

**Rhode Island Airport Corporation (RIAC)
General Aviation (GA) Airports Strategic Business Plan
Town of Westerly Meeting – Westerly State Airport (WST)
Westerly Town Hall November 22, 2019**

Town of Westerly (Town) Attendees:

Mark Rooney – Town Manager
Lisa Pellegrini – Director Development Services
Daniel Lathrop – Chair- Economic Development Commission
Lisa Konicki- President, Ocean Community Chamber of Commerce

Rhode Island Airport Corporation (RIAC) Attendees:

Christine Vitt – Senior Vice President, Chief Infrastructure Officer
Brent Semple, Esq. – Corporate Attorney
Daniel Porter – Vice President, Planning
Jeffrey Goulart – Vice President, Finance & Business Development
Eric Seabury – Assistant Vice President, Engineering
Jeffrey Wiggin – Assistant Vice President, Landside Maintenance
Kerri Fadden - Assistant Vice President, Operations & Maintenance
David Cloutier – Assistant Vice President, Business Development & Commercial Programs
Edward Brearton - General Aviation Airfield Technician, Westerly Airport
Patti Doyle – Founder, Patti Doyle Communications
Bill Fischer – President, True North Communications

Meeting Notes:

- All attendees in the room introduced themselves. The meeting opened with the Town offering a few comments:
 - Interest was expressed in exploring additional airport economic opportunities considering we are within Boston and New York corridors. Additional fixed based operator services may be an option.
 - The Town notified RIAC that there are some that don't support the airport due to it being in their backyard. Those who do support don't show up to public meetings and/or are not vocal. The local community has a strong dislike towards RIAC. Some feel as though they have been lied to and betrayed by doing things such as cutting down trees.
 - The Chamber of Commerce publically expressed to the community that they've had a good experience with RIAC and they have been labeled as the bad guys for bringing forward reality. Those against the airport also discriminate against those who speak in support of the airport. For example, a local financial planner utilizes the airport for work, but won't speak out as there is concern that locals will stop paying for his services.
- The Town of Westerly stated the airport is a big plus in the 2020 Comprehensive Plan. RIAC indicated that they have briefly reviewed and if the Town feels that the airport is an asset, then the current write up is weak. The Town requested that RIAC provide examples of other plans and suggested a meeting to strengthen the airport section of

the comprehensive plan. RIAC responded that they are happy to meet and intend to issue a written response.

- A summary of the Rhode Island Airport System including T.F. Green and five general aviation airports was provided by RIAC. It was indicated that RIAC is self-supporting with no local tax dollars and that the general aviation airports system operates at a deficit which is subsidized by T.F. Green and Quonset Airports.
- RIAC stated that their role is to provide a safe environment for aviation and to provide facilities that meet the needs of the State and local communities. RIAC advised not their role to define the strategic plan, it requires support and engagement from stakeholders, the community, and pilots.
- The Town advised that supporters would attend meetings, but they will need to know what meetings to attend. It was noted that some of the airport users are seasonal and therefore not available this time of year. Even if they were, they may not speak out as they may not want publicity.
- RIAC provided an overview of the five key elements of the Plan, including the infrastructure assessment, pavement assessment, airspace analysis, business and financial plan and stakeholder outreach. The status, schedule and cost of each element was reviewed.
- RIAC shared data of already known obstructions identified at Newport State Airport and indicated concern over data forthcoming for Westerly. RIAC indicated that known obstructions at WST have already displaced the runways by approximately 900 feet total. New data may require additional displacement.
- RIAC provided an overview of the business and financial plan which is also ongoing through a consultant. Information being collected currently will help to build the framework for a financial plan. Currently four out of the five GA Airports operate at a financial loss, and PVD and OQU subsidize. The plan will also include comparison to other aviation systems.
- RIAC then provided an overview of the ongoing litigation at Westerly regarding obstructions and the effect that litigation is having on the utility of the airport. It was indicated that runways have already been displaced by more than 900 feet and that navigational aids have been impacted. New data is expected to reveal the runways may need to be shortened further. It was noted that there was no near term end likely regarding the lawsuit and that the impacts are now starting to spill over into other airports including Newport Airport (UUU).
- Block Island is concerned because they utilize WST as a life line for emergencies, bringing folks to the island and commerce. Block Island indicated interest to attend and support the Westerly Airport at a public meeting when it occurs.
- RIAC indicated that the community often talks about RIAC's desire to expand the airport, but RIAC is only trying to restore the runways to their former utility (pavement and navigational aids/approach procedures). The geometry of Westerly Airport hasn't changed since the runways were constructed.
- RIAC provided the history of the litigation. In 2015, several plaintiffs questioned the taking of easements by eminent domain, which included fair market value offers for

appraised devaluations. RIDOT was approached to exercise eminent domain on behalf of RIAC considering the airports are part of the RI transportation system.

- RIAC further reiterated that we are asking for the Town's support in joining the litigation. One outcome could be a burden on the Town as it may be their responsibility to take the trees. The Town suggested RIAC should reach out to Bill Conley for further discussion. Currently, Westerly Town ordinances do not touch any kind of transportation. The litigation will confirm the State's authority to take aviation easements.
- RIAC also indicated that federal dollars that were received through a grant had to be returned recently due to our inability to remove obstructions at Westerly. Future funding through FAA funding may also be in jeopardy.
- RIAC discussed overlay zones in Westerly. Westerly recently applied zoning laws to protect the airport approach surfaces, height ordinances and property development. RIAC is unable to prevent development around the airport, only the Town has authorization for land not owned by RIAC. RIAC indicated that overlay zones were legislated as far back as 1946, so the Towns bear some responsibility in the inability to remove the vegetative obstructions since the zoning was not put in place until recently.
- The group discussed next steps including scheduling a community meeting for mid-January to early February. It was suggested to host Block Island's community meeting first.
- The meeting was adjourned and RIAC again thanked the Town for their input and time.