the necessary wheels. I can only imagine the litigation that would ensue if the County actually refused to comply!

A comparison with the Mutual Assistance language used in the 381 Agreement for Burleson Crossing, puts the magnitude of the County's airport give-away into perspective:

"Mutual Assistance/Good Faith. The County and the Owner each agree to act in Good Faith and to do all things reasonably necessary or appropriate to carry out the terms and provisions of this Agreement, and to aid and assist the other in carrying out such terms and provisions in order to put the other in the same economic condition contemplated by this Agreement, regardless of any changes in public policy, the law or taxes or assessments attributable to the Property."

Why all the special perks for the CTA? Was the County that desperate? Now, the morning after the con, in the cold light of day, is this Court possibly experiencing a case of well-deserved buyer's remorse? And if so just what is this Court going to do to remedy the situation? Inquiring minds would really like to know.

Posted by noairport at 11:10:24 in News, Players, County, Voices, stopcta

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SEPTEMBER 2011

Monday, September 12, 2011

Aftermath

These comments were presented during Citizens' Comments at the Bastrop County Commissioners Court on September 12.

I'd like to begin by expressing a sincere appreciation for everyone in this county who has stepped up and delivered this past week. You've all done an outstanding job. A huge thank you also goes to KXAN for broadcasting the very informative press conferences.

Considering the challenges ahead, the proposed Central Texas Airport is not likely to be a priority item on any agenda for some time to come. So after nearly a year of talking to this Court every second and fourth Monday, I have decided to get out of your way for a little while so you can take care of more pressing business.

I leave you with these thoughts . . .

The Union Chapel fire in western Bastrop County gave those of us living nearby a taste of what life might be like in proximity to the proposed Central Texas Airport. There is no doubt in my mind that if the CTA is built, the area to the west of Highway 21 - some of the most beautiful and thoughtfully developed in the county - will be no longer be suitable for the type of residential or recreational activity that currently exists there. That will be a tremendous loss to those who will be displaced as well as to the quality of life in the county as a whole.

Then I imagined what a fire the magnitude of the one recently experienced would do to an airport and industrial complex on the banks of the Colorado river. I envisioned planes and fuel tanks exploding and unknown toxins filling the air and running downhill toward the river. Such an environmental disaster is too painful to contemplate for long.

Even with the distraction of rebuilding this county, I hope that this Court will remain vigilant regarding the proposed Central Texas Airport and not let anything slip in under the radar while your attention is focused elsewhere.

Finally, I hope that a lesson has been learned in light of the recent destruction that will temper future decisions regarding development. Less is always more.

We all want to keep Bastrop beautiful, livable and safe and can do just that if priorities are chosen carefully.

Posted by noairport at 12:56:27 in Players, County, The 'expendable', Voices, stopcta

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Tuesday, September 13, 2011

October activities

Considering the events of the past week including the losses to individuals as well as the county as a whole, the Airport Action Month as planned for October is going to be postponed. However, informational Meet & Greets may still be held at various locations.

Cedar Creek Meet & Greet

Saturday, October 1

11:00am - 3:00pm
Bastrop Producers Market
977 Highway 71 West

For up-to-date information subscribe to our mailing list

Posted by noairport at 17:25:17 in News, Announcements
1 comment

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OCTOBER 2011

Sunday, October 9, 2011

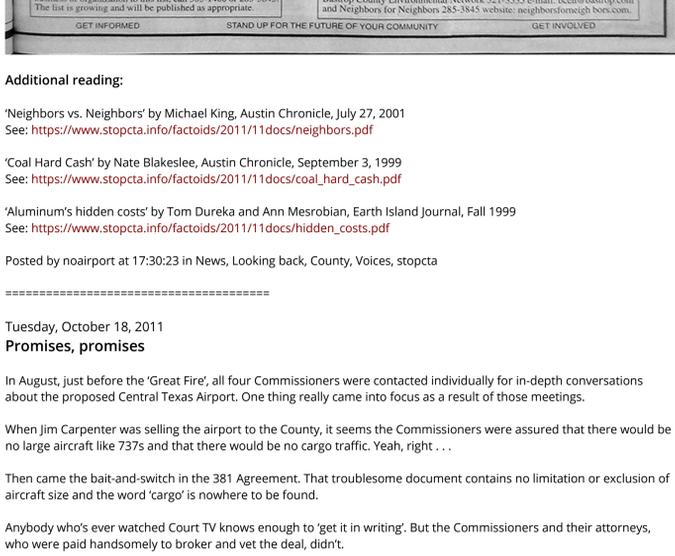
A history lesson

Here's some interesting Bastrop county history from 1999 when Alcoa appeared on the scene to exercise their mineral rights to stripmine lignite in northern Bastrop county for their smelters in Rockdale. BCEN (Bastrop County Environmental Network) encouraged the Commissioners to stand up to Alcoa by passing a resolution opposing stripmining. There was a precedent from a similar action taken by the Central Texas Lignite Watch maybe a decade earlier. Judge McDonald, you had just taken office for the first time a few months earlier, was promised that if the Commissioners passed it, we would get support from the community. Well, they did and here it is!

Three full-page community support statements were published in the summer of 1999 in Bastrop, Smithville and Elgin. More and more businesses and entities signed-on with each one. By the end of the project, all the cities, counties, Bastrop and Elgin Chambers, Bastrop EDC etc. had joined the party with over 800 signing on. The 'ads' were all paid for by donations from those who supported them.

Those were the days . . .

Additional information - The original documents were finally located this afternoon. Here's an image of the prepared-for-publication layout of the last of the three full page publications.



Additional reading:

'Neighbors vs. Neighbors' by Michael King, Austin Chronicle, July 27, 2001
See: <https://www.stopcta.info/factsoids/2011/11docs/neighbors.pdf>

'Coal Hard Cash' by Nate Blakeslee, Austin Chronicle, September 3, 1999
See: https://www.stopcta.info/factsoids/2011/11docs/coal_hard_cash.pdf

'Aluminum's hidden costs' by Tom Dureka and Ann Meschoben, Earths Island Journal, Fall 1999
See: https://www.stopcta.info/factsoids/2011/11docs/hidden_costs.pdf

Posted by noairport at 17:30:23 in News, Looking back, County, Voices, stopcta

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Tuesday, October 18, 2011

Promises, promises

In August, just before the 'Great Fire', all four Commissioners were contacted individually for in-depth conversations about the proposed Central Texas Airport. One thing they really came into focus as a result of those meetings.

When Jim Carpenter was selling the airport to the County, it seems the Commissioners were assured that there would be no large aircraft field 737s and that there would be no cargo traffic. Yeah, right . . .

Then came the bait-and-switch in the 381 Agreement. That troublesome document contains no limitation or exclusion of aircraft size and the word 'cargo' is nowhere to be found.

Anybody who's ever watched Court TV knows enough to get it in writing". But the Commissioners and their attorneys, who were paid handsomely to broker and vet the deal, didn't.

Here's what they did get:

Section 3. Entire Agreement.

(a) All Agreements. All oral and written agreements between the Parties to this Agreement relating to the subject matter of this Agreement that were made prior to the execution of this Agreement have been reduced to writing and are contained in this Agreement.

So all those reassuring promises amount to absolutely nothing, nada, zip, zilch.

It's impossible to point a finger in any one direction as the Commissioners voted in lock-step to approve the 381 Agreement on June 14, 2010. Perhaps it's just lack of experience. The county only has one other 381 Agreement on the books - for Burleson Crossing - that was approved on October 5, 2007.

Posted by noairport at 00:00:54 in Players, County, Voices, stopcta

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Monday, October 31, 2011

Vampire tales

October 31 seems like a fitting time to ponder the future of StopCTA. The recent events have understandably impacted the momentum that we had been gaining over the last year. We were hoping to carry on but in fact circumstances have drained the life-blood out of our efforts and brought things pretty much to a screeching halt.

The county and many of its residents will be occupied with recovery and putting their lives together for months if not years to come. Then there is the approach of the holiday season madness. On top of that there are the usual obstacles always going to attend - family, work and other 'important' pursuits. No one seems to have the time, focus or commitment to carry on. It sucks . . .

It's anyone's guess when or if a transfusion will arrive. The good news is that the site with its abundant resources will still be available. Perhaps someone will wander in, get inspired and donate a pint or two to resuscitate our efforts and get things going again.

Until then . . . over and out.

Posted by noairport at 22:51:30 in News, Voices, stopcta

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DECEMBER 2011

Monday, December 05, 2011

BISD not totally MIA

BISD's silence regarding the proposed Bastrop Central Texas Airport has been rather puzzling. It's not for lack of information. The new Striping, StopCTA figured several BISD meetings. Facts about the proposed project - including the observation that the new Cedar Creek High School is located directly at the end of the runway - were presented to Board Members, parents and other concerned citizens.

But the silence has continued.

Then we discovered that at least one lone voice at BISD has raised concerns about the effects the airport might have. A letter was written to the FAA by BISD Superintendent Steve Murray in March of 2010. As indicated in the letter, Mr. Murray was Deputy Superintendent of Del Valle ISD during the transition from Robert Mueller to ABIA so is aware of the problems that airplanes could bring to the Cedar Creek High School.

We have not yet seen the FAA's response but understand it side-stepped the concerns presented.

Now if only the School Board would wake up and smell the jet fuel.

Posted by noairport at 16:03:34 in Players, County, Voices, stopcta

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Monday, December 5, 2011

What's up with Elgin?

Well, with regard to the CTA . . . not much even though the ubiquitous assumption is that Elgin supports the project.

Recent conversations with the Mayor of Elgin, the Elgin City Manager and the Elgin EDC have completely debunked that assumption. In fact, not one of these entities has taken an official position despite the fact that information regarding the project can be found on their respective websites.

There has also been very little 'official' communication between Elgin and the Carpenter organization. A recent Open Records Request (ORR) to the City of Elgin garnered only 47 pages. The Perryman Group's infamous report 'The Sky's the limit' extolling the economic benefits of the CTA squandered 38 pages, the bulk of the offering.

Only two documents - an Elgin and attachment sent to the City Manager, Greg Vick - are of interest. The email is a rather desperate plea to the City of Elgin to send supportive comments to the USACE regarding the permit application for work on the CTA. The date of the email is April 19, 2011 just a few days before the original April 25 deadline for submission of comments.

The attachment is another pitch for support that was originally sent to 'supporters' of the CTA on March 24, 2011, the day before the Public Notice was posted by the USACE. The FOIA to the USACE for the submitted public comments had provided the first page of this document which we now know consisted of three pages in its entirety.

Mr. Carpenter's best efforts to drum up support were ignored by the City of Elgin and it seems most everyone else as only two favorable comments were ultimately submitted to the USACE.

Posted by noairport at 19:03:24 in Players, County, Voices, stopcta

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Friday, December 9, 2011

Second FOIA denied

A second FOIA requesting additional information regarding Permit Application No. SWF-2010-00506 was submitted to the USACE on October 21. One month later on November 21, that request was 'forwarded to the Southwestern Division Office for review and determination of releasability.' On December 5, a determination was finally made to deny release of the document.

See: http://www.stopcta.info/foia/11-12-05_usace_denied.pdf

So much for transparency in government . . .

Update: A letter appealing this decision was posted on December 30. Hopefully, the requested letter will be forthcoming.

Posted by noairport at 14:58:39 in News, Announcements, Players, Developer

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Friday, December 16, 2011

For the birds

A few days ago, this LTE titled 'Eagles at airport site' appeared in the Austin American Statesman:

I own property on the south side of the Colorado River across from the site to the proposed Central Texas Airport in Bastrop County. I have observed and photographed both mature and juvenile bald eagles flying and roosting in the area of the planned take-off and landing patterns for the proposed airport. I hope that Bastrop County officials will withdraw their support of this airport for the preservation of these bald eagles and other wildlife that inhabit this area.

**Margaret Maguire
San Antonio**

Eagles are a noble and beloved bird but it's going to take more than sentimental, well-intentioned concerns like Ms. Maguire's to put the brakes on this project. Forget the Feds as Bald Eagles are no longer on the Endangered Species List. And Forget County officials as they inked a 381 (Economic Development) Agreement well over a year ago that legally obligates them to support the project.

Those of us who have taken the time to read the 381 Agreement are well aware of the County's obligations. Here is a pertinent excerpt from Section 10 titled 'Mutual Assistance: County Cooperation and Assistance' (discussed in more detail here):

" . . . to cooperate with and assist Company in any Company application to an Infrastructure Agency, for such approvals, consents or permits and any regulatory, financial or other forms of assistance as shall be deemed reasonable, necessary or appropriate for the planning, design, acquisition, development, construction, equipment, operation and financing of the Project."

Knowledge is power. This site offers a formidable collection of documents that just might hold the key to getting the job done. Start reading folks . . .

Posted by noairport at 21:36:03 in News, Media, Environment, Players, County, Voices, stopcta

Thursday, December 22, 2011

Time to wake up

These days only a handful of people in Bastrop county have a clue about what's happening with the proposed Central Texas Airport. The issue seems to have disappeared from our collective consciousness and life has gone on for most everyone. That complacency and denial could come to haunt us.

Some comments that have recently come our way illustrate just how woefully uninformed the public is.

One rumor floating around is that if the developer doesn't meet an end-of-the-year deadline, the project would lose funding. NOT TRUE! The first deadline isn't until June 30, 2012 seven months from now. The specific requirements that the developer must meet can be found in 'Section 9 Company Performance' of the 381 Agreement.

Another rumor is that the US Army Corps of Engineers has granted the permit for work on the airport. WRONG AGAIN! The Corps has requested and is awaiting additional information from the developer based on the comments submitted during the Public Comment period which ended May 9 and an 'Environmental Information Document' submitted by the developer in August. After the requested information is received and processed, the Corps may even hold a public hearing before making a final decision.

Then there is the more general consensus that the airport annoyance has just faded away. This conclusion is a case of 'out of sight, out of mind'. Just because it's not in the news, does not mean it's not inching forward.

It's time to wake up, folks. Unless of course, the prospect of 737s rumbling overhead and chemicals polluting the Colorado River seems like a welcome addition to the ambiance of our county.

Posted by noairport at 14:53:22 in Future, Players, Developer, County, The 'expendable', Voices, stopcta

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END OF 2011 ENTRIES