



March 9, 2022

Members of the House Agriculture & Forestry Committee

I'm Bob Flint, Executive Director of Springfield Regional Development Corporation, the RDC that serves Southern Windsor County. I also serve as an appointed member of the Vermont Aviation Advisory Council and an ex-officio member of the Springfield Airport Commission. I'm speaking on behalf of SRDC and the RDC's of Vermont.

Any development in Vermont is challenging, even as the pandemic is hopefully receding, given the high costs of materials, the increasing financial gap between construction and appraised value, as well as the unpredictability of permits, including project timing.

Commercial development at state-owned airports is even more difficult as the uses of that property are limited by being recognized as a Federally- licensed airport. Any development, per FAA regulations, needs to be aviation-related – in other words, have a nexus to the functional use of the airport.

VTrans has been working on addressing some of the developmental challenges at their airports by undertaking a master planning process for a hanger site at each of their properties. I'll defer to the Aviation Division to speak more specifically about this project, but I believe all of the airports are at involved and are at various stages of progress. While a small step, having this work completed will hopefully help to stimulate hanger development.

But this is only one hanger site per airport. There are needs for more hangers as well as the potential for additional aviation-related commercial development, per the approved master plans at the state-owned facilities. Note that all commercial developments not only pay ground-lease revenue to the State of Vermont but also property taxes, which benefits the host municipality as well as the Education Fund.

The proposed language in H.610 would address one piece of this development challenge, by waiving the requirement of prime agricultural soil mitigation for qualifying projects at state-owned airports. This would help to reduce the permitting expense and time for such projects.

The reality is that any agricultural use of this property is impossible, since the real estate is located within a state-owned airport. The eligible commercial projects are also strictly defined, since they would have to qualify as a permitted use by the FAA.

Is this legislation a panacea that will lead to rapid development and growth at state-owned airports? It is not. But it would represent a positive piece of the puzzle in moving forward with advancing responsible, additive commercial projects that would enhance the resources at our state-owned airports as well as generate additional revenue for the State.

Thank you for your consideration of this legislation and thank you for your continued service to our great state!