

Let common sense guide us

Emilio Carlesimo

As a newly elected member, I've had the privilege of serving two months on city council.

One thing is abundantly clear: The airport continues to command too much council attention. Perhaps it's an obsession. Misunderstanding and speculation abounds. Now more than ever, open and honest discussions are essential.

During my door-to-door campaign, I listened to the comments and concerns of more than 4,000 Venetians on every issue. When it came to the airport, the resounding message was "we need to put this behind us and get back to the business of running the city."

People I talk to are under the impression that council's main goal is to produce an airport master plan driven by a small group that is politically acceptable, not one that is necessarily right. After all the airport workshops, airplane chases and constant presentations to council by the same individuals, there does not seem to be any useful result or even the promise of one.

Traffic counts and aircraft types have become an obsession in their efforts to downgrade the airport's reference code from its officially recognized C-II to a B-II designation. Much prudent advice has been ignored and a lot of effort has been wasted. The time has come to acknowledge reality.

It is clear from all our airport consultant's documentation that this is a C-II airport and always has been. I leave it to you to decide the viability of the city's latest proposal (downgrade the airport but keep runways at their current length) presented to the FAA on December 11, 2009. The city could have saved the gas for yet another trip to Orlando.

It is also clear to me that DY Associates, the consultant, understands the FAA's position on safety and utilization of airports. Based on the latest proposal carried to Orlando, my question is, "Do we?"

More importantly, are we ready to move forward in a positive way by finally bringing closure to the master plan update and to rebuild Runway 4-22, our noise mitigation runway, to acceptable standards? I submit that we are, and have been for well over two years.

The expectation levels of dedicated B-II proponents have been raised by the city to unreasonable levels. These citizens have been misled to no good purpose based on the reality that the same airplane classes that landed here in 1987 will probably still be landing here in 2010 and beyond? What have we gained from three years of circuitous argument and blatant disregard of facts, federal policy, and FAA correspondence? How many times does the FAA have to say, "No." How many more airport workshops are required to understand and acknowledge the facts, take action and put the MPU to bed?

My answer is "None." We have been chasing something that is unattainable because it was politically expedient.

Would we allow the planning of any other major city asset like the airport to be driven by self-proclaimed experts and activists?

Path To Completion

I submit to you and members of council this simple path forward to finish this MPU once and for all. To boil this down to the simplest and most easily understood terms, we must first and foremost comply with our airport's "reservations and restrictions" contained in the deeds of transfer and obligations of the grant assurances. The city has a responsibility to its citizens and its airport to do so.

Then, we must:

1. Rebuild Runway 4-22 as an effective noise abatement runway at its present width and length
2. Leave Runway 13-31 as is
3. Request continuance of the existing Modifications Of Standards relative to the golf course fence line and other similar areas
4. Move the golf course driving range in accordance with the FAA directive stated in the August 2009 Land Use Audit. (Our consultant has told us that we can probably get financial help from the FAA for some of this work.)

The FAA has told us again and again the airport cannot be downgraded from a C-II to a B-II. The FAA has also told us in writing to justify the fulllength rebuild of 4-22 for noise abatement. The city must now act on these issues. Had we followed their guidance back then, it is likely that we would have a useful noise abatement runway today. Until this city council is willing to put these actions on paper and submit them to the FAA in the master plan update, there will be more workshops, more consultant fees, more trips to Orlando, more civic consternation and an airport that continues to deteriorate right before our eyes.

The idea of continuing to try and seek a more favorable hearing at a higher political level for our flawed case is irresponsible. To what end? Why continue to lead people on? We should accept the reality of the situation and get on with making the best airport we can have that is as community friendly as possible.

One of the reasons I was elected was to do my part to try and end this council fixation with the airport and efforts to downgrade or reduce its usefulness. So let's get on with the work that we know needs to be done.

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