

Blaine / City reviews airport expansion stance

Charter's runway push revives debate

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Nearly 10 years after the city of Blaine resisted an expanded airport, the north metro suburb is looking at whether it should reaffirm its opposition.

The city will review its stance on expanding the Anoka County-Blaine Airport today and take a formal vote later this month. The city would join a chorus of communities that already have said they don't want a bigger airport in their back yard.

The growing resistance comes on the heels of the push by Key Air — an executive charter service at the airport — to add 1,000 feet to the runway and increase its weight-bearing capacity. As its client roster and fleet grow, Key Air has said it needs to maximize the use of and justify the investment in its facility at the airport.

Key Air's president could not be reached for comment.

"I think if anything, (the resolution) shows Key Air it's going to be a difficult road ahead for them to achieve what they'd like," said Barbara Haake, a Mounds View resident and member of the group Concerned Citizens of the North Metro.

But do the resolutions carry any weight?

The state Legislature — not the cities — would have to approve certain improvements to the airport.

"No matter what we do — one way or another — may or may not have any pull," said Blaine City Council Member Wes Hovland, whose district includes the airport. "If we don't speak out, we would be shrugging our responsibility."

Cities began establishing policies when the issue first surfaced last fall. At that time, the Anoka County Board of commissioners was considering whether to back a request for a runway extension.

Even after a handful of communities voiced their opposition to changes, Key Air sent a letter to the Metropolitan Airports Commission outlining its request for upgrades at the Blaine airport. MAC is putting together a long-term plan for the airport. A draft is due out late this summer.



MAC doesn't plan to expand the Blaine airport.

Lengthening the runway beyond 5,000 feet — which would require legislative approval — would reclassify the airport for intermediate use, allowing a runway up to 8,000 feet and larger aircraft. Holman Field in St. Paul is an intermediate-use airport.

Not only do opponents fear the expansion would open the way for larger aircraft, more frequent flights and round-the-clock takeoffs and landings, they also worry the impact would cause neighboring property values to fall.

The biggest player is Blaine, home to the airport. But not everyone on the city council thinks it's necessary to reaffirm its long-standing position.

Blaine Mayor Tom Ryan opposes a change in the airport's minor status but also thinks the city should be open if improvements are needed for safety reasons.

"I'm not the one who likes to type a resolution up anytime someone comes in here," Ryan said. "I just don't like to overdo things."

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