

Granite Shoals Airstrip

Report on current state of the airstrip, including excerpt from City Council meeting minutes from February 9, 2016 Workshop on Airstrip issues.

“9. SPECIAL WORKSHOP

Workshop to discuss the Granite Shoals, Texas airstrip, located in the Mystic Castle Section of the Sherwood Shores Subdivision. Property owners near airport have been invited to this workshop discussion.

- Background: History and legal status of the airstrip, title search / deed information, zoning, comprehensive plan, FAA classification
- Current Situation: airstrip physical dimensions and conditions, airstrip amenities, number of hangers / aircraft ‘based’ at airport, activity (landing/take-offs) logs, Costs for maintenance/insurance/utilities, revenue issues, status of Airport Advisory Committee.
- Looking Ahead: planning for best use for property in the future

Mayor Brugger disseminated a page of his notes, and requested that the discussion during the workshop be limited to six items:

1. The Airport History.
2. The Airport’s legal status, including title and deed information, zoning, comprehensive plan and FAA classification.
3. The Airport’s current situation – take-off and landing activity, physical dimensions and runway conditions, number of private hangers adjacent to the airport.
4. The Airport’s operating costs.
5. Requirements and costs to upgrade the airport.
6. Alternate uses of the property.

Mayor Brugger led the discussion of these items. There were numerous members of the public who submitted comment cards and/or spoke, most of them were property owners in the area, or pilots, or both:

1. Ashton Brunner, Sunrise Beach Air Field, Sunrise Beach, TX (also: *Fly Texas*)
2. Bonnie Kalodimos, 1404 Mystic, Granite Shoals, TX
3. Doug Scarbrough, 308 Belaire Circle / Scarborough Ranch, Granite Shoals, TX
4. Terry Scott, 809 N. Shorewood, Granite Shoals, TX
5. Roger Scarborough, Granite Shoals, TX
6. James Tenny, 100 Burnett Ranch Rd., Wimberley, TX 78676 (also: *Fly Texas*)
7. Gerald and Joyce Atchley, 1104 North Mystic Drive, Granite Shoals, TX
8. Jimmy Fermin, 1409 Green Forest, Granite Shoals, TX 78654
9. Nancy Sylvester, Granite Shoals, TX
10. Gene Lyng (in person) and son Stephen Lyng (submitted written remarks for the record)
11. Anita and Bill Harris, Mystic Drive, Granite Shoals, TX
12. Sandra Buschorn, 219 Mallard Point, Granite Shoals, TX

13. David Dittmar, Granite Shoals, TX

14. Mike Gardner, 902 Mystic Drive, Granite Shoals, TX 78654

As part of the effort to conduct the city's business with utmost transparency, a Notice was sent to all the property owners listed at the Burnet Central Appraisal District living adjacent to the airstrip, inviting them to come and participate in tonight's workshop discussion of the city airstrip.

Mayor Brugger read some history of the airstrip from a recent article about the 'History of Granite Shoals' which was recently printed in the Highland Lakes Weekly, authored by John Hallowell. The airstrip was probably built in the very early sixties, as the builders of Sherwood Shores subdivision expanded eastward after the purchase of the Ebeling Ranch. The City incorporated in 1966. The City took ownership of the airstrip in 1973.

Mayor Brugger recognized City Attorney Brad Young to discuss items #1 and #2. City Attorney Young had submitted his findings related to the history of the airstrip and the current legal status of the airstrip and this information was included in the agenda packets for tonight's meeting and was posted on the city's website.

At the council's request, staff obtained a title search for the airstrip property and reviewed the documents that the title company obtained from the real property records.

The airstrip was a part of the original Sherwood Shores subdivision. When the City obtained the airstrip in 1973 as part of the Sherwood Shores settlement, it obtained the property free of any relevant restrictions or encumbrances.

When the City accepted the conveyance of the airstrip in 1973 as part of Resolution No. 78 (along with the rest of the Sherwood Shores property), it dedicated the airstrip "for use as a part of the park system." This means that the city can continue use of airstrip as airstrip, or for Park system purposes, but could not use for any other city use (e.g., build a new water plant or Fire Hall). The property also cannot be sold unless the voters approve the sale of the airstrip at a Special Election.

The last update of the 'Airport Ordinance' is dated 2010.

The comprehensive plan for the City of Granite Shoals (circa 2010) recommends that there be an Airport Advisory Committee established to research best options to expand and make optimal use of the airport; and to apply for grants to fund such projects. This Airport Committee was established and the late Robert Sylvester served for many years as the Chair, and often acted as an airstrip manager. Mr. Sylvester donated many hours of time mowing and performing other volunteer service to maintain the airstrip. In the last years, the city has 'taken back' the responsibilities that Mr. Sylvester once held. Also, in the last year, the city has re-located the airstrip lights electric box to a city-owned site and so the Sylvester family is relieved of the bother of hosting this equipment on their property.

According to Mr. Roger Scarborough, a member of the Airport Advisory Committee during the years 2009-2011, the Airport Advisory Committee attempted to make recommendations for the expansion of the airport, but these recommendations did not make it into the final version of the 2010 Comprehensive Plan.

Assistant City Manager Peggy Smith was recognized to discuss FAA classification as well as 3.) Airport current situation.

Currently the FAA classifies the airstrip as a turf/dirt airstrip, publicly owned but 'restricted', meaning it is not open for use by the general public. It is classified as 'private/restricted'. It is 2,000 feet long and 300 feet wide. It is 'land locked' by private property owners on both ends. The FAA lists City Manager Ken Nickel as the contact/airport manager to be contacted by those desiring to use the airstrip. Due to the small size, the airstrip is not eligible for any federal grants for expansion or improvement. The airstrip has no fuel available, and from time-to-time deer are found on the airstrip. The airstrip is zoned ARPT – Airport. There are obstacles (trees) at the approach which are on privately owned land. Due to the small size the airstrip is almost solely used by pilots with 'ultra-light' planes. Although there are some runway lights, most activity at airstrip is conducted in daylight, for safety. The runway lights are available for dawn or twilight landings.

The Granite Shoals airstrip is named 32TE. Mr. James Tinney submitted a page of statistics regarding the airstrip. (see Exhibit A to these meeting minutes). It is generally agreed that the airstrip had approximately 71 days of use in 2015. Of the four hangers at the airstrip, two are involved with 'Fly Texas' business. The Fly Texas hanger(s) house the 'log book'. It is possible that more flights landed or took off, when the Fly Texas hanger(s) were not open to provide access to the book. There is no airport operator on site or any representatives of the city.

Mr. Ashton Brunner and Mr. James Tenny spoke related to the current situation of the airport. At this time, their business, Fly Texas, works out of two of the hangers at the airstrip. Their flight school is based in Smithville and Luling.

The city doesn't own the lots adjacent to the airstrip, so the city makes no money from hanger leases, landing fees, or anything else. The estimated cost to operate the airstrip is approximately \$10,000 per year. Almost \$1,000 of this is for 'Aviation Liability' insurance that the city maintains through Texas Municipal League Intergovernmental Risk Pool. City Manager Nickel explained that there was a 'one-time' cost of \$3,000 to move the electric box in 2015, for a total of \$13,000 for last year. The city pays costs of maintaining (mowing) the airstrip, as well as costs of replacing the windsock, as needed, and providing police patrol of the area. The airstrip has been a favorite target of vandals riding 'four-wheelers' and doing 'donuts' on the airstrip. When vandalism of this type happens, the city repairs the airstrip. It was noted that the airport has not 'developed' as have other, airstrips with larger area which are capable of growing. It was also noted that the costs listed tonight are actual expenditures/costs. The figures do not incorporate the 'opportunity costs' being lost by not re-purposing this property to another/higher use.

Peggy Smith provided a poster board visual aid depicting a diagram/map of the airstrip area with a list of the property owners.

Item #5, expansion of the airport options and costs was not discussed in depth, as it is not known what kind of improvements could be made without grant assistance. This is also not a budgeted item for 2015-2016.

Last, the discussion turned to item #6, options for alternate use of the airport. Mayor Brugger explained that during a Special City Council meeting last summer to discuss a possible park grant opportunity, the City Council was informed that the youth of the community desire playing fields for soccer, baseball, softball and other organized play. The discussion of the need for soccer fields is what prompted the idea of possibly re-purposing the airstrip for use as soccer fields.

The decision as to what to do with the airstrip is not made at this time, it is not going to be made this budget year, as the airstrip is not a budget priority. The Council's top priorities include safety, water system and the improvements of the public road infrastructure.

There was an extended discussion of the pros and cons of possibly changing the use of the airstrip from being an airstrip to being soccer fields.

Some 'pros':

- 1.) In 2009, the City Annexed the Kingswood area on the East side. This section of the city is underserved regarding off-water parks. This airstrip area would be accessible for those new residents. There is no park on the East side which could be easily 'leveled' enough to build a soccer field on.
- 2.) The city has 19 public parks, and although there are many amenities for boat ramps, picnicking, Hike and Bike trail, etc., there are no playing fields for basketball, baseball, softball or soccer. A 'practice' goal has been set up on the Quarry Park (City Hall campus) for some who wish to practice soccer, but it is an informal, small practice field.
- 3.) The airstrip has not developed. It is too small to attract interest, it is landlocked by private property and there is no business being generated from the airstrip, no revenue from hanger space or hanger leases.
- 4.) There has not been an Airport Advisory Committee active in the last four years. There is an active Parks Committee which invests volunteer time on the city's parks.
- 5.) The airstrip is used by only a small group of hobbyists, mostly flying ultra-light planes, so it is very specialized and would be difficult to 'market' due to lack of amenities such as fuel.
- 6.) The airstrip is not being 'managed' as the rest of the city facilities are managed, records are kept in a haphazard way, and the City Manager is not consulted by those who wish to use the airstrip.
- 7.) At least half of the students in soccer leagues in Marble Falls actually live in Granite Shoals.
- 8.) Having an interior park, not located off the busy highway or up at City Hall, provides more of an opportunity for the youth of the city to be able to ride their bicycles to the site.
- 9.) Other city parks which have restroom facilities (such as Veterans Park) do not have the space to have a soccer field big enough to use for games, other than young youth leagues, or practice fields.

10.) The airstrip is classified as park property.

‘Cons’ would include:

1.) Giving up the airport would mean giving up a unique asset. Granite Shoals has an airstrip and Marble Falls does not. Once converted to park with soccer fields, it could never be changed back to an airstrip.

2.) The ultra-light planes and glider type planes, which are popular at the airstrip, are becoming more and more popular in general.

3.) There are opportunities to involve the youth of the city in the airstrip, and provide them with activities such as kite flying, drone flying, etc. This would use the property as both airstrip and youth recreation facility.

4.) The property owners adjacent to the airstrip often purchased their property specifically in order to build a hanger and live near airstrip.

5.) The city converting the airstrip to soccer fields would increase traffic, litter and noise in this area, if the fields had lights; there would be glare.

6.) There are differences of opinion regarding the size of planes which can safely use the airstrip, although ultra-light planes are the majority, planes as large as a *Cessna 175 Skylark* can and has used the airstrip.

7.) The city has not made the best use of the airstrip as an airstrip. The city could advertise this amenity. The city could put up some ‘tie-downs’, especially ‘tie-downs’ with simple shade covers at the airport and increase interest/use. Some of the neighboring property owners could be tapped to do some volunteer mowing at the airstrip; as Mr. Sylvester used to do. If the city would invest in building and renting hangers, the airstrip would be able to contribute revenue to the city.

8.) The airstrip is not completely level; there are dips and bumps. These would not be easily leveled to a smooth enough surface for safe soccer play.

9.) The airstrip, if converted to soccer fields, would still present maintenance costs and mowing costs as a park, it would still require police protection and would still require some sort of insurance coverage, as all city facilities do.

10.) The City Hall complex sits on 130 acres of property, many of those acres planned for Quarry Park. This location would be a logical site for soccer fields. The land next to the Highland Lakes Elementary school would also serve well for playing fields, due to proximity to the school.

There was consensus of all present that safety of the citizens and visitors is the priority, no matter what the eventual outcome of this matter.

City Secretary Simpson was asked to read a statement from Mr. Lyng into the record:
"To the Granite Shoals City Council:

My name is Stephen Lyng and I wish to make a statement about the recent proposal to close the Granite Shoals Municipal Airport and repurpose the property for use as public soccer fields. My interest in this proposal derives from my ownership of property adjoining the airstrip, which I purchased about three years ago with the intention of building an airplane hangar and residential quarters on the property. I selected a building contractor and was preparing to break ground on the project this past November when I learned of the proposal to close the airport. Obviously, this proposal is of great concern to me since I will not be able to use the property as I initially intended if the airport is closed.

I will begin by sharing some information about myself. I am a 65 year old college professor who has been a pilot for 50 years. I teach at Carthage College in Kenosha Wisconsin and I have just started a phased retirement from the College. My wife and I were both raised in Texas and we would like to retire there. It has been a long-standing dream of mine to live in a "hangar house" on a small airport, so I conducted a search several years ago of airport property for sale in the Texas hill country and we eventually found and purchased two lots on Granite Shoals Municipal Airport.

My opposition to the proposal to close the airport is based on several considerations. First, closing the airport will deprive airport property owners like myself the opportunity to use our property for aviation purposes, which is presumably the main reason why anyone would purchase airport property. Although I have made a significant investment of time, energy, and money in this project so far, I will be forced to abandon my plans to build on the property if the airport is closed. While it is possible that I can find an alternative site at some other airport in the area, the value of my Granite Shoals property will likely decline if it ends up adjoining a public soccer facility instead of an airstrip. Thus, if the proposed change goes forward, property owners like myself may reasonably expect to be compensated for the diminished market value of their property.

Second, I would like to make the Council aware of a recent real estate market trend that makes it financially advantageous for the City of Granite Shoals to keep the airport open. During my five year search for airport property in the area, I have spoken with several local real estate agents who have informed me that property of this sort has become very scarce in recent years. Small private-use airports that allow residential living on the field, such as Sunrise Beach, Lago Vista, and Spicewood, are now almost completely filled with few remaining parcels for sale. Consequently, Granite Shoals Airport is one of the only private-use airports in the area where unbuilt lots are still available. The "hangar house" idea is becoming more popular as baby boomer pilots, like myself, approach retirement and wish to incorporate flying into their retirement living arrangements. I believe this trend will produce several results if the airport remains open: land values on the airport will increase, more hangars and residential quarters will be built on this land, and property tax revenue from airport properties will subsequently grow. These developments will definitely NOT occur if the land is repurposed as soccer fields.

Finally, I would like to correct some factual errors I have discovered in the Minutes from an earlier City Council meeting at which the airport proposal was discussed. The Meeting Minutes from the October 13th, 2015 City Council Meeting include a reference to the suitability of the airport for different types of aircraft. According to the Minutes, the Assistant City Manager was told by an unnamed pilot that “the airstrip is not safe for a plane bigger than an ultralight airplane; that is the plane type that uses the airstrip” (p. 10). While it may be true that the airport is presently used by ultralight airplanes primarily, it is definitely NOT true that it is unsafe for larger aircraft. In a conversation I had with the previous Airport Manager before his passing, Mr. Robert Sylvester informed me that he operated a Cessna 182 at the airport for many years. This is a four passenger, high performance, single-engine airplane that is very similar to the airplane I own (a Cessna 180). Mr. Sylvester never indicated that he had any concerns about the safety of the airport for any single-engine airplane. Moreover, I am aware that larger aircraft from other airports in the area often use the Granite Shoals airport to practice takeoffs and landings. As an experienced pilot, I am confident in stating that the airport is completely safe for use by larger single-engine airplanes, the type that future property owners are mostly likely to own and fly.

For the reasons I have specified in this statement, I encourage the City Council to allow the Granite Shoals airport to continue operating as an active airport. As I have stated, I believe it is in the best interest of current and future airport property owners and the City of Granite Shoals as a whole to keep the airport open.

Thank you for your attention to my concerns.

Respectfully yours,

*Stephen Lyng, Ph.D
Professor of Sociology and Criminal Justice
Carthage College”*

Mayor Brugger stressed that this workshop was held due to the mission of City Council to be transparent. He re-iterated that this item is NOT on the list of City Council budget priorities for this year. The top priorities of City Council for this budget year include safety, water and roads. The on-going discussion and planning for road improvements will be given the attention of City Council at this time. There are no decisions made related to the future of the airstrip. This was an information exchange workshop. Mayor Brugger thanked all those who participated and provided input related to this issue.

As this was a workshop, no formal action took place.”