

July 22, 2022

Dear Chair and Members of the Middlebury Select Board,

We write to express our concerns about the way the item 7 entitled “an update on the Airport Master Planning process” was presented at the July 12, 2022 Select Board meeting, and request the SB take some steps to ensure the record is accurate and complete with respect to the MP. In particular, we request the Select Board (“SB”) (i) clarify Nick Artim’s role, (ii) correct one misstatement about MANA’s position on the MP at this time, (iii) fill the vacancy on the Communications Task Force with a MANA selected nominee, and (iv) convene a special meeting to air the views of various constituents on the proposed airport master plan.

The agenda indicated that Nick Artim would be giving his portion of the update on the proposed master plan (“MP”) process, in his capacity as the Town’s representative to the Vermont Agency of Transportation’s Technical Advisory Committee, but his comments sounded much more like he was speaking on behalf of VTrans. He barely touched upon the status of the MP process, focusing instead on a description of the master plan, extolling the value of each proposed enhancement to the airport, and referring to unidentified persons who agreed with him in supporting the current master plan. In sum, his presentation failed to inform the public or Select Board about how the process was going. Our understanding is that the Middlebury Select Board (“SB”) appointed Nick for the sole purpose of serving as the Town’s representative on the TAC. However, the agenda indicated he was also reporting as liaison between MANA and the SB (an appointment we find nowhere in the record) and his presentation was neither focused on nor limited to the MP process or the TAC’s work. Moreover, the entire time allocated for this agenda item – with 3 speakers – was 10 minutes, and Nick spoke for 20 minutes, further calling into question his role generally and at this meeting.

➤ Hence, we request the SB clarify Nick Artim’s role.

Prem Presh was included on the agenda to present his view on the status of the MP process, in his capacity as a member of the Middlebury Airport Communications Task Group. He concluded his comments (at point 2:06 in the longer YouTube recording) with the statement: “I would like to clearly state that when we gathered this winter as a neighborhood association, we identified the major issues that concerned us, and they have all been addressed, to our satisfaction, in the master plan.” With all due respect to Prem, we (the undersigned) feel this statement was premature. Prem has been closely involved in the discussions with Nick Artim and VTrans and may well have reached the point that he is satisfied with the MP. However, he had not yet spoken with any of us, and we had not had a MANA meeting to consider the new information he may have gathered, prior to his making this statement. It does not reflect our views. That may have been Prem’s view, and we respect it, we just need the SB to know it does not represent the view of MANA as a group. We ask that the record reflect that MANA is not supporting the MP at this time, and will be filing a statement of its position during the public comment period. As Colleen Brown indicated during the citizen comment period at the outset of the meeting, MANA still has some unanswered questions, and thus concerns, about the MP (in its current form) and is in the process of doing its due diligence so it can put together a coherent statement of its position regarding the MP, to submit to VTrans, prior to the deadline for such comments.

➤ Thus, we would ask that the statement that MANA is satisfied with the MP as written, at this time, be stricken from the record.

On Wednesday morning (the morning just after the SB meeting), Prem emailed the MANA group to say he was resigning from MANA, he would no longer serve on the Communication Task Force, and did not want to be included in MANA email or in person discussions about the airport. We were saddened by this news. Prem has done exceptional work on behalf of East Middlebury residents in connection with the development and use of the airport, organized and named MANA, and worked tirelessly to build bridges among various constituencies in order to protect the rights and quality of life for those of us who live around the airport. However, since he has made clear he does not wish to continue in that role, and that communications Task Force is so important, we hope the SB will fill that vacancy swiftly.

➤ Therefore, we request that the SB fill the vacancy created by Prem’s resignation from the Communication Task Force and set a deadline for MANA to nominate that replacement.

Overall we found it troubling that the SB entertained Nick's advocacy for the substance of the MP, when the agenda item was limited to process, and that he did so in a tone that appeared aimed at garnering the SB's support for the content of the MP, and failed to describe any progress he had made in improving meaningful dialog between the SB and the residents who are most affected by the airport and the airport master plan. This is particularly problematic considering Colleen's preliminary and clear statement that MANA had not yet come to any final conclusions or position and MANA was relying on the SB considering only process that night. To clarify MANA's position on the record and, more importantly, to create a fuller expression of public opinion, we would ask that the SB set a special meeting in September to focus on the merits of the proposed MP. We understand that VTrans will schedule public hearings, as required by statute, but Brian Carpenter indicated at the June 14th meeting that he would convene a distinct SB meeting to do this and, especially after the potential confusion caused by the presentations at last week's meeting, we feel such a special meeting is essential.

- We therefore ask that the SB set a special meeting for public comments to be presented on the airport MP, shortly after the complete MP is published, and the SB consider those before taking a position on the MP.

Before closing, we want to share with you MANA's mission and our view for how to move forward. MANA is committed to work toward a win-win on the airport MP. We understand that there are some points on which what other airport constituencies want and what the neighbors would prefer are in conflict, but we also believe there are many points (such as the need for internal consistency and solid factual premises within the MP, and placement of new hangars) that we all agree on. MANA's goal is to try to find a middle ground in finalizing the airport MP: one in which the airport-related businesses can thrive, the pilots have the safety protocols they need, and the neighbors and neighborhood environment will suffer as little disruption as possible. In this approach, no one will get everything they want, but everyone's priorities can be met. VTrans has said there is room for negotiation, so we are hopeful that through open and honest dialog, with everyone acting in good faith, a win-win is still possible.

We ask that the Select Board take a balanced approach, giving as much weight to the quality of life of those who live near the airport, as it gives to the economic development potential of the airport, when it considers the merits of the proposed airport master plan.

Thank you for considering this.

Sincerely,

Eugene Roy
Jane Roy
Colleen Brown
Douglas Richards
Ross Conrad
Alice Eckles
Mike Davis
Marin Melchior
~~Paula Nath~~*
David Prescott
Andrew Sambrook
Andrea Sambrook
Judy Wiger-Groh

*On 7/29/22, 11:32 AM, "Paula Nath" <paulagnath@gmail.com> wrote:

Dear Kathleen,

Would you please remove my name from the 7/22/22 MANA letter sent to the Select Board.

Thank you Kathleen. I hope you are well and enjoying the summer.

Best Regards,

Paula Nath

Sent from my iPad