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Snohomish County News

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Students plant trees



Garfield Elementary School fifth graders helped plant trees April 8 at

Everett's Senator H.M. Jackson Park in celebration of Arbor Day. During a brief ceremony, students read poems and held up posters highlighting the importance of planting trees. Mayor Ray Stephanson gave a speech and accepted the Tree City USA award from the National Arbor Day Foundation. Everett is in its 16th year meeting Tree City's standards for its ongoing stewardship of its urban forest. The students got to take home trees to plant in their yards, pictured.

Mukilteo pitches special rule for airport

By KATIE MURDOCH

Mukilteo's effort to prevent commercial flights at Paine Field have not been thwarted as it has written a special classification for the airport that would allow the airport to receive federal funding and ban passenger flights.

The council voted 4-0 last week to direct Mayor Joe Marine to recommend Paine Field be classified as an airport of "special national significance" and would allow the airport to collect federal aviation improvement funding while controlling the types of service at the airport. Marine is requesting help from state and Congressional lawmakers to persuade the Puget Sound Regional Council and Gov. Christine Gregoire to support carving out an exception for Paine Field.

City administrator Joe Hannan said last week the classification currently does not exist. The city argues this would protect the interests of the Boeing Co. that uses the airport for operations.

Hannan said the airport is important to the state's local and regional transportation system and Boeing deserves an airport that receives Federal Aviation Administration (FAA) dollars.

"We want in the end to recognize Paine Field as a presence of the county's leading aeronautics manufacturer," he said. "We'd like to say to her (Gregoire) we need this airport protected and this is one way of doing it." The recommendation is modeled after the 2003 Centennial Rule named after Centennial International Airport in Arapahoe County, Colo., which eventually succeeded in banning commercial flights while still collecting federal aviation funding.

Centennial began receiving federal funding again after nearly a decade of losing \$1.5 million per year in federal funding after lawmakers inserted a special rule into a bill that restored the funding.

Marine is submitting the city's recommendation to the state Aviation Planning Council, which released a draft of a statewide air transportation study last month.

The study is called the Washington State Long-Term Air Transportation Study. The Department of Transportation, the lead agency for the study, is asking for public feedback.

The statewide study that began in 2005 focuses on airport operation capacity predictions and includes Paine Field and Seattle Tacoma International Airport (Sea-Tac).

The study finds that four Washington airports, including Sea-Tac and Harvey Field in Snohomish, will exceed 100 percent operating capacity by 2030.

The study finds that Paine Field in Everett and Arlington Municipal in Arlington will reach at least 60 percent of its operating capacity by 2030. Once an airport is identified as exceeding 60 percent capacity, the federal government encourages planning to begin for adding capacity, according to the study.

Hannan said the city needs to be concerned with those predictions and the impact that growth would have on the area right now because 20 years is not that far off.

"Let's pay attention to it and make a place for it in our long-term plans," he said referring to Paine Field.

Mukilteo city officials do not believe it would be in the best interest of Boeing if Paine Field had to accommodate commercial flights or more

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general flights from the Puget Sound area airports expected to exceed 100 percent capacity by 2030.

“We’re here to watch and halt state plans and say, ‘Look, we care about this and we want to make it hospitable at the airport for them (Boeing) to operate and potentially expand,’” he said. “As these other places continue to grow and look to other places, we ask Paine Field not to be the place to look at.”

A leader of the grassroots group that opposes commercial flights at Paine Field said the study is biased as it focuses on protecting airports and it is unclear how operating capacity was measured.

Greg Hauth, Save Our Communities (SOC) vice president, said he has repeatedly asked Department of Transportation aviation officials how capacity was measured for the study and asked to see the model used. “They’re not providing answers — it’s not transparent,” Hauth said of the process.

Hauth said the way the questions in the feedback workbook are worded support airports by describing community members as “encroaching” on airports and prioritizes the placement of airports over hospitals and public schools.

“It’s not fair to make that kind of recommendation to the governor,” he said. “Do it with the community’s needs and balance the community and the airport’s needs.”

Opponents of commercial service have said previously the impact of commercial flights could give Boeing an excuse to leave Paine Field and take local jobs with them.

Additionally, Hauth is displeased some members of the Planning Aviation Council publicly support commercial flights and doubts the panel will be receptive to SOC’s perspective.

“It’s a highly biased panel,” he said.

Also, Hauth said he doesn’t understand why the study predicts Sea-Tac will have capacity constraints given a third runway was opened last year and FAA documents indicate the United States saw an 8 percent decline in air passenger service from March 2008 to March 2009.

Earlier this month, basic drawings were released of a two-gate terminal for commercial flights at Paine Field. Horizon wants to offer two daily flights to Spokane and four to Portland using 76-seat Bombardier Q400 high-speed turboprops. While both Horizon and Allegiant airlines have expressed an interest, the county is currently in negotiations with Horizon and expects a draft agreement with Horizon by May. The terminal is anticipated to cost approximately \$3 million.

County and airport officials were adamant earlier this month that taxpayers will not pay for the terminal and it will only be built after the airlines commit to coming to Paine Field.

The Aviation Planning Council is asking for public feedback until April 17 and will listen to public comment at its May 7 meeting at the Museum of Flight in Seattle.

The Aviation Planning Council’s recommendations will be presented to the governor and state legislators by July 1.

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