
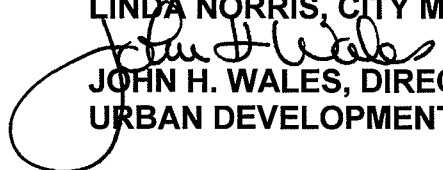


FOR COUNCIL MEETING OF: January 9, 2012
AGENDA ITEM NO: 4.3 (d)

TO:  MAYOR AND CITY COUNCIL
THROUGH: LINDA NORRIS, CITY MANAGER
FROM:  JOHN H. WALES, DIRECTOR
URBAN DEVELOPMENT DEPARTMENT
SUBJECT: OPPOSITION TO PLANNED CUTS IN FEDERAL FUNDING TO
FAA CONTRACT TOWERS

ISSUE:

Shall City Council authorize the Mayor to sign communications to the Federal Legislative delegation recommending opposition to planned cuts in federal funding to Federal Aviation Administration contract towers served exclusively by general aviation?

RECOMMENDATION:

Staff recommends the City Council authorize the Mayor to sign communications to Federal Legislative delegation recommending opposition to planned cuts in federal funding to Federal Aviation Administration (FAA) contract towers served exclusively by general aviation.

BACKGROUND:

Salem Municipal Airport has a contract air traffic control tower (tower). The primary purpose of the air traffic control system is to prevent a collision between aircraft operating in the system. In Salem, the air traffic control tower is focused on:

- Safety of the broad and unusual mix of air traffic (general aviation – single engine aircraft and larger corporate jets; military air traffic and pilot training; and air cargo traffic) and
- Safety of these same aircraft in navigating the complex runway and taxiway system.

The tower is also a unique asset for a general aviation airport in our region and makes Salem Municipal Airport more attractive to general aviation and other uses, including potential commercial service.

From 1977 to 1994, the air traffic control tower was an “FAA Tower”, funded and operated exclusively by the FAA. In 1994, the air traffic control tower became part of the FAA’s contract tower program. As a result of Salem’s participation in the FAA contract tower program, FAA pays a contractor an estimated \$500,000 on an annual basis to operate the tower. In Salem, the tower operates between 7 AM and 9 PM.

FAA Contract Tower Program

Following the strike by air traffic controllers in 1981, the FAA entered into sole-source contracts with various airport sponsors to re-open control towers that were closed as a result of the strike. The sole-source contracts were the beginning of a non-federal tower/FAA partnership program having FAA oversight – a pilot program and forerunner of the FAA Contract Tower Program (Program). The Program was inaugurated in 1994 when control towers were converted to contract services, rather than being operated by the FAA. Three companies provide this service. Towers in the Program follow the same procedures as their FAA counterparts: the same FAA national evaluation teams conduct full-facility evaluations at FAA and contract towers; and operational procedures and practices, training activity and record keeping, quality assurance activity, and administrative processes are thoroughly reviewed on the same recurring schedules in FAA and contract towers.

FACTS AND FINDINGS:

The American Association of Airport Executives has notified Salem that the Office of Management and Budget is recommending that the FAA eliminate funding to all FAA contract towers served exclusively by general aviation.

If the funding for this federal program is eliminated at any level (partial cut or entirely cut from the federal budget), the budgetary impact to Salem's Airport would be significant and it is likely that Council would have to determine whether to fill the funding gap, of as little as \$100,000 or as much as \$500,000, to reduce tower operation hours, or possibly cease operating the air traffic control tower at Salem Municipal Airport.

Staff drafted correspondence to Senator Wyden, Senator Merkley and Representative Schrader (Attachment A) and are seeking the Council's authorization for the Mayor to sign and submit the letter to Salem's Federal Legislative delegation.

Attachment A: Draft Correspondence Letter to Senator Wyden

Report Prepared by: Courtney Knox, Project Manager, City of Salem Urban Development Department
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DRAFT

January 10, 2012

Senator Wyden,

We understand that OMB, as part of the President's FY 2013 budget request, is recommending that the FAA eliminate funding to all FAA contract towers served exclusively by general aviation. This proposal would eliminate this critical safety program at half of the country's 248 FAA contract towers, including our tower.

By all measures, the FAA contract tower program has been one of the most cost-effective aviation safety programs at FAA for the past three decades. If these cuts become reality, it would have a devastating impact of air traffic safety at our airport. Our contract tower provides critical safety functions at our airport because of the mix of business jets, single engine aircraft, military operations, pilot training, and periodic commercial air service.

A few specifics about the Salem Airport (SLE):

- SLE is the airport serving the Capitol of Oregon, and third largest city in Oregon. EUG and PDX have FAA Control Towers.
- SLE is home to the Oregon Army National Guard - Army Aviation Support Facility, and is expected to have in excess of 5,000 operations next year.
- SLE is a Part 139 airport, with an FAA certificate that permits commercial air service operations.
- While SLE currently serves exclusively general aviation, SLE has had commercial air service as recently as July 2011 (Seaport) and previously in 2008 (Delta).
- The contract tower has been operating at SLE since 1994, and provides an elevated level of safety, familiar to aviators and a change would be detrimental to this condition.
- The geographic location of the airport is in a dense urban area, and is not isolated, thus creating a higher level of risk and the need for aircraft separation which is managed by the tower staff.
- SLE is located in the I-5 Corridor, a major airway for commercial operations above 10,000'.

On behalf of the Salem community and the flying public, I ask that you contact OMB and FAA to oppose cuts to this essential air traffic safety program. The federal government's budget constraints should NOT impact such a critical aviation safety initiative like the FAA contract tower program.

Thank you very much for your time and your immediate attention to this matter. We highly appreciate your advocacy for our position on this important issue. Should you have an interest in discussing this matter further, please contact this office. Hopefully, your staff can appraise this office of any developments.

Regards,

Anna M. Peterson, Mayor of Salem, Oregon