

StuNews Editorial 9-7-20

Act Now - County Supervisors to Approve General Aviation Facility Operator Leases on September 15

Our final opportunity to ensure that community protections are included in John Wayne Airport's (JWA) General Aviation Improvement Program comes on September 15. That's the day the Orange County Board of Supervisors will review and likely approve leases with the private companies, known as fixed base operators (FBOs), that will build and then operate the airport's new general aviation facilities for the next 35 years. We need to once again remind the Board members that their decisions will have a direct effect on our quality of life for decades to come.

Newport Beach has led a protracted fight to prevent this County project from increasing the presence of general aviation jets and private jet traffic at JWA. To date, our community's collective voice has led to the elimination of an additional, full-service FBO to serve the private jet community as well as land use and lease restrictions that ensure that the JWA preserves the majority of space available for smaller and quieter general aviation aircraft.

And now that the drafts of the County-FBO negotiated leases are publicly available, we see that the County heard our repeated requests to prohibit commercial airlines from operating out of FBO facilities. JetSuiteX should have never been allowed to operate in the general aviation area of the airport and we are pleased to see language included in the draft leases that ensures the County will change that practice effective January 1.

We are very concerned, however, that the draft leases do not include the other provisions we have repeatedly asked County officials to include. Those provisions include:

1. Eliminate the ability of any lessee to construct and operate a General Aviation Facility (GAF). This is a space used for processing international passengers.
2. Restrict the operational hours of the FBOs to match the hours of the commercial curfew at John Wayne Airport.
3. Require any future modifications to the terms pertaining to commercial use of an FBO, prohibiting a GAF, preserving the majority of the space for small general aviation, and restricting the FBOs' operating hours to go before the Board of Supervisors for review and approval, after reasonable public notice.

These are reasonable requests that will provide important protections to our community and others. Please ask the Board to add these three provisions to the final lease agreements.

The FBOs have all offered to work with us, but ultimately it is the County's decision as to what is done at the airport and included in these lease agreements. We urge you to call or email (714-834-3100 or response@ocgov.com) the Board or to be present on September 15 at 9:30 a.m. Remind them of the tens of thousands of lives and property values impacted by JWA operations and ask them to include the above provisions in the final lease agreements.

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