



Sept 12, 2019

### **My Take: Setting the record straight about the Park Township Airport and the AirPark Plan.**

The opinions Mr. Bill Clear expressed (My Take Sept 12 – Holland Sentinel) can not be allowed to stand without a response. Mr. Clear and a small handful of Bay Meadows residents have been misleading the public about the Park Township Airport for many many years. To see what is really going on at the airport in pictures and words, and the hundreds of people (other than pilots) that use and enjoy it throughout the year, please go to this link. <http://parktownshipairporthistoricalassociation.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/09/Park-Twp-Airport-Activities-2019.pdf>

The Park Township Airport Historical Association (PTAHA is a non-profit organization) manages the airport for the Township. For more information, go to <http://parktownshipairporthistoricalassociation.org> or the PTAHA Facebook page.

The actual use and enjoyment of the airport is much broader than a few local pilots. The link above shows photos and information about the major events and activities that have taken place through August at the airport. These include:

- 57 flights inbound from 19 other states shown in visitor's log. (Local area pilots typically do not sign-in so those flights are not in the count). Visiting pilots spend money on food, lodging, activities, including looking for potential property and homes for sale.
- 172 aircraft fuel purchases
- 103 local middle and high school students over the last seven months have attended the PTAHA Flight Night introduction to aviation program in the Historic Hangar. Park Township Airport Historical Association (PTAHA) volunteers present the program including an opportunity for students to fly the certified Redbird Flight Simulator. PTAHA is also working with West Ottawa STEM teachers to collaborate with the schools' STEM curriculum. Next Flight Night is Sept 24 at 6pm. Stop by and see what the students are learning.
- Tulip City Air Service and PTAHA are looking at collaborating to help students that want to become pilots find the best path for their ground school and flight training.
- The Coast Guard Auxiliary had their annual pancake breakfast in August on the airport grounds and community hangar, drawing nearly 200 boaters, swimmers, and other citizens thankful for their service.
- The annual Airport Pancake Breakfast and Open House attracted almost 450 visitors, not including the many pilots that flew in and the classic car owners displaying their vehicles on the grass behind the airplanes. Of the visitors 175 were Park Township residents and the other 265 were from Holland and neighboring areas. See photos at the link.
- PTAHA has an annual picnic in September for hangar renters and all of the volunteers that mow the grass, maintain the office and hangar, help with Flight Nights, keep the camping area clear, and keep the airport safe.
- The West Michigan Aviation Academy had a Teacher Development day in August and chose Park Township Airport for their event base. They brought two Cessna 172's and the Amway helicopter to the airport and gave rides to their teaching staff and others all day. Many people passing by on the road and bike path came into the airport property to watch the aircraft and talk with WMAA staff.
- Also in August the Selfridge Air Natl Guard CH-47 Chinook Helicopter selected Park Township Airport as their training destination. The helicopter drew a crowd from people driving by, bike path, neighbors, etc. The crew allowed everyone to come out on the field and tour the helicopter for nearly 3 hours.
- In June the Michigan Powered Paragliders had a four day "Beach Run" fly-in/drive-in event. Over 60 fliers camped out on the airport grass and flew their chutes around and out over Lake Michigan. Spectators and visitors were able to come right onto the airport field and talk to the pilots and see their equipment and flights.

- Most weeks when the weather is nice the West Michigan Aero RC Airplane Club is out on the RC field at the airport demonstrating their considerable flying skills with gas and electric powered radio-controlled airplanes. When driving by on Ottawa Beach road or riding on the bike path, people drive or ride onto the property for a closer look at the RC flyers. The WM Aero club did demonstration flights during the Open House, CGA breakfast, and WMAA teacher day.
- The Civil Air Patrol MI-135 Al Johnson Legacy Squadron moved to the airport in March of 2019, to be able to meet with and train cadets at an airport instead of in a conference room. Park Township Airport was their choice. The officers and cadets meet weekly in the Historic Hangar, and the CAP airplanes fly in for special training. The dedication of the squadron to WW2 veteran Al Johnson with over 120 people attending was in April. The CAP had an awards event in August attended by about 100 people, including Holland mayor Nancy DeBoer and state senator Roger Victory. The squadron of young cadets has already doubled in size since moving to the Park Township Airport. You may see them running around the airport property for physical fitness training.
- Many times during the summer photographers use the Historic Hangar as a backdrop for senior pictures, classic car photos, family photos, and airplane photos.
- The local Scout troops have been heavily involved in the restoration of the rustic wooded camping area on the airport property as well as work on the retaining wall and pavers around the T-33 jet memorial at the airport. Both were Eagle Scout projects, the camp area by Owen Israels, and the jet memorial by Anderson Bloemers.
- The Eurohangar European summer car show is a big event that in the past has been held on the large grassy area between the runway and the Historic Hangar. Usually more than 350 cars are exhibited.

For all of these events and activities, access to the airport grounds, the hangars, the airport office, the flight simulator in the Historic Hangar, is OPEN TO ALL. In fact, if someone just pulls into the airport parking lot, walks over or rides their bicycle in from the bike path, they may find someone from PTAHA in the office or a pilot on the property. Visitors are welcome and will likely get a tour of the Historic Hangar, see airplanes, and or even try their hand flying the Redbird certified flight simulator in the Historic Hangar. The Park Township Airport is not a large, commercial airport and as such it is much more user and visitor friendly. AND, with the implementation of the AirPark concept, the already broad appeal of the airport will be enhanced significantly.

Next, the opinions expressed by Mr. Clair in his 9/12/19 Sentinel post must be challenged.

- Mr. Clair has no idea of how many people in our community (especially young people) are involved with activities at the Park Township Airport. Read the list above or go to this link to see the major events. <http://parktownshipairporthistoricalassociation.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/09/Park-Twp-Airport-Activities-2019.pdf>
- The Park Township Airport is a recreational airport and is not off limits to visitors or passers-by. Commercial airports and properties like the West Michigan Regional Airport are not open to casual visitors and are also not tolerant of ultralight aircraft, paragliders, RC aircraft, drones, and non-aviation events that use the airfield open property. The signs around the West Michigan Regional and the Park Township Airport are FAA requirements, but as you can see every day, people visit, watch planes, talk to pilots, or just pull in and eat their lunch.
- Mr. Clair's opinions do not represent the vast majority of Township residents. The Township conducted a blind survey about the AirPark/Airport concept plan and a clear majority of residents had a favorable response on both the phone and internet surveys. His mention of subdivision residents signing petitions to close the airport are misleading. The actual number of people signing is small, in one subdivision, and actively directed by one other determined antagonist. By contrast, PTAHA representatives asked people at the local dog park, a Waukazoo subdivision garage sale, and at the airport open house if they would sign a petition for the Township to pursue the AirPark/Airport concept. 241 Park Township residents signed the petition, representing 95.2% of those asked about the project. (The Township has the signed petitions)
- The AirPark plan (which includes a one runway airport) is a CONCEPT. Mr. Clair and others have frequently cherry picked and misrepresented costs and features of the plan that may or may not be included. He has

also cited gross dollar amounts in the AirPark vision which do not account for alternative funding sources which would be available in the actual implementation. Good examples are: The cost of runway and taxiway repair could be offset significantly by the State with the reinstatement of General Utility status. PTAHA supporters have committed to pay for the tree trimming which is the key to re-establishing the General Utility status. New Township-owned hangars are shown in the concept but are optional. Without any potential donations or additional support, the above actions reduce the cost to the township to what it is today, about \$68,000 per year. Another fact that most residents do not know: Income from fuel sales and hangar rent offset the expenses to within about \$5000. In some past years there has been a surplus at year end. For the last 10 years the airport has essentially been operating at break even. This near break-even result is only possible because of the many volunteers that help PTAHA operate the airport for the Township. A key reason the future cost may be higher is because the maintenance of the airport suffered forced neglect in previous years. PTAHA was and is not responsible for the larger capital/maintenance improvements that were needed. These items are addressed in the Airpark plan. The last important financial fact: The airport portion of the AirPark plan, as described above, is only 9.2% of the total AirPark concept estimate.

- Another key point that bears mentioning. Mr. Cleair likes to talk about how few people “use” the airport and the cost per pilot. Based on the actual many activities and visitors at the airport, there are HUNDREDS of people that both use and enjoy the airport, not to mention the large number of pilots that fly to here, from here, and around here with airplanes, helicopters, ultralights, powered paragliders, and radio controlled planes and drones. He neglects to acknowledge that ALL of the other parks and facilities in the Township are subsidized by the township. Does Mr. Cleair use the Winstrom Disc Golf park? The dog park? The bike paths? The Cooper VanWieren natural area? Does he play pickleball? Not everyone uses these and other parks, facilities and properties yet all are subsidized by Township residents.
- The airport is an asset, benefit and attraction for many more people than pilots. AND residents agreed in the survey and PTAHA petitions. The AirPark concept further broadens the appeal and use of the property. The park portion of the AirPark plan has multiple funding sources including grants and existing Township budgets. The AirPark’s multimillion-dollar cost figure routinely quoted does not account for the grants and existing funds that would be applied.
- These are the safety statistics. In the last 20 years there have been 4 incidents at the airport. Three of the four involved the pilot bouncing on the runway and skidding off into the grass, bushes, and trees on the airport property- no injuries. The fourth light sport aircraft lost power on takeoff and crash landed on the fairground property – pilot was injured. Compared to the automotive safety risks taken every day by Township motorists, especially on Ottawa beach road, the airport has a good track record. With the trimming of the trees in the landing approach path, the landing length of the runway will effectively be lengthened and the airport will be even safer.

In summary, the majority of Park Township residents surveyed saw the AirPark Vision concept as a good thing, including an operating runway. People young and old are captivated by flight at our airport, no matter what the vehicle. The AirPark/Airport concept provides a wide variety of activities and experiences for a broad cross section of our residents. It will also attract visitors who will stay a while and spend their money in our community. The biggest benefit of the AirPark/Airport concept is for our youth. Park Township Airport, the PTAHA Flight Night program, and the Civil Air Patrol have already attracted many young people to aviation. Our historical airport did the same thing back in the 1940’s when Hope College trained over 100 young men to fly the aircraft of WW2. There is a rich history at our airport and we need to preserve it by moving forward with the AirPark plan. Go to this link to read about the plan. Start on page 21 with the overall layout of the plan <http://parktownship.org/wp-content/uploads/Park-Township-Airpark-Master-Plan.pdf>. If you enjoy seeing FLIGHT up close, and want the Township to respect the history and future of the Park Township Airport, please write an email of support to the Township Board of Trustees before Sept 30. Email them at: [board@parktownship.org](mailto:board@parktownship.org)

Thank you,

Bob Stander - PTAHA