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**To:** Mike Myers; Bonnie Onyon; John Liebert; Ken Ely; Bruce Wolf; 'Jason Overstreet'; Charlie Hawkins

**Cc:** Gary Tomsic; Sheri Sanchez

**Subject:** Letter in support of keeping the airport open and adopting and implementing the Airport Master Plan

To Mayor Mike Myers, and Blaine's City Council Members ~

The City of Blaine is struggling through a time of transformation. As our representatives, you, the City Council, are making decisions which will shape Blaine's quality of life and economic viability until we move on to our next world. It's an exciting time, but also a gut-wrenching time for those of us who care.

As you know, Bob is on Blaine's Airport Commission. He applied to serve because he felt that Blaine's airport was a major asset to the City, but under-used and certainly under-developed. He quickly found out that there is a lengthy history to the stagnation of the development of the airport, and that it was submerged in suffocating controversy. I would like to note that Bob served in the United States Air Force for 10 years, five years in the development of Air Force Base facilities, and five years as navigator. Since leaving Air Force service, he has never been interested being a general aviation pilot. His hope in joining the Airport Commission was to make a contribution to our new home and community.

When the Airport issue hit our community (again), I was determined to approach it with an open mind, to examine the opposing points of view, and to try to make some sense of the controversy. My bottom line has been "what best serves the long term greater interest of the City and the residents of Blaine?" (It is we, the *City/residents/taxpayers* of Blaine, who would lose the asset, and, not inconsequentially, would have to bear any financial "hit" the City might suffer during the throes of closing the airport.)

I have always approached my professional work by applying a "devil's advocate" approach, and I've done that here. Problem is, it's difficult to get away from concluding that the initial and *primary* benefit from closing the airport and selling the asset that the airport represents will flow to the folks who handle/broker the initial and subsequent sales, the purchaser(s), and developer(s) of the property.

The potential benefits to Blaine would come second, and at a time unknown. Further, an asset that could otherwise be expected to become more valuable with time will be *gone* - as has been noted by many - *FOREVER*. Blaine would come away with little to show, having lost what *could have been attained* by keeping the airport and implementing the Airport Master Plan with the additional planned development.

The development of the airport with the \$16-20M Federal and state funding provides considerable more certainty than the prospect of selling the airport and "betting on the come" with developers. There also is the extremely important question of "so what will *actually* be developed?" Once the property is sold, it depends on what the buyer(s) have in mind. That causes me serious concern.

Moreover, with the proximity to the border and the various, serious Homeland Security issues and related law enforcement/emergency service demands, and our location in an area where natural disasters can surprise us at any time, the airport provides us with vital access to outside help, and evacuation and enforcement assistance. Further, regional transportation needs are expanding as the area's population grows. It seems senseless to close an airport that can add a broader dimension and variety of service to Blaine and the area. This continuing capability surely would be more beneficial to the City.

The airport should be expanded to become the increasingly valuable asset it can be. It should be marketed for business and recreational/tourist uses from which our City as a whole can benefit, highlighting the expanded capability of the airport. And yes, let it be a place where those folks who have businesses or just love to fly for pleasure can park their planes. They may be visiting here, or live here, employ people, pay taxes, and spend money here - just as the rest of us do. Isn't success

what we all strive for?

Every city I have lived in has had an emerging or thriving general aviation airport, or there has been one close by. Friends worked at the airport in the little town next to my home town as kids; some learned to fly. One young man's experience led to his becoming a pilot at the earliest possible age. While waiting to become old enough, he learned the "workings" of the airport and the mechanics of aircraft to help him when he finally could be licensed. He went on to college and law school - focusing on aviation law - and after working at law firms specializing in aviation law he is now a senior level attorney in the U.S. Department of Justice, handling it's major aviation cases. This all happened because of his early exposure to airplanes, dreams that he dared to realize, and the folks at the airport who mentored him. The airport was Morey Field in Middleton, WI; it's worth checking out online.  
<http://www.ci.middleton.wi.us/Transportation/Airport/airport.htm>

This obviously doesn't happen to everyone, but I can't help remembering the good feelings, and sometimes, excitement that seemed always to be associated with the local airports - Middleton and Madison, WI; Corona, CA; Santa Monica CA; Montgomery Co. MD. San Carlos, CA; Half Moon Bay, CA. Closing any of these airports would have been unthinkable. Even the smallest of them, Half Moon Bay, CA, with population growth and business interests, has become an increasingly valuable asset to the overall community and region. It's website  
 ( [http://www.co.sanmateo.ca.us/smc/departments/dpw/home/0,,5562541\\_5562593\\_147318973,00.html](http://www.co.sanmateo.ca.us/smc/departments/dpw/home/0,,5562541_5562593_147318973,00.html) ) reflects what I envision for the Blaine Airport - Dierks Field: the similarities are quite remarkable:

" . . . The Army turned the Airport over to the Navy following the end of WWII and the County acquired the Airport from the Navy in 1947. The Airport has served a variety of roles over the years and is currently an *important business, transportation and emergency service asset to the community.*

"Half Moon Bay Airport provides a *variety of emergency service and response functions including: Air-Ambulance and Medivac flights; law enforcement and homeland security patrols; Coast Guard sea-rescue operations; and use as a disaster relief staging site for the airlifting of emergency supplies in the event that roads are closed during a disaster or emergency.*

"The Half Moon Bay Airport is home to approximately 80 aircraft and several aviation related businesses. The Airport is *self-funded* through airport user and business fees and receives no money from the County's General Fund. . . *the Airport provides an important source of education and training for the pilots, mechanics and Airport employees that fill the jobs in the industry. . . .*"

The HMB airport has an annual air show that draws thousands to the area on the weekend of the show; it's an alternate airport when San Carlos or SFO are not feasible, or when a person wants to visit the coast, but not the more heavily populated areas on the other side of the coastal range. The airport enables tourists to make day trips to what has become a bustling tourist destination town, or to fly in to visit a major resort just south of there. The availability of the airport has brought many casual visitors to the town, and the businesses (retail shops, small businesses, home-offices, restaurants) in Half Moon Bay have grown in number, and have benefited enormously. It was an amazing transformation to watch!

And of Morey Field, now Middleton Municipal Airport, in Middleton, WI:

"In 1998, the City of Middleton purchased the 160 acre Morey Airport *to maintain the airport as part of the region's transportation infrastructure, provide a buffer between city business parks and prime farmland, and to enhance stormwater management . . . .*

"In July of 2005, Middleton Municipal Airport - Morey Field was officially opened after \$7 million in land acquisition and construction. . . *The general aviation airport provides the Middleton and West Madison area with a convenient alternative to Dane County Regional Airport. . . .*" (All emphasis above is mine)

Blaine, for years, has been blocked from developing it's airport into a more broadly useful and fiscally

sound resource by it's opponents. Now it's opponents use the airport's less than sterling performance as a reason to close it.

But a simple line of logic makes it easy to understand that Blaine's airport has not become a more broadly functional and fiscally sound airport with a larger business base because it's stability and future have been in limbo for so long. Few businesses or individuals who are looking for a long term or stable business/tie-up location are willing to make the kind of investment required when the the airport's future is uncertain. If one needs - or just wants - to have access to an airport, why would one build or buy here, or bring a business to Blaine, when the availability of a resource you need to to rely on is continually attacked by folks who would close it? And why would anyone want to put up with the personal attacks on, and disparagement of those who have the good fortune, or need, to own an aircraft, or fly, or have family or friends who do, or who have businesses that are enhanced by or rely on, the presence of the airport? Why is it that those who have businesses using vessels in the marina, or who just own and berth their pleasure craft there are *not* placed in the same category as those who have businesses and private aircraft at the airport? Does anyone disparage the sport fishermen or pleasure craft owners, or those who have businesses who rely on the occasional use of their boat?

Just as the Middleton, WI and Half Moon Bay Airports, along with many others, provide alternative transportation opportunities that the waterways and sometimes our roadway systems cannot, Blaine's airport does and would continue to provide this transportation alternative.

The City of Blaine has owned a valuable resource that has been permitted to falter. Perhaps for lack of interest, or lack of motivation in the face of the opposition to the airport, there has been no apparent effort by the City to market the airport as a resource which might draw business to Blaine. Similarly, in four years I have heard of no effort by the City to seek any input from the residents of Blaine - many of whom have broad experience in many areas - for ideas on how to make the airport a viable entity.

Ironically, once the City, through the Airport Commission, initiated constructive effort to take steps to make the airport a viable and productive resource and developed an Airport Master Plan, the opponents again have come forth to muddy the waters and try to close the airport. But one thing is clear: Blaine's airport is more than just another piece of property for more commercial, industrial, or retail development. There is plenty of that property already awaiting development dollars. The airport is a unique and valuable asset and resource that will always provide other unique opportunities and services. It will continue to serve the City and it's residents in ways other development simply cannot offer.

It's an asset the City cannot afford to lose. It is unique, and it is irreplaceable.

I strongly urge you all to "think of the possibilities" and to vote to keep the airport open and implement the Airport Master Plan, and  
I would be pleased to have the opportunity to speak with any of you about my concerns and conclusions.

Thank you for your time and consideration. . . .

Lois Franco