

# Blairsville Airport Advisory Board Meeting

579 Airport Terminal Rd. Blairsville, GA. Conf Room

Minutes

March 21, 2024

**Call to Order:** 12:14pm

**Determination of Quorum:** All members present.

In attendance (Officer positions were newly elected at this meeting):

- Chris Wadle (Chair)
- Sonny Hinson (Vice-Chair)
- Stan Vangilder (Secretary)
- Corey Payne (member)
- Tracy Martin (member)

**Others:**

- Aaron Manheim (Blairsville Airport Manager)
- Marvin Harkins (Blairsville City Attorney)

**Conflict of Interest:**

Aaron Manheim expressed reservations about the intentions and motivations of this board based on comments he had heard prior to this meeting that directly impact him. Chris and Marvin stated that there were no preconceived conclusions or directions of this board – that it is advisory only in nature and that we should continue with the stated agenda. All agreed to proceed as planned.

**Public Comments:** No members of the public present

**Minutes:** N/A

**New Business:**

- **Review ordinance & establish guidelines (Marvin)**
  - Marvin reiterated the Open Records / Open Meetings nature of our work - suggests dedicated email addresses / cloud storage for Board work to separate from our other work or personal activities.
  - Marvin stated that if 3 or more of us are discussing Board business anywhere or any time, then it is an official meeting, and these same “Open” rules apply.
  - Sonny and Chris noted that we have a shared email address ([blairsvilleairportboard@gmail.com](mailto:blairsvilleairportboard@gmail.com)) already in place that might be most of what we need as a group. This in effect provides a distribution list of Board members to those who send to it.
  - Aaron will serve as the Board’s conduit to the City Council and reserves the right to disagree with the recommendations or conclusions of the Board, and will have the opportunity to state and argue his position.
  - There are federal and state laws insulating volunteers from liability resulting from board business.
  - Chris mentioned that these are two-year terms but will be adjusted to ensure continuity. I.E. all positions won’t turn over at the same time. We will probably meet once per month for the next several months, then quarterly.

- City Council has full control of Board membership. City can remove or add anyone at any time. All new members must be approved by the City.
- **Elect Officers**
  - Officers were nominated and approved as listed above under attendance.
- **Establish Regular Meeting Date(s)**
  - Meetings will be held the third Thursday of the scheduled month at noon within the conference room at the Airport Terminal.
- **Determine goals & objectives of the Board, Airport, City**
  - Four major goals for the Board were identified. For Blairsville Airport, the Board will establish an effective, consistent, and transparent:
    1. Hangar lease rate plan, starting with an inventory of all hangars and their lease classification, suitable for upcoming renewals.
    2. Hangar wait-list process. Ensure that the list accurately and fairly represents pilots committed to securing hangar space when available.
    3. Hangar lease violation policies and methods for enforcement.
    4. Newly constructed hangar lease strategy.
- **Debrief existing hangar leases**
  - Marvin will provide all current hangar leases with financial information redacted. Chris will assign lease reviews to all or part of this Board.
- **Establish Mission Statement**
  - *The mission of the Blairsville Airport Advisory Board is to serve our community by providing guidance to the City of Blairsville, and enhancing our airport through responsible economic development, environmental stewardship, and community engagement while ensuring the highest standards of safety and accessibility for all users.*
  - There was discussion as to whether we should more specifically define “community” to avoid misinterpretation. Tabled final action until next meeting.

**Old Business – N/A**

**Executive Session** (not held at this meeting)

**Adjourn**

**NOTES:** These were some of the discussion points and observations from the meeting

- Marvin will check about virtual attendance for Board meetings, but expect in person for quorum / voting.
- Goals and benefits of the airport to the region:
  - Pilots – new pilots, training in mountainous terrain
  - Tourism benefit
  - Travel – compared to Hartsfield with long commutes and security wait times.
  - Economic development, business benefits

- Government uses: Military, forestry, law enforcement, public safety training and other uses.
- Benefits / impacts to the city:
  - Aaron: Airport “Puts us on the map”. Mention of state elected officials’ access to Blairsville.
  - Lower insurance premiums for the fact that you have an airport for public safety.
  - From the perspective of the City, the airport can provide positive exposure, but is not a core govt function. It is an exception in many ways, and there is therefore a lack of airport management expertise in city govt.
  - Marvin: Educational, informational vacuum, confusion about financing options.
  - Marvin mentioned that this exercise is basically a business plan for the City’s hangar rental business.
  - FAA rules vs city wishes / conflicts between Fed, state and local agendas and priorities.
- Hangar leases / rates:
  - Need classification of hangars, and lease rate equity among these classes.
  - Classes are subjective, just need good records and justification.
  - Lease rates are determined by more than just square footage. Amenities in each unit and airport services such as valet / fuel also impact rates. This should be considered when comparing with other airports.
  - Backstory: These hangars were built in 2006. To finance construction without indebting future administrations, the City offered 20-year prepaid leases, some of which were extended by 5 years. So, in 2026 and 2031, many of these will be up for renewal.
  - Month-to-month leases can be attractive to hangar owners during periods of high demand, but the tenants want stability and are unlikely to accept such short terms.
  - Aaron has suggested month-to-month, 12 month and 5-year leases.
  - Aaron – pilots need to understand rents will be higher now than in 2006.
  - Corey – LONGER than month-to-month for healthy local population of aircraft, buying fuel etc.
- Hangar Lease Violations and Inconsistencies
  - Corey and Aaron noted the misuse of hangars – empty, or non-aviation-related uses.
  - Corey – says most airports have clear and enforced policies – feeling that policies are NOT clear and not enforced at KDZJ – it’s more about who you know than what you do.
  - Situation where City needs a hangar for someone then Airport needs to evict someone to make room.
  - Lack of communication and coordination between City and Airport.
- Hangar Wait List
  - The waiting list is hidden and loaded with uncommitted pilots. Same list at all local airports? Inflates the real number and no clear or fair process for working through the list.
- Airport Operational Issues
  - Aaron mentioned City contracts as an area for financial improvement. Gave examples of duplicate contracts for overseeding leading to unnecessary expenses.
  - Aaron also mentioned excessive credit card fees.
  - Chris and others acknowledged the severity and impact of operational issues but stated that we need to focus on our core tasks and goals (hangar issues) before becoming involved in operations.
  - Marvin mentioned that he’s happy to assist but that the City must approve his time with the Board.