

# We the people of Paulding County, GA

November 11, 2014

The Honorable Anthony Foxx  
Secretary  
U.S. Department of Transportation  
1200 New Jersey Avenue, SE  
Washington, DC 20590

Re: Paulding Airport Investigation

Dear Secretary Foxx:

We understand you have heard from various other stakeholders in connection with requests for investigations surrounding the Paulding Northwest Atlanta Airport (Paulding Airport). As citizens who would actually face major commercial aircraft over their households, versus the intermittent general aviation aircraft today, we are writing as concerned citizens of Paulding County, Georgia to request that, to the extent any investigation occurs, it be focused on potential violations of federal transportation law and possible financial conflicts-of-interest between the people and companies involved in the attempted commercialization of Paulding Airport.

We hope your Department will not approve commercial service at the airport and will fully investigate:

- the secret deal in November 2012 between the County and Propeller Airports to commercialize Paulding Airport;
- the facts and circumstances leading up to the County and Airport Authority entering into a backroom agreement to subvert the will of Paulding voters by attempting to transfer City-restricted land to the Airport Authority and prevent the County from opposing the commercialization of Paulding Airport; and
- the financial and legal compliance of Propeller and the Airport Authority with federal law as well as possible conflicts of interest with County officials .

We are very concerned with the use of taxpayer money to fund the commercialization of a small general aviation airport that is not necessary, not supported by the electorate, and not the subject of any of demonstrable airline interest. In addition, we remain concerned that the County, without any public input or competitive process, struck a sweetheart deal with the private operator, who will enjoy an economic windfall from the commercialization of the airport at our expense. For example, the agreements with Propeller include the lease of property that can be developed at the whim of the private operator. But, the agreement does not require that the

County receive fair market rent for the property. In addition, the Airport Authority has given the private operator exclusive rights to develop all services at the terminal, including airport parking, food, and retail. But instead of the people of Paulding County receiving the benefit of these sales, Propeller will pocket almost 100 percent of the money.

We also question whether the private operator or those officially connected with the County and Airport Authority stand to gain financially from this transaction. Our concern in part stems from the selection of an environmental consultant that formerly employed the Airport Director and that has advised the County on development of the airport for years. This is a clear conflict-of-interest and we hope the Department and the OIG will pursue these questions.

Finally, and most importantly, for the past two years, the presently elected leaders in our county have gone to great lengths to commercialize our local airport, without any public hearing or process. We are very concerned that actions that they have taken over the last six weeks have accelerated those back-room efforts to circumvent the new majority that will be sworn in to the county commission in January.

Paulding County has a five member commission. Commissioner Pownall has been the lone voice for transparency in this process. He has done so with incredible courage and integrity. While he has been threatened with political retaliation for his position on commercialization, he has remained strong in his belief that this deal was done in the dark of night without the benefit of public input. In January, Commissioner Pownall will be joined by Commissioners Tony Crowe and Vernon Collette, who were elected, in part, due to their opposition to committing taxpayer dollars for the commercialization of Silver Comet Field. Given the opposition of the city of Atlanta, Delta, local landowners, and soon the majority of the County Board of Commissioners, we believe FAA should not approve of any further efforts absent a regional and local consensus.

Therefore, we are respectfully asking the Department not approve any actions related to the airport and that all development activities cease until the FAA environmental review is completed, until the City of Atlanta's land claim is resolved, until the new Board of Commissioners is seated, and until any federal investigation is concluded.

Thank you for your consideration of our request. We greatly appreciate and respect your role.

Sincerely,

Cathy Sasser Helms, On behalf of We the people of Paulding County  
191 Ogle Road  
Rockmart (Paulding County), Georgia 30153

**NOTE: Additional Signatories are on the following 13 pages**

cc: The Honorable Calvin L. Scovel III  
The Honorable Kathryn Thomson

The Honorable Michael Huerta  
The Honorable Saxby Chambliss  
The Honorable Johnny Isakson  
The Honorable Tom Graves  
The Honorable Kasim Reed  
State Senator Bill Heath  
State Senator Mike Dugan  
State Representative Howard Maxwell  
State Representative Paulette Rakestraw Braddock  
State Representative Micah Gravely  
State Representative Kimberly Alexander  
Daphne Fuller, FAA  
Winsome Lenfert, FAA  
Michael Fineman, FAA  
Calvin Thompson, Chairman, Paulding County Airport Authority  
Blake Swafford, Paulding County Airport Authority

Attachments (13)