

Published: Friday, June 6, 2008

FAA: Snohomish County must negotiate with airline

*By Jeff Switzer
Herald Writer*

Unless it wants to risk losing millions in federal funding, Snohomish County must negotiate with a Las Vegas-based airline that wants to launch passenger service at Paine Field, the Federal Aviation Administration said this week.

The company wrote the county last month asking to open negotiations, and County Council members and County Executive Aaron Reardon immediately lodged their objection.

Federal regulators in a letter put the county on notice that its obligated to negotiate with the airline.

Federal grants that pay for millions of dollars in improvements at Paine Field require the county to "make the airport available as an airport for public use on reasonable terms and without unjust discrimination to all types, kinds and classes of aeronautical activities, including commercial aeronautical activities offering services to the public at the airport," wrote Carol Key, manager of the FAA's Seattle Airports District Office.

The county "is obligated to make areas available for lease on reasonable terms and negotiate in good faith," she said.

"Failure to negotiate in good faith may subject the county to an enforcement action," Key also said. "To comply with your grant assurances and ensure continued receipt of federal funding, you must negotiate in good faith with Allegiant Air."

The federal government has spent \$52 million on the airport since 1945. That gives federal authorities leverage over how the airport is used.

The FAA letter officially pinches the county between its federal obligations and residents and cities opposed to having noisy jet airline service.

The letter was dated Wednesday, the same day the Snohomish County Council voted to oppose Allegiant Air's proposal to fly passenger jets from Paine Field to Las Vegas two to four times a week.

© 2008The Daily Herald Co., Everett, WA