

Why does the City of Santa Monica want to close its airport?

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By [Randy W. Bright](#)

Among a long list of government overreach examples is the long battle the City of Santa Monica has waged against its own airport in an attempt to close it down for development, even though it is apparent the citizens of Santa Monica want the airport kept open.

In December of last year, the Federal Aviation Administration (FAA) held that because of federal funding, the airport must remain open at least until the end of August 2023. Staying true to form, the city will not take no for an answer, filing an appeal with the FAA to overturn its own ruling.

A few days ago, an article was posted with the L.A. Times regarding accusations by an aviation business and organization group saying that the city was “imposing illegal landing fees, diverting airport funds to non-aviation uses and setting unfair leasing policies to force out aeronautical tenants.”

The group has filed a complaint with the FAA alleging that the city has “pursued plans for years to make it increasingly difficult for aviation business, pilots and aircraft that was once home to Douglas Aircraft Co.”

The complaint contends that the city has violated FAA regulations, the terms of the 1948 agreement that transferred ownership of the airport to the city from the federal government, and terms of its agreements with the federal government regarding grants it received for airport improvements.

The complaints also accuse the city of imposing “excessive and unreasonable” landing fees, as well as other “impermissible charges for airport expenses and other inadequately documented costs”, and for improperly charging interest on loans, even charging interest extending six years before the loans were made.

According to the article in the *LA Times*, the city of Santa Monica refuses to give aviation business long-term leases, but has given long-term leases and lower rental rates to other business that were not aviation-related.

The City of Santa Monica began its efforts to close the airport in 2010 by banning Category C and D aircraft (which include business jets). The FAA ruled that they had no authority to impose the ban, so the City Council took them to court – all the way to the U.S. Court of Appeals for the District of Columbia – losing all the way. In 2011, the court ruled that they could not ban certain categories of aircraft.

The City Council then filed a lawsuit against the FAA in 2013, asking the court to give them free title to the airport so they could close it, claiming that the closure was necessary to respond to complaints by residents about noise. However, a survey done by the AOPA (Aircraft Owners and

Pilots Association, which has been involved with attempts to prevent the closure) indicated that most of the complaints came from people who were not Santa Monica residents and that 70 percent of those surveyed wanted the airport to remain open.

Studies have shown that the airport supports over 1,500 jobs and businesses and generates about \$250 million in economic activity each year. More than 275 aircraft are stationed at the 227 acre-airport.

I have not seen any real justification as to why the city government of Santa Monica is so determined to close, other than their contention that it is a noise problem, but this December 2015 post by Elizabeth A. Tennyson, the senior director of communications at AOPA, might explain it:

...many city residents support the airport and some have raised concerns that closing the field would lead to additional high-rise developments, bring more traffic problems to the already congested region. The protection zone around the airport currently prevents high-rise buildings from being constructed within about five miles of the airport.”

Another factor that could be placing the crosshairs on the airport is its location, only two miles from the Pacific Coast, making it a desirable location for development. The entire area is heavily developed and appears to be land-locked, so any large undeveloped land mass becomes a target for takeover. Airports are particularly counter to the current urban planning mentality of dense development for tax purposes, especially if the airport discourages high-rise development.

Airports are as vital to our nation’s security and economy as our roads and bridges. The Santa Monica Airport is a vital resource to the Los Angeles area, and since there are few airports within a thirty-mile radius of L.A.’s main airport, it is important for safety as well, serving as an alternative place for landing. It deserves protection, and it is almost unimaginable that the city government of Santa Monica would try to take it for development. There are ways for cities and their airports to productively coexist. Perhaps Santa Monica should think about that.



Randy W. Bright, AIA, NCARB, is an architect who specializes in church and church-related projects. You may contact him at 918-582-3972, rwbrightchurcharch@sbcglobal.net or www.churcharchitect.net.

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