

## **Rachel Kahler for Heber City Council- facebook Sept 6, 2021**

The Heber City Airport is a hot political topic, with complex federal agreements and a paper stack of legality.

Anyone that has attended an airport public meeting or been involved in an online discussion knows that it is fraught with high emotions, discussions of expensive jet fuel, noisy airplanes, and discussions of airport requirements. The question remains... To be C2 or not to be C2. The truth is.. Heber City is currently a non compliant C2 airport and has been since 2003.

The timeline of the Airport Master Plan, due to COVID-19 pandemic, is one year behind the published schedule; the consultant is now reviewing the Facility Requirements. Determining the runway protection zone, which includes the width requirements of the runway. It's purpose of the Master Plan is solely to collect data. Based on meetings and the information that I've received, as a city council representative, the final decision is NOT in my hands. The final decision to be in compliance is not in the hands of any Heber City elected official. Not the Mayor. Not the City Council Representatives.

Heber City has accepted 39 federal participation grant assurances since 1991, by taking the FAA grant money, the sponsor (Heber City) agreed to operate the airport as a public use facility.

These grant assurances locked Heber City airport into FAA requirements, with the purchase of land in the 1990's, that extended the airfield and improved the runway. Heber City Airport is obligated to upgrade to a C2 level, because of these past grant assurances that were accepted to meet the B2 standard. Contractually Heber City is obligated to meet the agreements in the grant assurances. Recently I asked Senator Mitt Romney for help dealing with the complexities of the Heber City airport, hoping that if we had the political will power in Washington DC, hoping we would have a chance to make a stand against the FAA. Romney and his staff are aware of our situation. Those contracts are legally binding documents, past staff and officials signed agreements unknowingly to the growth of the Heber Valley, and certainly not knowing the increase in jet traffic. We are now facing the consequences.

U.S. Department of Transportation Federal Aviation Administration provides an Advisory Circular (which is the legal document that guides the Master Plan process) for the preparation of master plans for airports. Chapter 8 Facility Requirements includes, "In some cases, the airport sponsor may decide that it is in the community's best interest for the airport not to continue to grow to accommodate forecast activity, or to accommodate forecast activity only up to a point. In these cases, the master plan should document this decision and indicate the probable consequences of the decision (e.g., demand will be capped, the demand will go unmet, or the demand will be diverted to another airport)." While the citizens can demand that the airport not change, it doesn't change the fact that the airport is currently receiving air traffic that pushes beyond the current B2 standards.

All federally funded airports receive approximately \$150,000 of discretionary funds for snow removal, maintenance and operations. Heber City would need to replace this funding annually if we weren't compliant with agreed upon standards. The current airport runway was re-sealed for \$500,000 two years ago, and will need to be redone every 4-5 years. The cost to redo the runway could run another \$20 million dollars. An airport expense that could potentially burden Heber City taxpayers. FAA funds come from airport operation fees, none of the FAA funding comes from citizens tax dollars. Again from the FAA Advisory Circular "Many of the significant improvements needed at an airport are actually driven by the demand level, not a time frame or a specific year. Therefore, planners should identify what demand levels will trigger the need for the expansion or improvement of a specific facility. In this way, the sponsor can monitor growth trends and expand the airport as demand warrants." AC 150/5070-6B with chg 1-2, Airport Master Plans

The decision will be made by the FAA when the facts from the Master Plan FlightPath are presented. Heber City Airport is a non compliant C2 airport. The federal funds and contracts that were accepted and agreed upon for the last thirty years require that Heber City is obligated to maintain a safe airport in Heber City based on the demand levels.

It's a fight I thought we could win. But now I know without spending millions of dollars in litigation, we won't.