



## Rhode Island Airport Corporation

November 1, 2019

Mr. Randy R. Rossi  
Town Manager  
Town of Smithfield  
64 Farnum Pike  
Smithfield, RI 02917

RE: General Aviation Airports  
Strategic Business Plan Development

Dear Mr. Rossi:

The Rhode Island Airport Corporation (RIAC) is reaching out to you, to respectfully request your assistance in supporting our efforts to ensure continued beneficial and safe use of Rhode Island General Aviation Airports (RIGAAs). RIAC operates and maintains the RIGAAs for the benefit of the state, local communities and stakeholders. As such, RIAC alone, cannot and should not, decide the future direction of RIGAAs and at what scale they will operate. In this light, RIAC is embarking on what we hope will be a collaborative and productive process to develop a comprehensive, General Aviation Strategic Business Plan (Plan) and would appreciate your help and support. The key elements of the strategy will include:

1. Development of a ten year plan which assesses the condition of the airport infrastructure, including buildings and appurtenances such as electrical and heating systems. This plan will summarize and prioritize necessary improvements at each airport. Associated cost estimates and potential funding sources will also be identified.
2. Development of a ten year plan which assesses the condition of airfield, roadway and parking area pavements. This plan will summarize and prioritize necessary pavement repairs and reconstructions at each airport. Associated cost estimates and potential funding sources will also be identified.
3. Development of an updated airspace analysis plan. This plan will identify current obstructions present within airspace surrounding the airports and their runways.
4. Preparation of a ten year business plan which will evaluate the current financial health of each airport, define economic development opportunities and provide potential paths forward to establish self-sustaining operations.
5. Establish partnerships and garner support from stakeholders, including local municipalities, communities, Aircraft Owners and Pilots Association (AOPA), the Rhode Island Pilots Association (RIPA), and others who have an interest in the operation of RIGAAs and in ongoing legal proceedings which are affecting airspace hazard mitigation.

To support the efforts above in establishing the Plan, RIAC has formed an internal task force comprised of aviation experts in the fields of engineering, planning, operations, finance, legal and property management. The infrastructure, pavement and airspace plans (items 1, 2 and 3 above) are already well underway and results from the

assessments will be forthcoming over the next few months. We have retained a consultant to assist with the business plan development (item 4 above) that will include information from the plans in items 1, 2, and 3 above. For item 5 above, we offer the following additional discussion:

The ongoing litigation pertains to trees located within or near airport runway approaches in the Town of Westerly that have grown to a height where they are now obstructions to the air space surrounding the Westerly State Airport (WST). These trees are within private property boundaries and the associated property owners are arguing that removal of these trees or the granting of avigation easements is unwarranted and unlawful. While RIAC denies the allegations in the lawsuit and continues to assert its rights to take these easements, litigation to resolve this matter has been ongoing since 2016, with no near term resolution in sight.

To comply with Federal Aviation Administration (FAA) regulations and grant assurances associated with receipt of federal funding, RIAC is required to mitigate hazards to protect aircraft operations. If hazards cannot be physically removed, RIAC must address by other means such as runway shortening. At WST, the usable runway lengths have already been reduced by more than 900 feet. With runway shortening, we can also lose the benefits of navigational aids, further limiting utility to visual approaches only. In addition, federal grant opportunities are lost due to our inability to resolve these issues. In fact, for the first time ever, we recently had to return federal dollars received from the FAA as we were unable to clear obstructions as intended.

The effects of this lawsuit induced delay are sprawling and now beginning to impact additional airports. At Newport State Airport (UUU), trees/obstructions have been identified in a multiple runway approaches and RIAC will need to displace or reduce available runway lengths in the near future. Navigational aids at UUU have additionally been turned off as a result of these obstructions. Block Island State Airport (BID) will likely be impacted as the type and number of aircraft operations able to operate out of WST will also decrease as the available runway length continues to be reduced.

Property owners with known obstructions in WST and UUU were offered fair market value for easements through a system delineated by the FAA. In some cases, counteroffers far exceeded what we could consider within federal guidelines and remain eligible for reimbursement. In total, five plaintiffs at WST and one property owner at UUU are currently preventing the implementation of obstruction removal. The airspace analysis mentioned in item 3 above, is already identifying additional obstructions at the airports, thus amplifying the problem. Without a clear ruling on the ongoing litigation, airport utility will continue to diminish.

Trees and airports simply do not mix and we do not believe stakeholders are apprised of the dynamics and wide spread implications unfolding. This is why RIAC feels it necessary, to ensure that all stakeholders, including neighbors and the community, have their voices heard on this matter. The long-term solution is to establish a strategic plan that we can all work towards.

Therefore, we are formally requesting that you:

1. Support and participate in the development of the Plan and help us engage stakeholders and the community throughout the process.
2. Join with RIAC in ongoing litigation to ensure we protect the continued beneficial and safe use of RIGAAAs.

RIAC appreciates its role in providing facilities and services that are meaningful to the community and we therefore look forward to working with you to reach successful outcomes to the challenges and requests outlined herein. We would request some time within the next couple of weeks, at your convenience, to meet and discuss in further detail. Please contact Donna Melone, in my office, at 401-691-2222 to schedule some time. We look forward to hearing from you soon.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "I. Ahmad", with a long horizontal flourish extending to the right.

Iftikhar Ahmad  
President and CEO