

Current General Plan Draft Needs Revision

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The Watsonville General Plan 2030, February 2006 draft, contains development plans for Buena Vista (Concept A) that will impair the safety and utility of Watsonville Airport and create noise and safety problems for proposed future residents of the area. Runway 26 is the second most heavily utilized runway at the Airport. The area proposed for development lies immediately under the flight path of aircraft departing this runway. The proposed development also underlies the approach path of aircraft landing the opposite direction on runway 8. (Runways 8 and 26 are the same pavement, runway 26 facing west and runway 8 facing east.)

The Airport has a good safety record because aircraft with emergencies now have open areas on which to land, providing relatively safe options for pilots to avoid hitting structures. A Watsonville pilot with an engine failure landed with little damage to his aircraft (none to structures) in the open area on the south side of Buena Vista Drive.

The California Department of Aeronautics, the Watsonville Pilots Association, and others have provided airport land use planning information to the City that would allow lesser development to avoid creating hazards. The City has continually rejected these recommendations. In fact, on April 12, 2005 the City Development Department presented a proposal to delete airport safety planning criteria from the Airport Master Plan so as to allow development off the end of east-west runway 8-26. The proposal was accepted by the City Council on a four-to-three vote. To enable this action, some mislead Council members voted to designate runway 8-26 "low use" (defined as less than 2000 operations per year). In actuality, runways 8-26 support over 13,000 operations per year, some 10,000 operations on runway 26 and some 3,000 on runway 8. Intentionally not counted are the 10,000 operations from the same pavement going the other way on runway 26, overflying the Buena Vista area. Aircraft depart runway 26 under maximum power. Takeoff and climb power puts more stress on engines and makes considerable more noise. Discounting operations on runway 26 defies common sense and can only be seen as a baseless rationalization for decisions favoring unsafe development.

The California state law says, "it is in the public interest to provide for the orderly development of each public use airport in this state and the area surrounding these airports...and to prevent the creation of new noise and safety problems." How do you build houses off the end of runways without creating new noise and safety problems?

Runway importance

How important are the east-west runways 8-26? They are vital to the safe operation of the Airport. The potential for, and danger of, an accident increases with increasing crosswind. Strong winds frequently blow out of the west and during "off-shore flow" conditions, strong winds blow from the east. The maximum published allowable crosswind component for various aircraft ranges from 7 to 28 miles per hour. Crosswinds cause aircraft to land faster and put more stress on the aircraft. Without runway 8-26, aircraft attempting to operate on runway 2-20 would face unmanageable crosswind conditions.

Stratus or fog conditions can prevent use of the north-south runway 2-20. Many pilots and aircraft do not have capability to fly in clouds. For days at a time, especially in summer months, east-west runway 8-26 allows pilots to depart clear of clouds and remain in visual conditions. The north-south runway is closed sometimes because of runway maintenance, aircraft mishaps, and roosting seagulls. The east-west runway is

vital for keeping air transportation moving and for airport located businesses.

Revise General Plan 2030

The housing section of the latest General Plan 2030 draft states that a goal, where appropriate, is to remove "constraints" on development (pages 7-1,4). Nowhere in the General Plan does it say explicitly that there are legitimate constraints or limitations to development. The plan contains a transportation goal: "Maintain or improve the Airport's safety and functionality." Not stated is the goal to insure the long-term viability of the Airport, part of the national transportation infrastructure, an irreplaceable transportation resource that supports large and small business—and 1650 jobs. Safety for people residing around the Airport and people traveling by aircraft must be permanently protected. To achieve these goals, responsible airport land use planning involves objective, legitimate, and appropriate constraints on development in Buena Vista. As some on this Council know, when a city has an airport, the Councilpersons not only represent their districts, but the interests of the whole city; they also represent the county, state, and country.

Existing housing west of the Airport now exceeds safe density by 10 dwelling units in the gross acreage of the 4 runway safety zones. To prevent creating a future hazardous situation, no more dwellings should be built in those 4 zones. If more growth in the Buena Vista area can't be done responsibly -- don't do it. Many people and organizations agree with the pilots association in its position: either revise General Plan 2030 substantially or delete the Buena Vista development from the Plan, and from any future specific plans, so as to prevent deliberate creation of new noise and safety problems.

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