



September 12, 2022

Joe Flynn, Secretary of VT Agency of Transportation

Brian Carpenter, Chair of Middlebury Selectboard

*Sent via Email*

Dear Secretary Flynn and Chair Carpenter,

We are writing as the four elected officials who both reside in and represent the Village of East Middlebury within the Town of Middlebury to express our concerns with both the Act 250 permit application and master planning draft related to the Middlebury Airport. As you know, the Middlebury Airport lies directly north of the historic East Middlebury Village and is surrounded by residential housing, including the Burnham Woods development. The Airport also lies directly above the aquifer recharge area for both Middlebury and East Middlebury and parallel to the base of the Green Mountains, close to the Middlebury Gap.

Due to the facility's proximity to essential community and natural resources, we oppose any plans or permits that could lead to increased air or ground transportation traffic, noise, emissions, or contaminants that could erode the quality of life, property values, or environment of the surrounding area. We believe that the Act 250 permit should be rejected and that the master plan should be clear that no further development, including lights or additional buildings, should be permitted at the Airport. If an expanded airport is determined to be a necessary resource for Addison County, then a new, more appropriate site should be established for the facility.

State and local officials must make protecting and expanding quality, affordable housing, similar to much of the housing near the Airport, a priority. As members of the Selectboard know well, housing in Middlebury is already in short supply and unaffordable for many residents. East Middlebury and the surrounding area is one of the few places in town where middle and working class families can afford to live. While much of the housing has been built after the existence of the Airport, the Village center pre-dates the Airport by more than 150 years. Newer housing was built and purchased with the understanding that activity at the Airport would not increase. For many people, the long-standing housing shortage did not afford them the

opportunity to choose not to live near the Airport. On many days, noise from airplanes is noticeable and annoying, interrupting conversations, family gatherings, and work meetings. With more development at the Airport, noise and other impacts would certainly increase, which would deteriorate the quality and value of area housing and have a negative impact on the Town population and grand list.

The Airport lies directly over the aquifer recharge area for both the Town and Village water supplies. A community's water supply is one of its most valuable public assets and should be protected above almost all else. When a community's water supply is contaminated, the health, environmental, and economic impacts are devastating. The two Act 250 development permit applications appear to substantially increase the allowable build-out and impervious surface area at the Airport, increasing potential runoff of toxic fuels and chemicals, directly proximate to wetlands and the community's water supply. This activity is in addition to the current pesticide use around the fenced perimeter of the Airport and the recent clear-cutting of trees at the north end of the Airport. While related water-source and environmental permits have apparently been secured, we believe the potential cost of a contaminated local water supply is far too great to justify any further development on this site.

While Vermont airport expansion has been promoted to generate economic activity and benefits, the Middlebury Airport houses only two businesses and minimal business activity. The primary users appear to be private individuals, most of whom are not Middlebury residents, who use the facility for personal use. A recent analysis calculated local property tax revenue generated from the airport facilities at less than \$20,000, whereas the surrounding residential housing generates significant local property tax revenue for the Town and local schools. While the facility is occasionally used for public purposes, such as the one-time distribution of food during the pandemic, it very rarely offers a general public benefit to area residents.

There appears to be little compelling state or local interest for supporting Airport development. The small amount of tax and lease revenue generated from current or potential activity does not cover the cost of the airport operations, planning, and community impact. As a public asset, the Middlebury Airport appears to have minimal public purpose. There are many more pressing state and local projects that are more worthy of public funding and support.

Both the master planning and development permitting work appear to be based on consultant-driven, cookie-cutter work that is not community-specific. The airport use data appears to be based on the assumption that the development permits will be approved and increase use at the Airport and therefore further justify more development. The Master Plan makes no case for any current or future public purpose for the Airport, nor does it assess any impact on the neighboring community and residents. Both processes seem to be based on the

premise that generic airport development is inherently both desirable and beneficial, without making a case for either. We acknowledge that the permitting and planning work for the Airport are required under [2018 Act 108](#) and [2019 Act 78](#), however, we believe such planning should not result in an expansion of this and every airport, and that a more critical and cost-benefit approach to planning is appropriate and necessary.

The Airport is located on a gorgeous piece of property that, because of its proximity to the mountains, wetlands, town aquifer, and a village center, would not likely be developed as an airport today. If it is deemed a necessary facility, a more appropriate site for a county airport could be found, and the current site could be used for additional affordable housing with a community park to protect the aquifer. We look forward to discussing these matters with you further and being involved in a more holistic approach to transportation and community planning.

Sincerely,

Lindsey Fuentes-George, Middlebury Selectboard Vice Chair

Ruth Hardy, State Senator - Addison District

Farhad Khan, Middlebury Selectboard Member

Amy Sheldon, State Representative - Middlebury

cc: Middlebury Selectboard Members

Michele Boomhower, Agency of Transportation

John Flowers, Addison Independent

Connie Houston, District 9 Act 250 Commissioner

Al Karnatz, District 9 Act 250 Commissioner

Kathleen Ramsay, Middlebury Town Manager

Mike Winslow, ACRPC Transportation Planner