

NEWS RELEASE

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Stop The Airport
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Community files complaint against Washington airport commission

Complaint claims site selection violates law, demands Thurston County be removed from consideration

OLYMPIA – Stop The Airport, a community organization in Thurston County, has filed a complaint alleging wrongdoing by the Washington Department of Transportation’s Commercial Aviation Coordinating Committee (CACC), which is charged with recommending sites for a major new airport in the state.

Stop The Airport and Lacey resident Bennett (Mike) Butters filed the complaint with the Washington Office of the Attorney General yesterday. They allege the CACC has exceeded its legal authority by identifying a potential site in Thurston County that significantly overlaps with the boundaries of Joint Base Lewis McChord (JBLM), a major West Coast military installation.

The state laws the CACC is operating under explicitly state that, “Options for a new primary commercial aviation facility in Washington may include expansion of an existing airport facility *but may not include siting a facility on or in the vicinity of a military installation that would be incompatible with the installation's ability to carry out its mission requirements.*” However, along with two potential “greenfield” sites in Pierce County, the CACC recommended the “Thurston County Central” site in a report to the State Legislature on Oct. 15, 2022. The commission is due to narrow its recommendations to one greenfield site by June 15, 2023.

In consultation with Olympia attorney Barnett Kalikow, the complaint further alleges that the CACC deceived the public by removing reference to the restrictive section of the legal language in public materials and communications. It demands the law be upheld and asks Washington Attorney General Bob Ferguson to intervene and remove the Thurston County Central site from consideration.

“Members of the CACC have ignored this significant limitation in the very laws that gave them the authority to look for airport sites in the first place,” said Lacey resident Mike Butters. “There needs to be consequences for their actions, for the incredible stress and sleepless nights they have created for thousands of people who recently learned about this disastrous idea, and who, along with every local official here, are united in their opposition to losing their homes and the natural environment that is unique to this county.”

Stop The Airport spokesperson Dawn Sonntag challenged the state's rationale for establishing the CACC in 2019. Expanding aviation based on models of "unconstrained growth" contradicted Washington's new climate policies and state requirements to reduce greenhouse gas emissions 95% by 2050, she said.

"Paving over a 'greenfield' in Thurston County – or anywhere in Washington – to build a new international airport shouldn't even be on the table in this time of climate crisis and massive biodiversity loss," said Sonntag. "Any remaining forest and prairie land in Western Washington is a vital carbon sink and habitat. We must protect it, the plant and animal species it contains, and the McAllister Springs aquifer that provides 85% of Olympia's drinking water at all costs."

The proposed airport has outraged Thurston County residents. Many families have lived in the communities now threatened by the airport proposal for decades, sometimes generations. More than 5,400 people have joined an online opposition group and hundreds have participated in community meetings since learning about the airport for the first time through a recent local story.

"Very few of us knew the state was considering Thurston County for a major new airport, and a lot of people here still don't know," Sonntag said. "This work has been undertaken outside of meaningful public input and scrutiny for years, and we are confident Attorney General Ferguson will uphold the law and stop it."

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About

Stop The Airport is a community group representing thousands of Thurston County residents and business owners who oppose the destruction of homes and unique land and water to make way for a new international airport in Washington state.

Media Contact

Dawn Sonntag
stophethurstonairport@gmail.com
(330) 569-8063
www.stoptheairport.com

Mike Butters
MButters00@spiritnw.net
(360) 556-1854