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Northeast Ohio's Waterways: Lakefront Planning Issue Forums Summary Report, Burke Lakefront Airport

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Northeast Ohio’s Waterways:
Lakefront Planning Issue Forums
Summary Report
Burke Lakefront Airport

Date: September 18, 2002
Venue: Burke Lakefront Airport
Moderator: Norman Krumholz, Professor, Maxine Goodman Levin College of Urban Affairs, Cleveland State University
Panelists: David Beach, Director, EcoCity Cleveland
Steve Nagy, Senior Consultant, PB Aviation, Inc (Parsons Brinckerhoff Company)
Ted Esborn, Attorney and Shareholder, McDonald, Hopkins, Burke & Haber Company, LPA
John Mok, Director, Department of Port Control, City of Cleveland
Mark C. Coffin, Real Estate Developer and President of R.F. Coffin Enterprises

The following summary presents basic information presented at the forum about Burke, the composition of the site, its role in the regional air system, and the master plan for its future as an airport. Also summarized are issues raised at the forum for further discussion. These relate to possible alternate uses for Burke and will continue to be discussed as the process moves forward.

Burke Lakefront Airport, built in 1947, now occupies approximately 450 acres on the shore of Lake Erie, directly to the north of Cleveland’s downtown. Separated from downtown by the Shoreway, the airport spans nearly two miles from E. 12th to E. 53rd Streets (see map). Its size and location make it an obvious and important consideration in Cleveland’s lakefront planning process.
Burke Lakefront Airport

**Fast Facts**
- 450 acres
- Opened in 1947
- FAA has designated it as a reliever airport for Hopkins.
- The airspace that Burke serves is the busiest in the United States
- Burke handles over 90,000 flight operations annually.
- Two runways (6,198 by 150 feet and 5,200 by 100 feet)
- Instrument landing system for guiding aircraft in poor visibility conditions.
- Two fixed base operators that own and operate two fuel farms.
- Home to four flight schools, Cleveland National Air Show, Women’s International Air and Space Museum, and Cleveland Grand Prix.
- Additional 30 acres of fill area.

**Background**

**Site composition**
Burke is built on land composed entirely of fill that sits atop the Lake Erie lakebed. The eastern half of the site was used for the dumping and burning of solid waste, a practice stopped by court order in 1958 in response to a citizen’s lawsuit. Up until that point, the city routinely burned waste on the site and used the ash for fill material.

The majority of the western half of the site is comprised of fill from dredging the Cuyahoga River as well as from the excavation of the Cleveland Press garage, at the intersection of E. 9th and Lakeside Avenue and some of the interstate highway projects. The city and the Army Corps of Engineers continued to extend the fill north into the lake using construction and demolition material.

The cover material or soils placed on top of the dredge materials are between 10 to 14 feet thick. An estimated 90 percent of the land is built on “clean fill” with 10 percent built on garbage.

A 1992 risk assessment study conducted on behalf of the city of Cleveland and approved by the Ohio EPA determined that the site was within acceptable limits for carcinogens for airport use. A study to determine whether the site could be safely used for non-airport uses has not yet been conducted.
Ownership
The city of Cleveland owns the fill and the facilities of Burke while the state of Ohio maintains the public trust interest in the lakebed underneath.

Facilities
Burke’s facilities include two runways, one 6,198 feet by 150 feet and the other 5,200 feet by 100 feet. The runways are separated by a distance of 510 feet and connected by four taxiways. The control tower, built in 1961, now includes an instrument landing system for guiding aircraft in poor visibility conditions.

The airport operates 24 hours a day, Monday through Friday, closing at 11:00 PM on Friday evening. Its weekend hours are Saturday 7:00 AM to 11:00 PM and Sunday 8:00 AM to midnight.

The airport also maintains two hangars, a 57,750-square-foot terminal, a rescue and firefighting facility, and space for maintenance and warehousing.

Burke is home to two fixed-base operators that house 79 fixed base aircraft and that own and operate two fuel farms.

Operations
As the major east-west corridor between New York and Chicago, the airspace above Cleveland is the busiest in the United States.

Burke’s primary role, as designated by the FAA National Plan of Integrated Airport Systems, is to act as a reliever airport for Hopkins International Airport. Reliever airports have the function of relieving air traffic congestion from the primary airport.

Handling over 90,000 flight operations annually, Burke provides aviation services for corporate flights, news and police helicopter flights, charter flights, flight training, and pleasure flying that the commercial airlines and military do not provide. Burke also has the capacity to handle some large commercial jets if necessary.

Burke Airport is the site of the Women’s International Air and Space Museum and the annual Cleveland Air Show and Grand Prix.

Issues for consideration in the planning process

Burke’s role in economic development of downtown and the region

David Beach: Burke has not been a significant draw in bringing businesses to downtown Cleveland. Another use, such as a park or residential neighborhood, may be more effective in bringing workers back to the city.

John Mok: Economic impact studies estimate that the aircraft activities at Burke contribute about $45.6 million in direct and indirect expenditures to the regional economy.

Burke’s importance in the regional air system

David Beach: If Burke were to close, the small aircraft could be accommodated by one of the other regional airports and Hopkins would not be overburdened. Only four jets are based at Burke.

Steve Nagy: A 1994 Federal Aviation Administration (FAA) capacity study identified Burke and the other satellite airports as “cornerstones” to the regional system. The number of jet aircraft based
at Burke does not indicate actual corporate jet activity. Burke is only able to close for events such as the air show and Grand Prix because they are planned far in advance.

**John Mok:** Corporate aviation activity is expected to accelerate as the economy recovers and post-September 11 concerns over executive safety escalate. Many corporations prefer the convenience and security of private jets.

**Financial status of Burke**

**David Beach:** The airport runs at an annual deficit of approximately $1 million to $1.4 million per year, which is offset by subsidies from Hopkins.

**Environmental conditions of Burke**

**Ted Esborn:** The land is stable and virtually anything could be built if the support structures rested on the lakebed.

**Steve Nagy:** Any future expansions of Burke would have to pass rigorous environmental scrutiny by the federal government.

**Future Scenarios for Burke**

**David Beach:** First, do nothing and maintain the status quo; second, improve the facilities and services of Burke as recommended by the current airport plan; third, close the airport and make it a park; fourth, close the airport and develop housing with green space; and fifth, let the airport remain and move the port authority to the airport’s east end, opening up the part of the lakefront closest to downtown and the warehouse district.

**Steve Nagy:** If closure were proposed for Burke, the FAA would look at issues such as the provision of another reliever airport of comparable location and function and the possible reimbursement of the funds that they have already invested in Burke.

**John Mok:** The Department of Port Control has a master plan that includes continued utilization of Burke as an airport. The long-term plan for Burke envisions the potential need for another runway.

**Mark Coffin:** If the city’s ultimate goal is to have public access to its lakefront, it will need the amenities that will draw people to the lakefront. There are many barriers to the lakefront that could be changed or better utilized: the Shoreway could be turned into a pedestrian-friendly boulevard, the port could be moved to the Burke airport site, and the Cleveland Power Plant could be reconfigured.

**Will new development help or hurt current downtown development and Cleveland’s struggling economy?**

**David Beach:** The solution lies in the construction of downtown housing, thereby bringing people downtown to frequent existing businesses and increase the tax base while at the same time being careful not to create downtown development projects that compete with one another.

**Mark Coffin:** By improving the amenities of the lakefront and downtown, including housing, Cleveland may effectively attract new businesses.