

February 26, 2020

To: The ASE Vision Committee

From: John Bennett, Meg Haynes and Jackie Francis

During our review of airport alternatives over the past year, we have explored the core question facing Pitkin County: whether to pursue the airport improvements outlined in the 2018 Environmental Assessment (EA), including the increased runway/taxiway separation required by the FAA for federal funding. Our decision could have been simple and binary. Either recommend proceeding with the measures described in the EA *or* recommend that Pitkin County forgo any significant “airside” improvements and focus primarily on other issues such as the terminal, ramp and energy efficiency projects.

Either of those “bookend” choices offered its own advantages and risks, but our research revealed that neither would achieve the four Core Community Goals that the four ASE Working Groups and our Committee established for the airport: safety, managed growth of airline enplanements, substantial reductions in airport air pollution, and a substantial reduction in noise. Instead of either bookend option, we are now recommending a balanced middle path that we’re calling the *Common Ground Recommendation*; and responding to your invitation at the end of our Feb. 20 meeting, we’re now assembling the package of measures that we believe could achieve our community goals and — we hope — earn your support.

Common Ground Recommendation

The Common Ground Recommendation is a package of interrelated measures all designed to reflect the Community Values and Goals on which we have all agreed. Some of these measures would be relatively straightforward for Pitkin County to implement on its own. Others are complex and would require the agreement of the additional airport stakeholders. Some of these would require working with the FAA, others would require negotiations with airlines, and still others would require agreements with the airport’s fixed base operator (FBO).

Because many of the measures contained in our Recommendation are interdependent, we propose that the Board of County Commissioners should adopt them together as an integrated package to ensure that they reflect and balance the community values and goals we have identified.

Safeguards to Maintain the Integrity of the Common Ground Recommendation

Our Common Ground Recommendation represents a careful balance between competing airport perspectives. This balance rests directly on our shared community values and goals. The Vision Committee’s decision-making process has asked all of us to move outside our

comfort zones to seek middle-path solutions that address shared community goals, even if certain aspects of these solutions may have made many of us initially uneasy.

For example, some of us for whom enhancing the visitor experience and ensuring the county's future economic vitality are high priorities may be skeptical of managing growth through the terminal's "flexible gates." Likewise, some of us for whom protecting our community character and quality of life are primary priorities undoubtedly feel some discomfort with the notion of allowing larger airliners to serve ASE. The first group may be made more comfortable by assurances that appropriate larger aircraft will be able to serve ASE and that the number of flexible gates will accommodate today's level of airline service as well as gradual future growth. For the second group, the assurance that any new, larger airliners will emit significantly less greenhouse gas and other emissions, be quieter, and fit within the managed growth constraints of flexible gates may be a key consideration.

If we can agree on this kind of *critical balance of community assurances*, we should insist that the Pitkin County Commissioners not allow them to be forgotten in future years or changed arbitrarily by future elected officials or county staff. To that end, we recommend the following safeguards:

- A. The Common Ground Recommendation should be adopted by a formal county ordinance so that it could never be changed without future public hearings and a full community discussion.
- B. The County Commissioners should create a permanent Airport Advisory Board of citizen volunteers who represent balanced, diverse viewpoints to advise the County on future airport issues. (Some of you might wish to be members.)
- C. The County Commissioners should ask the Airport to provide an annual report on progress made toward meeting our Core Community Goals.
- D. The airline agreements necessary to the Common Ground Recommendation should be enforceable through long-term legally binding contracts.

Negotiation Time Period and Possible Alternate Recommendation

The Common Ground Recommendation's major strength lies in the fact that its targeted outcomes — managed growth, reduced air pollution and less noise — appeal to many Pitkin County citizens. The Recommendation's inherent challenge, however, is that some of its most important measures rely on stakeholder negotiations and agreements that may or may not be attainable.

If we all can agree on the package of measures contained in our Common Ground Recommendation, our Committee should advise the County to test immediately whether those that require negotiation are attainable. Specifically, we should suggest that the County engage in discussions with the three airlines that serve Aspen today (see "Airline Negotiation

Approach” below). We should suggest also that the County Commissioners set a fixed time period for these initial negotiations — perhaps 60-90 days.

After those negotiations, the BOCC should reconvene our Committee for no more than 14 days to evaluate the success of the negotiations and make an alternate airport recommendation if necessary. Were such an alternate recommendation necessary, our Vision Committee process could be as simple as a new vote to recommend either of the original “bookend” options to replace the Common Ground Recommendation. Of course, we could possibly end up in a split vote that produced both a new majority recommendation and a minority report.

Importance of Flexibility and Adaptability

If we can agree on the Common Ground package of specific recommendations, the Vision Committee should recommend that the County follow an incremental decision-making model that is flexible, adaptable and focused always on attaining our core community goals. For example, over time, the number of terminal gates we’re recommending might turn out to be either too low or too high to meet our goal of approximately .8% annual airline enplanement growth. Our Committee could recommend that, were this to happen in the future, the County should meet with its Airport Advisory Board to agree on the appropriate course correction. Because accurately foretelling the future is an impossible task, this kind of adaptability will be essential to successfully achieving our core community goals.

In addition, we think we all recognize that our .8% enplanement growth goal is both aspirational and approximate. Federal law limits our ability to set exact enplanement limits but we are using our limited tools as best we can. The intent of this approximate target is to guard against either a cruise ship syndrome that could overwhelm our airport with dehumanizing waves of people or an out-of-control overall enplanement growth rate that might threaten our valley’s long-term quality of life for residents and visitors.

Flexibility, adaptability and skillful course corrections when needed will be essential to ensure the success of our future airport, reflect our character and values, and attain our long-term core community goals.

Thank you for considering these thoughts. We have enjoyed this year of working closely with you on the Vision Committee, and we feel the Committee is extremely close to achieving a broad agreement on airport recommendations that could truly win the support of a broad majority of Pitkin County citizens.

We have been working hard on it all this week, and in tomorrow’s meeting we will present and review with you the package of measures — the Common Ground Recommendation — that we hope will bridge the divide in our community and actually achieve our Core Community Goals.

We look forward to seeing you tomorrow!

John, Meg and Jackie