



Portage County Board of Commissioners  
Meeting Minutes

449 South Meridian Street  
Ravenna, OH 44266  
<http://www.co.portage.oh.us>

Amy Hutchinson, Clerk  
330-297-3600

Tuesday, November 29, 2022

9:00 AM

Commissioners' Board Room

The following meeting minutes are summarized. Audio recordings and backup material are available in accordance with the Commissioners' Agenda and Audio Recording Retention Schedule.  
Please contact the Commissioners' Office for specific details.

The Portage County Board of Commissioners' meeting came to order in the Commissioners' Boardroom located at 449 South Meridian Street, Ravenna, Ohio, with the following members present:

Attendee Name	Title	Status
Sabrina Christian-Bennett	President	Present
Anthony J. Badalamenti	Vice President	Present
Vicki A. Kline	Board Member	Present

Also attending throughout the day were County Administrator Michelle Crombie and Commissioner-Elect Mike Tinlin

**AVIATION MANAGEMENT CONSULTING GROUP (AMCG)**

Present: David Benner and Scotty Malta

Commissioner Christian-Bennett noted for the record that the Board will not be going into Executive Session to discuss the Airport.

Mr. Benner explained I've been with the company now for 15 years, so I'll be managing the process from our end. After finishing my master's degree, I came to AMCG and have been working there ever since. We work all across the country and we are aviation management consultants, so this is right in our wheelhouse.

As a company, we've managed airports on a short-term basis, we've operated airports, managed Fixed Base Operator (FBO), we're pilots and we own a single-engine aircraft that we use in the course of our business.

With me today is Scotty Malta, who has recently joined the team and has over 20 years of managing and working on airports. He will be instrumental in understanding the ins and outs and details of the airports, especially as we go out there tomorrow. The remainder of the team is based out of Denver, Doug is down in Florida and Bob is in California. Everyone will be helping, but Scott and I will kind of be the face of AMCG from your perspective.

Currently, we are focused on the assessment and the options analysis. We are looking at it from both an airport perspective and an FBO perspective. Tomorrow, we'll get into the details of the airport and the FBO from an operational management perspective. We will discuss all

the different details of management (from a governance perspective), such as the financial performance facility and development, and assess the airport. There is a huge compliance piece to that from an FAA standpoint. We have the ODOT report provided by Mr. Lucas and we'll be going deeper in terms of reviewing agreements. So that's the assessment portion of the project and the first piece, then we move into the second aspect.

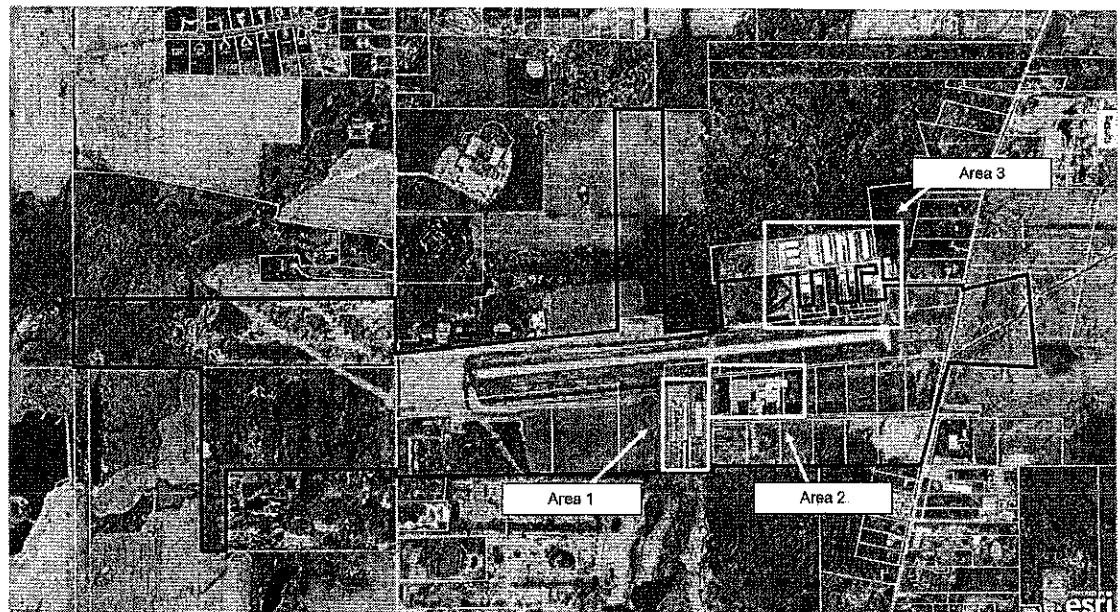
Looking at things from an options perspective, we are looking at different options in terms of how the airport is governed and how it's managed (from an FBO perspective too), so understanding what's going on today and how that functions from a county perspective, the management contract for airport management, the FBO agreement, and different options such as what are the pros and cons from a county perspective and a consumer perspective. Then we will get to that selected option of doing the financial impact, obviously, from a county perspective, so that's where we get into the heavy financial side of things.

Some very general background information, we've been working with JoAnn and Michelle, and Mr. Lucas from the authority. To date, we've received information on past rents, lease agreements, management contracts, financial statements, and operational items. We've also received pictures and the ODOT reports and we've begun reviewing some information. Sometimes there's limited information and minimum standards, rules, and bylaws of the authority and we've reviewed all of that information.

We will be talking about the airport in three key areas: the assessment piece - we'll be looking at the runway, the taxiway, the lighting, and all the different operational aspects. Area one is the T hangars, area two, is the FBO, and area three, is where we have a mix of property with some conventional on-airport hangars, there are some other hangars with what looks like access so, from an FAA standpoint, that's through the fence access that we need to get to the bottom of. That is kind of a focus from an FAA standpoint, so we want to understand all of those details, what are the uses and how is it addressed in key area three.

## Airport Map

- ✈ Area 1
- ✈ Area 2
- ✈ Area 3



AMCG

Commissioner Badalamenti mentioned area three (property map) looks like a snaggletooth, is all the area in black County owned property? Mr. Benner indicated the black area is the airport property line. When we're doing an assessment and we're looking at future options, we want to understand what the history is, where things came from, and how we got to this point. We don't walk in the door with a preconceived definition of what we're going to tell you to do. It is our process and reputation to understand situations and what is going on so that we can recommend the best path forward. At this stage of the game, it's more of an information-gathering process so we can begin to understand what's going on at the airport.

Mr. Benner explained that we are interested in how the county historically has been involved with the authority - that's a key question, what is the involvement historically since the authority was started years ago, what are the successes and that history related to the authority, how the airport is viewed within the community, how it's used, who uses it, and what the airport excels at, from an authority standpoint and an FBO standpoint, and what are the long term goals from the county perspective. We are meeting Mr. Bonner tomorrow so we'll understand different perspectives within here, and then we can start to kind of piece everything together.

Additional questions include what is the purpose of the airport, and how it fits in with things that are going on within the county. I know, during our first meeting, there was some potential discussion of development - how does that fit in, what is your long-term vision from a Commissioner standpoint of the airport? We'll work through the assessment, and then into the options analysis, then more towards the business plan, what are some of those strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats. This is the basis of what we're doing tomorrow by going out to the airport and meeting with the authority and talking to Mr. Lucas and Mr. Bonner.

After that happens, Scotty and I will sit down and start to identify what are the assessment pieces that we need to identify to help take the airport to the next level and help the county move the airport forward. The next step would be the options analysis, which then leads into some of those future conversations. At this point, this is kind of the final piece in gathering information, it's an ongoing process, but this puts the end to the information gathering and then we take all of the conversations and go from there.

Commissioner Christian-Bennett asked about the timeline for completion of the project and Mr. Benner stated from a scope and proposal standpoint we said 16 weeks from the site visit, I'm hoping to go quicker than that for the assessment and options analysis and then the business plan will follow.

So we will coordinate with Michelle as we go along in terms of additional questions, but also as we finish the assessments, we will get that out to you and how we review it. We want to make sure what we're providing is factually and correct, so we like to have a draft process where we provide it for your review. Some opinions are professional opinions, but from a factual standpoint, we want to ensure we have it right.

Commissioner Badalamenti noted there's a tremendous amount of potential and Portage County is in a growth cycle that is just awesome. Geis has started a million-square-foot building, right up the road by the Turnpike and they are building a proposed 7 million-square-foot building there and the Turnpike is something we've never utilized in Portage County and it goes straight across the country, both ways. To be able to look at that and the potential for that, the people that are talking to the airport or talking within the county are looking at how can we extend that and can we make the airport larger so we bring bigger aircraft in to be able to do business. Is there a possibility of putting meeting rooms out there so you could fly in and do business and people can meet you there and what that would look like. Everybody I've talked to about the airport says profitability is one of those things – good luck with that, but can we break even, what's the potential of the airport? I think one of the first things is the possibility of building hangars there so we can bring money in because the more people see that the County Commissioners are interested in making this a viable airport, the more likely people are going to say - hey, we'd like to have our airplane there. My whole interest is what we have and I think we have the bones of a good product sitting out there. Is there potential for a build-on for businesses to come in and what are the first steps that we as Commissioners have to do? How do we continue to build on this and the liabilities and things that we have? I just look and there are so many things that we could do and then there are always those questions and I have the same question because I hadn't seen anybody draw a black line around the property. The only thing that I've seen that we've done as a County since the '90s when we gave it to the Airport Authority is that when you run out of money, you go to the County asking for more, so you can survive until the next project and that's the only part I can think of that the County's had is providing additional funding.

Commissioner Christian-Bennett noted most counties that don't own their airport provide funding for them each year because it's an economic driver for the County and many don't know that having an airport helps us score better when receiving funding for other programs.

Having the airport close down is not an option for the County because we are responsible for the return of a lot of money. The airport does the best with what they have, but it's just not enough.

Commissioner Christian-Bennett shared another option that was discussed was having a car rental available because we are centrally located and you can be at any part of the county from there within 25 to 30 minutes. We see the potential the airport has; we just need to have a long-term vision because it's not going to happen overnight.

Commissioner Kline pointed out that when I said they're not going to be paying it back, I certainly didn't mean to criticize the airport because I think they've got a tremendous amount of potential. This Board is behind the airport by finding out where we are, where we need to go, and like Commissioner Badalamenti said, the steps we need to take. It's a good time to act because, in the past, the Commissioners started getting involved and the neighbors, the people that live there, they would fight against extending the runway and I guess it was just too much for the current Board of Commissioners. The time to act is now we have to do something. Commissioner Christian-Bennett noted the biggest complaint you'll hear is the potential of expanding the runway. We have land to expand that runway and those are the neighbors that do not want that expansion, but the land was purchased before anyone built houses.

Commissioner Christian-Bennett mentioned UH Portage is going to start transporting next week and they changed their helicopter hub from Geauga County and moved it to Portage. It's happening due to the instruments that we have to allow them on a cloudy day to still be able to fly.

Mr. Benner explained that from an airport standpoint, we're aviation and airport proponents so we're not here to say we want to help the county help the airport, maximize its potential by helping identify those things that are going to move it forward. There are lots of things that can be done, but what's going to have the biggest impact the fastest? As we go through and rank some of these assessment pieces, there's going to be that side to it - these are all 50 things that would be great, but what's feasible now, and what can we do? Commissioner Christian-Bennett would like to see it done in phases, we realize it's not going to happen immediately, what's our five-year plan and what's our immediate plan to try to get the airport to become self-sufficient? We have plenty of room to build hangars and there's a desperate need for storage of the planes. There's a lot of potential that the current airport does not have because it's been given away over the years.

Mr. Benner indicated there have been a lot of grants that have come, which is great so that provides some of those funding bases, which is helpful. There's the match and how that work, then you mentioned self-sustainability and that's one of the sponsor's assurances that come along with that money and it's to be as self-sustaining as possible given the circumstances that exist. Small general aviation airports aren't the most self-sustaining entities across the country and some of the feedback you're getting is pretty accurate from an overall industry perspective.

Commissioner Christian-Bennett mentioned the State General Assembly did an airport study that's probably 10 years old and they studied all the airports in the state. One of the things that they said about Portage County is that it's very underutilized. Mr. Benner noted it appears that you have an airport that's ready to transition into a much more prominent piece within the field, and Commissioner Badalamenti pointed out that we have the people who are willing to start that move.

Mr. Benner replied the County has the property available and that's not even talking about any runway extensions.

Commissioner Christian-Bennett stated as far as the FBO, they just had a nice lease agreement contract with UH Portage and it's for their systems, the entire UH to be housed there. Starting next week, they will have a helicopter and an ambulance there, and they're going to have people out there 24/7.

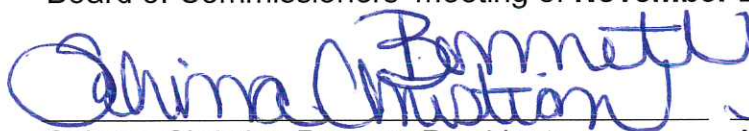
Mr. Malta asked if they could spend a few minutes either on the phone or personally with each Commissioner to ask questions either today or tomorrow and Commissioner Badalamenti stated he's available whenever and Michelle will be our conduit so she'll be there when you talk to all three of us so she can make sure we're all receiving the same information and talking about the same things.

**Motion:** by Commissioner Christian-Bennett, seconded by Commissioner Kline that the Board adjourns the Meeting on **Tuesday, November 29, 2022, at 9:34 AM.**

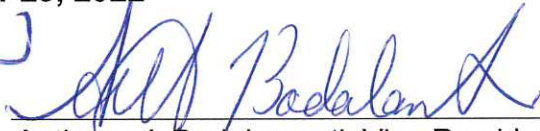
All in Favor: Commissioner Christian-Bennett, Yea; Commissioner Kline, Yea; Commissioner Badalamenti, Yea;

**Motion Carries**

We do hereby certify that the foregoing is a true and correct record of the Portage County Board of Commissioners' meeting of **November 29, 2022**



Sabrina Christian-Bennett, President



Anthony J. Badalamenti, Vice President



Vicki A. Kline, Board Member



Amy Hutchinson, Clerk