

January 27, 2007

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29439 Sayle Drive
Willoughby Hills, Oh. 44092

The Honorable Kenneth A. Lorenz
Mayor, City of Willoughby Hills
Willoughby Hills, Ohio 44094

Dear Mayor Lorenz:

In following up our telephone conversation I am pleased to offer this synopsis of the Cuyahoga County Airport expansion issue, including a pledge made in the 1980's by the Cuyahoga County Commissioners never to expand the airport.

In the decade of the 1980's I was the administrative assistant to Cuyahoga County Commissioner Virgil E. Brown and in that capacity was privy to various policy and program initiatives, including the issue of county airport expansion.

There was a master plan for the Cuyahoga County Airport developed in the 1950's that called for major expansion in the future, so much so, that the county airport was to in time supersede Hopkins International Airport, which in the 1950's was already "hemmed in" by abutting Cleveland neighborhoods. Eastern portions of Cuyahoga County and bordering Lake County were still significantly undeveloped, therefore, such a master plan theoretically made some sense in the 1950's.

Departmental strategies for expansion developed over the years were put before the Cuyahoga County Commissioners in the mid 1980's. However, in the 30 years since the master plan for the county airport was conceived there had been significant growth and development in Eastern Cuyahoga County and western Lake County, as well. When plans for expansion in the 1980's became public, officials in Richmond Heights and surrounding communities, as well as organized citizens groups vigorously opposed any expansion of the Cuyahoga County Airport. A number of public meetings were held and the Cuyahoga County Commissioners subsequently decided that they would not expand the county airport.

I remember very specifically that my Commissioner, Virgil E. Brown, said he was in office as a representative of the people and that it was the wish of the people that there be no airport expansion.

Affected suburban officials and members of the citizens groups remained skeptical and asked how they could be sure that the Commissioners would keep their word in coming years, or when administrations changed in the future.

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The Cuyahoga County Commissioners replied that they would keep their word with deeds. They stated they would surround the county airport with economic development, thereby physically hemming in the airport to assure no physical expansion and at the same time spurring economic development and jobs in the surrounding communities.

The result is the commercial/industrial park currently surrounding the airport-- all built since the mid-1980's. It is a visible symbol of that pledge not to expand the airport.

The current discussions regarding potential expansion of the airport seem to be emanating from various relevant departments whose task is to fulfill the missions for which they were created (viz. the county airport itself, the county economic development department, the county planning commission, etc.) The key to any policy decisions in the future rest with the Cuyahoga County Commissioners themselves. It appears from newspaper accounts thus far that they are not near any key policy decisions yet and appear to be open to community input.

Therefore, it is appropriate to first and foremost, remind them of the pledge made to the people by the Cuyahoga County Commissioners in the 1980's not to expand the Cuyahoga County Airport. Even though several county administrations have passed in the more than 20 years since that pledge was made and there may not be an immediate historical memory in the current board, it is certainly appropriate to cite the policy promise that was made. One of the members of the current board—if memory serves me—Commissioner Timothy Hagan—was a member of that earlier board in the 1980's.

The current developing issue of expansion of the Cuyahoga County Airport, is presenting a valuable opportunity for the Lake County and Cuyahoga County Commissioners, together with mayors of affected communities and our Congressional delegation to address in a more comprehensive, cost saving and mutually beneficial manner the issues of several regional airports and how best to resolve their status for the overall betterment of our communities.

I am hopeful that the above information is valuable to you as you address the important issues facing Willoughby Hills and its neighboring communities.

Respectfully yours,

Al Ruksenas