



## SUMMARY REPORT

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**Agenda Date:** 4/15/2025

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**To:** Board of Supervisors

**Department or Agency Name(s):** Sonoma County Public Infrastructure

**Staff Name and Phone Number:** Johannes J. Hoevertsz, 707-565-2550

**Vote Requirement:** Majority

**Supervisorial District(s):** Countywide

**Title:**

Presenting Aviation Commission Governance Information and Options for Board Consideration and Direction

**Recommended Action:**

- A) Receive a presentation of the key findings of comparable airports governance structures and assess the relevance of these findings to operations of the Charles M. Schulz-Sonoma County Airport (Airport). Specifically, review the authority, scope, and membership structure of the Airport Aviation Commission and compare it with similar airports.
- B) Provide potential adjustments and direction to staff on the governance structure.

**Executive Summary:**

The Sonoma County Public Infrastructure Department (SPI) - Airport Division (Airport) is presenting findings regarding the potential merging of the Aviation Commission and the Airport Land Use Commission, including key metrics for comparable airports regarding governance oversight areas such as level of authority, functions, and membership. The data collected from nine airports serves as a comparative analysis to help guide potential changes to the governance structure of the Aviation Commission.

The **Airport Land Use Commission** (ALUC) operates under California's State Aeronautics Act and is responsible for land use planning around all six airports in the County. It has a regulatory role and can override local land use decisions if they conflict with airport safety and operations. The authority for the Airport Land Use Commission is established by the California Public Utilities Code Sections 21670-21679.5, which dates back to the 1950's. Staff is requesting the Board's direction on the structure and appointment authority for the **future Aviation Commission**.

Specifically, guidance regarding three main points to be able to update the Aviation Commission Resolution to reflect the needs of the Board:

- Commission membership make up with staff recommending no less than four aviation experts in all scenarios and no more than a total of nine members.
- Commission appointment guidance, keep District representatives or entire Board.

- Transition expectations.

**Discussion:**

The Board provided direction to SPI to review and provide an analysis of options for the governance of the Airport at the October 15, 2024, Board meeting. Since that meeting the Airport has looked at two different areas: the first is the consolidation of the Aviation Commission with the Airport Land Use Commission; the second is an in-depth analysis of comparable airports and their Airport/Aviation Commissions governance structures. In presenting these findings, the Airport seeks guidance from the Board on the ideal structure and appointment authority for the future Aviation Commission that will best serve the Board, the County of Sonoma and the public.

**1. Aviation Commission and Airport Land Use Commission Consolidation.**

The Sonoma County Aviation Commission was established per Board of Supervisors Resolution 12172-1 on March 16, 1965, and last re-designated and updated by Resolution 53319 on April 19, 1976. The Commission serves as an advisory body to the Board and Airport Manager, providing input on Airport operations, policies, land use and capital improvements. The Commission is composed of seven members, with one member representing each Supervisorial District and two at-large members appointed by the Board. The term of the District representative is aligned with the Supervisors term and at-large members have a two year term with all representatives serving at the discretion of the Board. There are no requirements or specific designations for those who are interested in serving on the Aviation Commission.

The Aviation Commission's role is to advise the Board and Airport Manager on issues related to the Charles M. Schulz - Sonoma County Airport, focusing on operations, maintenance, development and policy recommendations. The Aviation Commission deals with aviation safety, noise and community relations. Aviation Commission members are appointed by the Board with a representative from each district and two at-large members.

The Airport Land Use Commission (ALUC) operates under California's State Aeronautics Act and is responsible for land use planning around all six airports in the County. The authority for an Airport Land Use Commission is established by the California Public Utilities Code Sections 21670-21679.5 and dates back to the 1950's. It also establishes the appointment of the members of the commission which includes two members appointed by the County Board of Supervisors, two selected by a committee of all City mayors in the County, two with aviation expertise selected by a committee of all County managers of public airports and one selected by the other six members of the commission representing the general public. Its primary duty is to ensure that development near airports is compatible with aviation operations, including preventing noise-sensitive development in flight paths and mitigating potential aviation hazards. The ALUC reviews general plans, zoning changes and development projects to ensure that they comply with the Airport Land Use Compatibility Plan (ALUCP). The ALUC has a regulatory role and can override local land use decisions if they conflict with airport safety and operations. The ALUC Commission members are appointed by Board of Supervisors (2), City Selection Committee (2), Airport Manager's Committee (2), and ALUC (1).

Both Commissions are similar as they are both involved in aviation matters that impact the operations and

surrounding development. Both interact with County officials, planners, aviation stakeholders and the public. They both contribute to decisions affecting the airport's long-term functionality, safety and integration with the Community. However, there are differences between the two commissions as outlined in the table below:

<b>Feature</b>	<b>Aviation Commission</b>	<b>Airport Land Use Commission (ALUC)</b>
<i>Physical Area of Responsibility</i>	Charles M. Schulz - Sonoma County Airport *Property <b>inside</b> the Airport fence	County wide - six airports *Property <b>outside</b> the airport fences
<i>Appointments</i>	Board of Supervisors	Multiple appointing groups
<i>Primary Focus</i>	Airport operations, maintenance, and economic development	Land use planning, zoning, and development compatibility
<i>Authority</i>	Advisory to the Board of Supervisors and Airport Manager	Regulatory authority under state law to approve or deny projects
<i>Scope</i>	Manages concerns directly related to airport operations	Enforces land use policies to prevent conflicts between development and aviation
<i>Decision-Making Power</i>	Limited to recommendations	Has legal authority over land use decisions
<i>Key Concerns</i>	Safety, noise, services, and community relations	Preventing hazards, noise conflicts, and incompatible land uses

While both Commissions deal with aviation related matters in Sonoma County, their distinct roles, responsibilities, and regulatory powers make them unsuitable for consolidation. The Aviation Commission focuses on Airport operations and development, while the ALUC ensures land use compatibility and regulatory compliance. Keeping them separate ensures checks and balances, prevents conflicts of interest, and maintains efficient, expert-driven decision making in both areas. After consultation with County Counsel and the information provided above, the Department does not recommend merging the Aviation Commission and the ALUC.

## **2. Aviation Commission Review, Analysis and Options.**

A review of Airport/Aviation Commission governance structures from comparable jurisdictions with similar sponsor agencies including Eugene, Santa Barbara, Redmond, Medford, Bellingham, Everett, Arcata, Redding, and Stockton, reveals varying approaches. Airport Authorities, such as Monterey, were not reviewed as they are an independent governmental agency.

Commission sizes range from five to twenty-four members, with appointment authority varying from district-based, including at-large selections from a single-appointing body to multi-jurisdictional appointments. Many commissions incorporate aviation professionals, business representatives and public members to ensure diverse perspectives. While some commissions function strictly in an advisory capacity, others hold some decision-making powers over leases, master plans and capital projects.

Based on the analysis and review of other commissions, staff have identified four potential governance structures for Board consideration and direction to staff.

1. Retain the current structure, which maintains continuity and existing aviation expertise but lacks commercial tenant, other stakeholder and public representation.
2. Modify the current membership profile to be safety and operations focused. Membership could include four aviation experts and three tenant representatives, which would ensure tenant concerns are addressed while maintaining aviation expertise.
3. Shift the composition to four aviation experts and three public members, balancing professional aviation insight with broader community representation. Although tenant concerns may be deemphasized in this model, a tenant could be included in the aviation experts grouping.
4. Expand the Commission to nine members, incorporating five aviation experts alongside selected diverse membership that could include seats for members from specific areas of expertise such as tourism, environmental, the business community, etc. to ensure broader engagement.

In addition, a hybrid approach combining these options could also be considered for flexibility in balancing expertise, tenant concerns and public input.

Guidance is also requested on modifying/clarifying the appointment authority. Options include:

1. Maintain the current system, where each Board member nominates a member to represent their district with two at-large selected by the entire Board.
2. Shift to all appointments being made by any member of the Board for all positions with approval for each by the Board.
3. Board appointing all but one member, with the final member selected by the Commission itself.

A hybrid of any/all of the above could also be considered.

Staff is requesting direction from the Board regarding three main points to be able to update the Aviation Commission Resolution to reflect the needs of the Board:

- Commission membership make up with staff recommending no less than four aviation experts in all scenarios and no more than a total of nine members.
- Commission appointment process, keep District representatives or entire Board.
- Transition expectations.

These options were reviewed with the Aviation Commission at their regular meeting on March 20, 2025. As part of the discussion on this item, additional outreach was conducted to promote public participation in their discussion through announcements at the February meeting, emails to the Airport's interested parties list (over 6,500 contacts) and social media postings. Members of the public recommended to ensure expertise in innovation and modernization is represented if it is determined that a change in Commission composition is enacted. They also recommended being mindful of Commission size as increasing the number of members

may delay or complicate decision making.

Based on the staff review and public comments the Aviation Commission requests the Board consideration on the following options:

- Confirming staff's recommendation to not merge the Aviation Commission and the Airport Land Use Commission
- Maintaining or expanding Aviation Commission membership
- Retain District representation for each Supervisorial District
- Change the historical practice of requiring the District Appointee to reside within the Supervisorial District to residing within the County to allow more flexibility in the selection process
- Commissioner terms match the appointing Supervisor's term and At-Large remain until removed or resignation
- No limit for the number of terms a Commissioner may be reappointed
- Change the meeting schedule from monthly to bi-monthly with additional meetings added as requested by the Board of Supervisors, Aviation Commissioners, or the Airport Manager

If the Board directs staff to restructure the Aviation Commission, staff will prepare a resolution for Board adoption at a future Board meeting. This will include a transition plan to follow the direction of the Board. Public outreach would be conducted to engage stakeholders in the selection of new members.

**Strategic Plan:**

N/A

**Racial Equity:**

**Was this item identified as an opportunity to apply the Racial Equity Toolkit?**

No

**Prior Board Actions:**

3/16/1965 Resolution # 12172-1 Formation of the Aviation Commission

4/19/1976 Resolution # 53319 Update of the Aviation Commission

**FISCAL SUMMARY**

**Narrative Explanation of Fiscal Impacts:**

At this time, no fiscal impacts are anticipated. However, should any projects related to Governance arise, the Airport will address the fiscal impacts on a case-by-case basis, presenting them to the Board for approval. The Airport operates as an Enterprise Fund, meaning it is self-sustaining and does not rely on the County of Sonoma's general fund. Revenues for the Airport are generated from various sources, including grants, charges, and fees.

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**Narrative Explanation of Staffing Impacts (If Required):**

N/A

**Attachments:**

Power point

Comparative Analysis

**Related Items “On File” with the Clerk of the Board:**

Original Resolution 53319 from March 1965.