



**LAKE ELMO AIRPORT FEDERAL EA / STATE EAW**

# Community Engagement Panel

## Meeting #5 Minutes

Baytown Community Center  
January 16, 2018  
6:00 P.M.

**Panel Attendees**

Marlon Gunderson  
Mary Vierling  
Dave Schultz  
Kent Grandlienard  
Stephen Buckingham  
Ben Prchal  
Chad Leqve  
Neil Ralston  
Michael Madigan

**Other Attendees**

Joe Harris  
Brad Juffer  
Evan Wilson  
Evan Barrett  
Colleen Bosold  
Todd Streeter

**Public Observers**

Tom Vierling  
Pat Schultz  
Gary Kriesel

**Absent Panel Members**

John Renwick  
Keith Bergmann  
Ann Pung-Terwedo  
Robin Anthony

**Representing**

Airport Tenant/User and City of Lake Elmo Resident  
West Lakeland Township Resident  
West Lakeland Township Supervisor  
Baytown Township Supervisor  
Baytown Township Resident  
City of Lake Elmo Planner  
Metropolitan Airports Commission Director of Environment  
Metropolitan Airports Commission Airport Planner  
MAC Commissioner District F

**Representing**

Metropolitan Airports Commission  
Metropolitan Airports Commission  
Metropolitan Airports Commission  
Mead & Hunt  
Mead & Hunt  
Community Collaboration

**Resident of**

West Lakeland Township  
West Lakeland Township  
Washington County Commissioner

**Representing**

Airport Tenant/User  
City of Lake Elmo Resident  
Washington County Public Works Planner  
Greater Stillwater Chamber of Commerce

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*The attached report represents this writer's interpretation of items discussed during the meeting. Any corrections or additional information should be brought to our attention for clarification.*

## **The purpose of the meeting was to:**

- Present the final results of the environmental effects of the proposed development (preferred alternative).
- Share information with the CEP members on the public hearing timing, format and guidelines.
- Continue to equip CEP members to be the point of contact for information sharing, both to and from the community and MAC, and to respond to inquiries from their constituent groups.

## **The presentation was as follows:**

A copy of this presentation can be found at: [metroairports.org/General-Aviation/Lake-Elmo-Environmental-Assessment/21D-CEP-Meeting-5-Presentation-01-16-2018.aspx](http://metroairports.org/General-Aviation/Lake-Elmo-Environmental-Assessment/21D-CEP-Meeting-5-Presentation-01-16-2018.aspx)

Evan Barrett, Mead & Hunt (MAC's consultant) Project Manager for the environmental review process, opened the meeting by welcoming everyone and thanking them for coming. He then announced the CEP had a new member joining tonight—Ben Prchal, Lake Elmo City Planner—and suggested going around the table and having everyone introduce themselves and who they represent. The CEP members in attendance each introduced themselves.

Evan then outlined the agenda for the evening. He said while there wasn't a significant amount of new material to share with the group tonight, the intent of the meeting was to have one more opportunity to check in prior to publishing the EA/EAW document. He stated the last time the group met, the team was nearing completion with all the field work and analyzing the results—for some categories the work was complete, but not for all. He then said, at this point in time, all that work has been completed. He said he would provide updates on the environmental effects categories for which there was new information since the preliminary results he covered at the October 19 CEP meeting, and then would discuss the timeline for publishing the draft document and provide details on the public comment period and public hearing.

Evan reported the following updates:

- Biological Resources – includes fish, wildlife and plants
  - At the time of the last meeting, the FAA was still working on its finding for the Endangered Species Act, as there are two federally-listed species (northern long-eared bat, a threatened species, and rusty patched bumblebee, an endangered species) known to exist near or on the airport.
  - The FAA issued a finding of “may affect, not likely to adversely affect” those species. Best management practices and mitigation measures will be identified in the environmental document for avoiding any affects to those species. Given that those measures will be taken, the FAA determined there will be no adverse effects to endangered or threatened species. The US Fish & Wildlife Service (USFWS) concurred with this finding.
  - USFWS suggested the MAC consider managing a portion of the airport property as a pollinator habitat. The MAC is considering the benefits, risks, costs, potential partnerships and FAA input of doing this. The rusty patched bumblebee is a pollinator

- that plays an important role in the food chain. Several other types of insect species, such as the Monarch Butterfly, could also benefit from this.
- Kent Grandlienard asked if the pollinator habitat is proposed for areas that are currently ag land? Evan responded the area being considered is south of the proposed realignment of 30<sup>th</sup> Street N., which is ag land currently
  - Kent then asked if this is a mitigation measure? Evan responded that it's considered a voluntary environmental enhancement. He said, we're not mitigating for anything necessarily, but it's a way the MAC can provide a benefit from having that land that won't be used for any type of airport use.
  - Neil Ralston added it would be converting that ag land to a tall-grass prairie-type habitat. Kent shared concerns about tall-grass prairie habitat attracting ground-nesting birds, which then attracts coyotes, foxes and other wildlife. He stated his surprise that that type of habitat would be recommended on an airport. Evan said that part of the reason the team is looking at the area south of 30<sup>th</sup> Street N. is that it's outside the airport fence, to prevent any mammals that might be attracted to that habitat from getting onto the airfield. Evan also said the ag land itself is a wildlife attractant for deer, geese and other species, and that the project team has had initial conversations with the USDA. USDA concurs it will attract other types of species, but if you balance the equation of taking away the ag land vs. implementing the tall-grass prairie, there's a net benefit from a wildlife hazard perspective.
  - Kent said fences don't keep critters out and believes there will still be wildlife issues and said that's something to consider. He said raptors are attracted to the tall-grass prairie. Evan responded that the team is having conversations with the FAA to make sure all of these things are being considered, as well as what the implications are of attracting endangered species to an airport. There are other considerations such as would this be considered park land or controlled access. Evan said there are a lot of different considerations that are being weighed, and wildlife hazard is one of them.
  - Dave Schultz asked if there was no concern about removing 25 acres of trees? Evan responded that the agencies have not identified any required mitigation beyond the best practices noted for the northern long-eared bat. He said the benefit is that you have clear approaches to the runway, which is something that needs to be done anyway. Some of the trees identified for removal would need to be removed anyway for the existing runway and stated this is an opportunity for the MAC to take care of an existing issue. Regarding bats, Evan stated that it's a species that nests in trees, but if the trees are removed in the winter time, that should avoid any incidental taking of the bats associated with the tree removal. Evan also noted that Dave had expressed concerns at a previous meeting that when the bats returned, the trees would be gone and the bats would have to find a new place to nest, and confirmed that was true; however the USFWS's concern was with the incidental taking of the bats during tree removal activities, and they concurred with the FAA's finding that with appropriate best management practices and mitigation measures, there would be no adverse effect.
  - Kent added one more thought to the discussion, saying that wild turkeys fly so fences don't bother them, and they love tall-grass habitat.
  - Chad Leque asked Mary Vierling if she had any thoughts on the matter.

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- Mary responded that wildlife is on the airport/in the vicinity already anyway, including turkeys. She told Chad, I don't know what you're going to do because a fence won't keep them out. She said she has to stop for them on 30<sup>th</sup> Street N. all the time. She said they're abundant in the area.
- Dave said he's seen eagles and turkey vultures in the area.
- Chad asked the group if they'd view the pollinator habitat as something positive or not? Mary said she didn't know if there was a benefit between the tall grass vs. the ag land. She said it's running about the same. Stephen Buckingham said going from corn to tall grass means you're trading raptors for geese and pheasants. Evan noted the difference is that geese are a flocking bird so where there's one, there's hundreds of them, whereas the raptors tend to be a single occurrence. He suspected this is the view the USDA takes from a wildlife hazard perspective: any type of bird is not good, but you're likely to see a lot more birds with the ag land as opposed to the tall-grass prairie. Chad said what the MAC is trying to gauge is how the community would view the use of airport property for something that is more natural than ag land. But, he said, if the perception is that it's six one way, half a dozen the other, that's good information to bring back to the MAC and it's a good discussion to have here. He stressed wanting to get input from the residents around the airport.
- Kent replied he's all for wildlife habitat, but just thinks it's an ironic situation.
- Mary said this is the area from the river valley where they have the return of the peregrine falcon. She also noted it's interesting to watch the pecking order of the eagles as they feed in the area. There's more than one eagle nesting in the area, there are multiple eagles. She said it's not on the airport property, but she believes there's an eagle nest to the south. She said they're feeding on something if they're happy there, because it's far from the river.
- Chad asked Mary whether tall-grass prairie on the airport would be viewed as an amenity from her perspective. Mary said she wasn't sure.
- Kent noted that Oak Park Heights Prison is doing a pollinator project right now. They had planned on tall-grass prairie, but he said there is pollinator habitat that is shorter grass and is less likely to bring in the bigger ground-nesting birds and some of the predators. He said it's all about height. Whether prey or predator, the taller grass prairie will attract more of it, he acknowledged he doesn't know enough about the pollinator plants, but said he thought there were shorter varieties that can be beneficial to the bees and butterflies but may not attract some of the larger predators. Evan responded that there are a lot of different options in terms of what can be done with the mix of species and how it's maintained, and that would be spelled out in a management plan if the MAC determines this is something they would move forward with. He also noted the MAC would consider partnering with a local agency and it would be interesting to find out who is working on the prison pollinator project. Kent said Washington County was involved, among others.
- Mary said her biggest concern right now is the number of birds, which don't match up well with the airport. She said that's likely due to the holding ponds and noted that has attracted a lot of birds. She said she didn't think the pond was meant to hold that much water, but it is, and now a new one is going in on the corner of 30<sup>th</sup> and Manning Ave. and that would be the next concern – how much water is that going to hold? She thinks

it's deeper than the one down by the north entrance. She said that's her biggest concern because if a plane comes down because of a bird, it's probably more likely than a plane getting hit by a deer. Chad said that's good feedback and as Evan had noted, the team is working with the FAA to get answers to questions like this as it pertains to potentially establishing this type of pollinator habitat on airport property and as it relates to wildlife hazards. He said the team is going to flesh some of this out a bit more before making any decisions. He said it has been helpful to get this feedback and thanked the CEP for their input.

- Evan stated there are several additional environmental benefits beyond just providing habitat for pollinators. Because there is less ag land, there are carbon sequestration benefits and climate benefits associated with the fact that these are plants that would not be harvested annually and would be there indefinitely. He stated the fact you're not using farm equipment on that land results in climate change benefits. There are also storm water management benefits because these are deep-rooting plants so a lot more of the storm water would infiltrate on-site and not be going into the pond. He noted these and other environmental benefits are being balanced against the risks and costs associated with it.
- Kent added one more comment that 35 years ago this area was a magnet for Canada geese during their migrations. People would drive from the cities out to Downs Lake, which they would call Goose Lake, and then to Lake Elmo, especially if we didn't have a lot of snow. There were thousands and thousands of geese, then the goose population started to increase in the 1960s, but in the early '60s they were an endangered species. It's diminished over the years compared to what it was 30-35 years ago, but it could cycle around again. He said he didn't know if it was a factor of what the farmers were planting or not planting, or snow cover. He said maybe taking away the ag land you would have some risk with other wildlife, but you probably wouldn't have thousands of geese because they don't like the tall grass, so you wouldn't have the potential for lots of waterfowl.
- Mary said when she first moved to the area 30 years ago, there was a wetland across the road from her that an elderly neighbor told her used to be the local swimming hole when she was a kid. It was clean enough water to swim in. Mary said when she moved out there, there was still a lot of open water and a lot of beavers, badgers and frogs that were in that pond. She said there were still a lot of them out there, along with woodchucks and possums. She recalled that for many years when they first moved to the area, 30<sup>th</sup> Street and Neal Ave. were completely covered with frogs in the spring of each year. There were so many it was slippery, like being on ice. While that's declined a lot in the last 15 years, she said the point is there's still a lot of wildlife out there and they serve a purpose.
- Cultural Resources – Evan reported the team completed a full study of historic structures and archaeological resources and, on October 20, 2017, the FAA submitted a determination of “no historic properties affected” to the State Historic Preservation Office (SHPO). On December 28, 2017, the SHPO issued their concurrence with the FAA determination. This means there should be no issues with historic properties for the project. They did instruct that any trees surrounding potentially historic building foundations be hand-cut to avoid disturbance of those foundations. Apart from that, there were no other mitigation measures they indicated were necessary.

- Farmlands – As of the last CEP meeting, the project team was consulting with US Department of Agriculture to determine the significance of effects to farmlands. There are 40-50 acres of farmlands that will be taken out of production associated with the runways, taxiways and the realignment of 30<sup>th</sup> Street N. The findings from the USDA indicate that those impacts are not considered significant when using their scoring criteria, which means there is no required mitigation for those impacts to farmlands.
- Land Use – Wildlife Attractants – On October 18, 2017, Mead & Hunt’s wildlife biologist completed field observations. He spent two days out on the airport observing deer, waterfowl and other wildlife. He issued those findings to USDA-Wildlife Services, which is the branch of USDA that works with airports to minimize and mitigate wildlife hazards. On January 3, 2018, USDA-Wildlife Services issued a letter stating the project is not likely to increase wildlife hazards at the airport. Evan noted this is important from the standpoint of the pollinator habitat discussion during tonight’s meeting in the sense that there are wildlife hazards present at the airport today, and there will be hazards present in the future. It’s really a matter of balancing the different wildlife hazards and identifying ways to mitigate for those hazards. The USDA-Wildlife Services’ letter acknowledges there are hazards today and there will be hazards tomorrow but this project is not going to increase those hazards, and if the airport implements mitigation measures, wildlife hazards could potentially be reduced.
- Water Resources
  - Wetlands – The team submitted its wetland delineation report to the Valley Branch Watershed District. They convened a technical evaluation panel, which consists of several different agencies. The Washington Soil & Water Conservation District, Minnesota Board of Soil & Water Resources, Minnesota Department of Natural Resources and U.S. Army Corps of Engineers all sit on that panel. The panel reviewed the delineation report and approved the wetland boundaries and types. Evan pointed out this does not mean the project is permitted from a wetland standpoint; the MAC will need to go through a permitting process under the Clean Water Act and the Minnesota Wetland Conservation Act. This will happen following the environmental review process; at that time, the exact impacts will be determined. He noted there’s an estimate of what these impacts are in the environmental review document. There’s additional work that needs to be done, but as far as the EA/EAW is concerned, that’s the level of analysis required for an environmental review at this stage – determining what wetlands are out there, what types of wetlands there are, the likelihood of impacts to certain wetlands and what the likely impact is in terms of form and function of wetlands on airport property and surrounding property.
  - Dave Schultz asked if the team was planning to involve the MPCA (Minnesota Pollution Control Agency) and noted that West Lakeland Township is an MS4 Community.
  - Evan responded that the MPCA is not involved in the Wetland Conservation Act process as far as determining what the impacts are and what the required mitigation ought to be, but they are involved in a lot of other areas, such as storm water management, which is the key one as far as airports are concerned. He noted the MAC has a Storm Water Pollution Prevention Plan, which they keep updated, that identifies what they must do as far as testing, manual inspections and other related measures, as well as mitigation measures for minimizing soil erosion associated with storm water. Evan stated the MPCA will likely review the document and, for a project of this magnitude,

they often provide comments. He noted they were invited to the agency scoping meeting held at the beginning of this process and did not receive a response from them; however, he feels confident they will provide comments once the draft is published.

Evan stated that concluded the updates on the environmental effects he wanted to share with the group and pointed them to the 11x17" foldout in their handout and noted this is the summary of environmental effects that will be included in the draft EA/EAW. He mentioned there is a lot of supporting documentation that will also be included. He asked if there were any other questions on the environmental effects before he moved onto the next steps portion of the agenda.

- Mary Vierling said she noticed the MAC had a meeting in December in which they voted to construct a new building on the airport to house salt to keep the runways clear in the winter. She asked for an explanation of where that runoff would go and the impacts it's going to have. Dave Schultz added it's in the environmental piece for 2018 to construct a building for housing salt, sand and other materials. Joe Harris clarified it may be listed in the CIP as an out-building for salt, but the primary use would be for storing sand. He said that sand is currently kept in their equipment storage facility but takes up quite a bit of space, so this would be an out building to have it stored in a separate facility. He also noted that because salt is corrosive to aircraft, it's not used at airports. Dave replied that's what he thought, so he found it odd to be listed on one of the MAC's environmental documents. Joe said he'd make sure that got corrected in those documents.
- Dave Schultz noted that on one presentation slide the railroad was highlighted. Evan said yes, the railroad was identified by Mead & Hunt's historians as potentially eligible for the National Historic Register because that railroad corridor has a significant relationship with the history of the Twin Cities. He said that railroad corridor supported a lot of the commerce that built the Twin Cities. However, he noted, it is not affected by the project, and the SHPO agreed with that. But, because it's within the area of potential effects, it has to be identified as part of the process. The SHPO has not required any further analysis related to it because it's not affected by the project.
- Kent Grandlienard joked that the railroad is the only one with more power than the MAC.
- Commissioner Madigan said that Mary asked at the last meeting about visual screening mitigation measures along the road and wanted to know if anything further has been done with that. Evan responded that the team has looked at a lot of different ideas for screening – such as fencing or trees. The conclusion—and what the environmental document will say—is that there are options for minimizing visual effects if that is perceived as an issue. He noted there are fencing options available that are tall enough and made of the right materials that would prevent the airport lighting from being an issue for nearby automobile travelers. Another recommendation for further analysis during the design process is light baffles that channel the light to just the areas needing it. Those are the two key recommendations for physical, on-the-airfield improvements that could help minimize the visual effects of the lights. The third is an operational improvement, which is setting up the lights so they're only on when the pilots truly need them and could be keyed on and/or get changed to full intensity remotely by pilots when needed. There would be three settings (low-, medium-, and high-intensity) that can be remotely activated as needed. He said, that way the lights would only blink or be at full intensity when they're absolutely needed. This is another mitigation measure the document is recommending.

Evan then went over the requirements for public review and public hearings for federal environmental assessments (EAs) and state environmental assessment worksheets (EAWs). He noted that the federal requirements apply because the FAA is the responsible federal agency for the EA, the requirements are based on their orders and guidance. FAA Order 1050.1F, *Environmental Impacts: Policies and Procedures*, lays out all the requirements regarding circulating environmental documents, the length of review period, how to engage people and how to interact with the other federal agencies, etc. That order says the draft EA must be available for public review and the notice of public hearing should be published at least 30 days before the hearing. He said the team is making sure it complies with these requirements and will have all the notices in place according to this timeframe. On the state side, they have a similar requirement for a 30-day period for review and comment after the notice is published for availability of the document. The responsible government unit (in this case the MAC) *may* hold one or more public meetings but they are not required to. Evan noted that there have been several public meetings throughout this process and this public hearing is the more formalized opportunity for input under the federal regulations. The state regulations do not define specific timing for the public notice in advance of the meetings, just that it should be “reasonable.”

Evan said, based on those regulations, the timeline the team has established is as follows:

- February 6: At MAC Planning, Development & Environment Committee’s regular monthly meeting, recommend the Draft EA/EAW be published
- February 20: If the PD&E Committee accepts MAC staff’s recommendation to publish the Draft EA/EAW, approval will be requested of the MAC Board of Commissioners to publish the Draft EA/EAW effective as soon as possible
- February 26: Target date to publish Draft EA/EAW, if all previous steps receive proper approval in the anticipated timeframe listed. This date is based on the publication schedules of the various publications the notices will appear in.
  - Once the notices go out, the Draft EA/EAW, including appendices, will be available for download on the project website.
  - Hard copies will also be placed at the Lake Elmo City Hall, Lake Elmo Public Library and Baytown Community Center.
  - Publications where notices will be placed include Minnesota State Register, St. Paul Pioneer Press, Stillwater Gazette, Oakdale/Lake Elmo Review and Minnesota Environmental Quality Board (EQB) Monitor.
  - The notice will cover both the availability of the draft document and the public hearing.
  - A notice will also be distributed to the project email subscription list.
  - Relevant federal, state, and local resource agencies will be notified via email with hard copies made available upon request.
- February 26-March 28: Required 30-day review period prior to the public hearing
- Early April: Hold public hearing. Date and location TBD.
- Mid/Late April: Close public comment period. The team will allow an additional 15 days for public comment after the public hearing.

Evan then went over the ways the public can comment on the document:

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- Spoken comments will be put on the record at the public hearing
- Written comments can be submitted via email to [ContactLakeElmoAirportEA@mspmac.org](mailto:ContactLakeElmoAirportEA@mspmac.org), via postal mail to the MAC Environment Department (address on the project website), or in-person at the public hearing.

Evan stated all the spoken and written comments received during the comment period will be published in the final environmental document and responded to in the document. Similar comments on a common theme may be responded to collectively.

Stephen Buckingham asked how the comments would be recorded at the public hearing. He asked if it would be a court reporter. Evan responded yes there will be a court reporter.

Evan wrapped up the presentation with the public hearing format and guidelines:

- Hearing format
  - Hearing is a formal public hearing, so the MAC Planning, Development & Environment Committee will act as hearing officers.
  - A court reporter will be present to prepare a transcript of the proceedings.
  - An audio recording will also be made.
  - A half-hour open house will be held prior to the hearing, similar to the other public meetings. This will allow attendees who have not been involved throughout the process to learn about the project prior to the hearing.
  - A short presentation will be given prior to opening the hearing.
- Hearing guidelines
  - Anyone may fill out an “I wish to speak” slip and approach the podium.
  - Speakers will be asked to observe a time limit to allow everyone to speak.
  - Spoken comments will not be responded to during the hearing. He noted this is different from the previous public meetings where there was Q&A and more of a dialogue. During the hearing it’s just public comments for the record.
  - Written comments will be accepted up to 15 days following the hearing.

Evan stated that after the public comment period, the team will take some time to take stock of what they’ve heard, and then will reconvene the CEP for one last time before publishing the Final EA/EAW. The final CEP meeting will provide an opportunity to discuss an overview of the public comments received and the MAC/FAA responses, as well as a final opportunity for the CEP’s input and discussion.

Evan then opened the meeting for CEP discussion.

- Kent Grandlienard asked if Evan had any idea how large that Draft EA/EAW document would be, as he wants to get either a link or the document posted on the township website. He asked if it would be better to just link to the MAC’s website. Evan responded the main portion of the document would be about 100 pages, but the appendices add about an additional 1,000 pages. He said the project website was established to make it as easy as possible to share the information with the public and told Kent to let the team know how they can help to get the document linked on the township website from the project website. Chad Leqve added that linking to the document on the MAC’s website is typically what other communities have done so the township doesn’t have to worry about storing and hosting it on their own server, as it will be a very large document.

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- Dave Schultz said don't make it difficult to find the document from the MAC website. Chad concurred and said it will be straightforward to find it on the project website.

Upon no further CEP discussion, Evan opened the 10-minute public comment period for anyone from the audience wishing to speak. Upon hearing none, he closed the meeting at approximately 6:50 p.m. He thanked everyone for attending and said he looked forward to seeing them at the public hearing.