

**Re-envisioning Whiteman Airport
Community Advisory Committee
Minority Report
April 6, 2023**

In November 2020, an aircraft arriving at Whiteman Airport suffered an engine failure. The pilot attempting to reach the airport hit powerlines across Sutter Avenue, crashed into two parked cars and caught on fire. The pilot, the only person on board, was killed in the accident. No one on the ground was injured. Homes nearby were slightly damaged by the fire and the parked cars were destroyed. The aircraft came to rest approximately 150 feet North of the airport property. Employees from American Airports, the contracted management company for the airport, responded with emergency equipment. They were asked to depart the area by responding Los Angeles City Fire Department personnel. Immediately following the Accident, Monica Rodriquez, Councilwoman, Los Angeles City Council District Seven and Veronica Padilla-Campos, Executive Director of Pacoima Beautiful publicly demanded that Whiteman Airport be immediately closed. They cited the following reasons; safety, pollution, noise and the belief that the airport did not provide any benefit to the Pacoima community.

In response to this incident and public call for closure, Supervisor Sheila Kuehl, Los Angeles County Supervisory District 3, on December 8th, 2022, made a motion to the Los Angeles Board of Supervisors, which was passed unanimously.

In the preamble of the motion she noted, “Los Angeles County strives to operate and maintain smart, active, safe and sustainable transportation infrastructure. The county needs to work collaboratively with our local partners, residents, and stakeholders to ensure our infrastructure benefits the widest populations possible while not disproportionately burdening any individual community. “

She moved that the Board of Supervisors direct the Department of Public Works to take the following actions related to Whiteman Airport:

- “1. Engage local stakeholders, including but not limited to, Councilwoman Monica Rodriguez’s Office, community-based organizations such as Pacoima Beautiful, residents, businesses, and other government partners **to undertake a community driven master plan for Whiteman Airport that maintains the property’s primary function as an airport** (emphasis added) but provides for the creation of local jobs, community beneficial uses, and open space opportunities;
2. Conduct appropriate environmental studies to assess the airport’s potential environmental and health risks;
3. Create a Community Advisory Committee (CAC) to provide residents with opportunities for local input on airport operations; and
4. Develop emergency response protocol for both on-airport and off-airport

accidents that includes a streamlined approach for reimbursement for damages. The protocol shall include the support of mental health counseling when appropriate.”

The Department of Public Works formed a Community Advisory Committee originally comprised of 22 members. Two Representatives from Los Angeles County Supervisor District 3, two from Los Angeles City Council Office 7 (Monica Rodriguez’s District Director), four from Pacoima Beautiful (Veronica Padilla-Campos), and 13 additional members selected by Monica Rodriguez. There were two representatives of Whiteman Airport (a pilot and a business owner), a representative from the Los Angeles County Fire Department and a representative from the LA City Fire Dept. And finally, a Los Angeles County Aviation Commissioner as a non-voting member. In the end, 18 members remained.

At meetings taking place over more than 20 months, it was immediately clear that the Council Office and Pacoima Beautiful representatives had no interest in keeping the airport open and would not even consider it, regardless of how the community would benefit. Other members claimed to be undecided, but early on stated they were leaning toward closure. A press conference was held at the corner of Osborne and San Fernando Rd. with Veronica Padilla-Campos and Robert Arias, both CAC members about closing the airport in Jan. 2022. Clearly, they were not remaining open-minded. Veronica Padilla-Campos as the head of Pacoima Beautiful was involved in conducting several protests, numerous airport closure media events, hiring individuals at \$22.00/hr to canvas the neighborhood to spread their opinions, and posted inaccurate information on their website, all pushing for the closure of the airport. In fact, the Pacoima Beautiful website renamed the entry advertising the “Reenvision Whiteman Airport meetings” to “Shutdown Whiteman Airport meetings”, which was not the purpose of the CAC committee.

During over 20 months of meetings, including a “Workshop” and four “Open Houses” in the community, the Department of Public Works developed a draft of recommendations that listed a number of recommendations made by the community and CAC members. The items were voted upon by CAC members to determine those items which were most important and also to identify issues which were supported the most. Those items were grouped by area of concern. The Department of Public Works then split them into two groups as a result of the demands of members of the CAC to allow the issue of closure to be voted upon. The resulting recommendations had three components; those which were not impacted by the airport remaining open or closed, those impacted by the closure, and those impacted by the airport remaining open. Two scenarios emerged which were identified as Scenario 1 (Closure) and Scenario 2 (Remain Open). By the very design of these Scenarios, the CAC and community divided into the two factions. A review of the motions shows that they both support mitigating the noise issue, addressing leaded fuel and enhancing the value of the airport to the local community. Contrary to statements for Councilwoman Rodriguez and Veronica Padilla-Campos, the airport does provide benefits to the community and will continue to a greater amount with the airport open.

By listing closure of the Airport as Scenario 1, it implies this is the desired or recommended Scenario. This is clearly at odds with the direction of the motion to develop a plan which keeps the airport open.

At the January 26, 2023, in person CAC meeting, scheduled to be the final meeting where the CAC members would vote on any motions put forth, Councilwoman Rodriguez was afforded as much time as she needed to address the CAC members concerning her desire for the airport to be closed. No time was provided for any rebuttal to her comments. This was the second time she was afforded time to address the CAC without any time limit being imposed or opposing view being allowed. During Public Comment speakers were limited to 2 minutes. The majority of speakers supported keeping the airport open. The public comment caused the meeting to be adjourned without any votes on the two motions presented. One motion was published prior to the meeting, calling for the airport to remain open. The second was presented verbally, calling for closure and having a large number of points, in addition to closure. This precluded the public from having time to research and address the motion. This was a possible Brown Act violation.

A new meeting was scheduled for February 23, 2023. Prior to the meeting four motions were published. Three motions recommended keeping the airport open and one recommended closure. One motion did not receive a second and another was withdrawn, leaving one motion for closure and one for remaining open.

Ms. Alderson's motion:

Therefore, I MOVE,

1. Whiteman Airport remain open supporting its critical role in the local and regional transportation network.
2. The County of Los Angeles address safety and potential environmental impacts from other unsafe condition the County identifies in the operation of the facility.
3. The County of Los Angeles pursue the sale of 100UL unleaded fuel at all County Airports, as soon as possible.
4. That the County pursue the "General Improvements" and "Scenario 2 options" identified by the County Department of Public Works, the Community Advisory Committee, and the Community at large. This should include the establishment of community meeting space, educational space, a restaurant, and open space for viewing airport activities.
5. That all available federal, state and local funding be pursued to mitigate residential and community impacts, including federal funds already identified for soundproofing and insulation for residents as identified by a FAA Part 150 study.
6. That a reconstituted Community Advisory Committee consisting of members from the community of 2,000,000 residents served by the airport, Airport Stakeholders, as well as, representatives of the Los Angeles County Department of Public Works, continue to meet regularly, maintaining an open dialog to address community and airport concerns, as well as, to increase utility and interaction between the airport and the local community.

7. That the County pursue bring job training programs, such as, Aircraft and Power Plant Mechanics School, Aviation Programs associated with local Community Colleges and Universities. Outreach should be made to the local School District to offer High School STEM Classes on the airport.

This motion follows the mandate of the motion from the Board of Supervisors to keep Whiteman Airport open and addresses every other issue discussed by the community, in the motion. Funding for noise mitigation is identified and the motion gives direction to the items that are most important to the community to move forward with.

Ms. Padilla-Campos Motion:

Recommend to the Board of Supervisors that Scenario 1 (Airport closure is pursued) and the following recommendations be implemented to move forward immediately to ensure public health and safety measures are prioritized in the timeframe leading up to airport closure.

- LA County shall not accept Federal grants that will extend the operational timeline at Whiteman Airport.
- Prohibit the sale, storage, and use of leaded aviation gas and cease all operations requiring the use of leaded aviation gas at Whiteman Airport until there is a commercially viable product available to replace leaded aviation gas.
- LA County shall enact a Noise Abatement and Curfew Ordinance restricting stage 2 aircraft departing between the hours of 10 p.m. and 7 a.m. at Whiteman Airport (medical emergency and military flights are exempt). No restrictions on landings or helicopters.
- New Air conditioning units and door bottom seal strips shall be installed in all housing units adjacent to the Whiteman Airport and LA County Fire Department boundaries along Pierce Street, San Fernando Road, Osborne Street, Airpark Way, and in all housing units at the San Fernando Gardens paid for by LA County or other non-FAA funding.
- Air Purifiers and noise cancelling windows shall be installed in all units for residents that live adjacent to the Whiteman Airport and LA County Fire Department including along Pierce Street, San Fernando Road, Osborne Street, Airpark Way, and in all housing units at the San Fernando Gardens paid for by LA County or other non-FAA funding.
- The County will fund the installation and maintenance of a sound barrier along San Fernando Road from Pierce Street to Osborne Street utilizing nature-based solutions to reduce noise pollution coming from the airport and to increase carbon capture, reduce air pollution, promote the use of the pedestrian walkway and bike path as well as improve its overall aesthetic.
- Require LA County to sponsor a peer-reviewed study in cooperation with the California Department of Public Health (CDPH), Childhood Lead Poisoning Prevention Branch (CLPPB) to assess statistical associations between the blood lead levels of sampled children living within a

mile radius of Whiteman Airport and indicators of aviation gasoline exposure risk around Whiteman Airport.

- The Department of Public Works shall implement an emergency response protocol for both on-airport and off-airport accidents that includes a streamlined approach for reimbursement for damages. The protocol shall include the support of mental health counseling when appropriate, per Los Angeles County Board of Supervisors motion on December 8, 2020.
- LA County will conduct a redevelopment study, including renderings, of closed Airport property for reuse in a planned manner including suggested uses such as open space, retail, mixed income housing, community gardens, public services, education centers, and evaluating the potential to return land to the Tataviam Nation. The redevelopment study will be informed by focus groups, needs assessments, and visioning sessions with the local community including tribal community members and leaders, schools, resource centers, local businesses, and residents living within a 3-mile radius from Whiteman Airport to ground truth recommendations to determine the plans after closure of the airport. Recommendations shall prioritize local hire and a job transition plan for local workers currently employed at Whiteman Airport.
- Since pilot training consumes the vast majority of the local environmental impact. Restrict touch and goes to one per day.
- LA County to begin proper enforcement of all airport rules, but especially related to noise.
- The Airport Commission cannot be stacked with pilots. Add a minimum of 2 community residents (non – airport related) to the Commission.
- Require all non-emergency flights from and to Whiteman + heliport to follow FAA rules related to Above Ground Level (AGL) and Helicopter Association International recommendations about AGLs.

Ms. Padilla-Campos' motion does not follow the mandate of the Board of Supervisors by recommending the closure of the airport which does not support position that the "Los Angeles County strives to operate and maintain smart, active, safe and sustainable transportation infrastructure" and "to undertake a community driven master plan for Whiteman Airport that maintains the property's primary function as an airport." Ms. Padilla-Campos' motion should be rejected as nonresponsive to the guidance of the Board of Supervisors' motion.

Because the motion calls for the closure of the airport, it prohibits the acceptance of FAA grants for any improvements or mitigation activities paid for by the Federal Government due to Grant Assurance clauses which require the airport to remain open for 20 years from the time the money is accepted. This results in the airport potentially falling into disrepair or a huge cost to the Los Angeles County taxpayers by shifting all the costs for maintaining the airport and mitigating the noise and pollution issues to the County. Whiteman Airport must remain open until 2035 due to existing Grant Assurance clauses.

A prohibition on the sale of unleaded fuel is a violation of FAA rules. Reid Hillview Airport is currently being prosecuted by the FAA for removing 100 low lead fuel and replacing it with 94UL. The FAA requires 100 Low Lead fuel remain available until a “replacement drop in” 100UL fuel is available. Although approximately 70% of General Aviation Aircraft can use 94UL, they only represent 30% of fuel used. Additionally, the airport can not prohibit aircraft using 100 Low Lead from landing or departing from the airport. It is a public facility open to all aircraft capable of landing or taking off from it. This section would authorize the sale of 100 Low Lead fuel as soon as a commercially viable product to replace leaded aviation gas became available.

A noise curfew against the operation of Stage 2 aircraft is unnecessary since the prohibition of operation of Stage 2 aircraft in the United States airspace occurred in 2017.

Two sections direct the County to specifically mandate the County provide new air conditioning units, door bottom seal strips, air purifiers and noise cancelling windows to specific residences adjacent to Whiteman Airport. The identified fall both within and outside of area identified in the noise study and a large number of residences identified in the study are outside the area in the motion. The specificity of what is to be done for noise mitigation does not list items which are generally performed by an FAA financed mitigation. The motion specifically directs the County to pay for this and the costs are estimated to be approximately \$30,000,000.00.

This motion requires the County to install and maintain a “a sound barrier along San Fernando Road from Pierce Street to Osborne Street utilizing nature-based solutions to reduce noise pollution coming from the airport”. The bike path along San Fernando Road is City of Los Angeles property. There are no residences along this stretch of roadway and any nature based (trees or shrubs) will prove ineffective since the aircraft are at altitudes well above the level of any growth to have an impact on noise. Again the cost is on the County and will continue well after the airport ceases operations.

The next item requires the County to sponsor (pay for) a study of the assess statistical associations between the blood lead levels of sampled children living within a mile radius of Whiteman Airport and indicators of aviation gasoline exposure risk around Whiteman Airport. The sources of lead in the area involve everything from contaminated soil, residential paint, commercial exposures, baby food, other farm and dairy products to name a few. Although, any lead is bad for people, the EPA has established acceptable levels of exposure that are well below those experienced in the neighborhoods adjacent to the airport. It is anticipated that 100UL will be come available before this study could be concluded.

An emergency response protocol for both on-airport and off-airport accidents already exists. The Los Angeles City Fire Department responds to all emergency incidents occurring on or off of Whiteman Airport. They have keys for emergency ingress and egress and routinely practice operations on the airport. The reimbursement of losses associated with an aircraft accident generally falls under the insurance of the involved aircraft. There is no County liability associated with aircraft incidents off of County property and very limited, if any, liability for incidents on the County property. In the incident which led to the establishment of the Community Advisory Council, the then airport manager provided contact information for the

owner of the aircraft within 48 hours of the incident. The provision of Mental Health services falls squarely on the County of Los Angeles Department of Mental Health.

The mandated redevelopment study demonstrates that the CAC did not give serious consideration of how the property should be used. They still have no agreement as to what it should be. They repeatedly state they want open space, yet they are surrounded by open space. There are two parks adjacent to the airport, Roger Jessup Park contiguous with the airport and David M. Gonzales/Pacoima Park. Approximately one mile from Whiteman Airport is Hansen Dam Recreation Area, the second largest open space in the City of Los Angeles, with a large swimming area, museum, hiking and biking trails, and an equestrian center to name a few amenities. There are three additional parks within three miles of the airport. Proponents of closure have suggested low income and high-end housing, industrial center (although they complain about all the light industry in the area), educational facilities, farmers market, community square, a vacant lot and returning the land to the Tataviam Nation. There was no effort to re-envision the airport, other than to envision the planes gone.

The motion says they will recommend job transition for local workers. Does that mean if you don't live in Pacoima, finding a new job is not of concern? Where will the hundreds of employees at Whiteman Airport find comparable work at the same salary levels? What about the 20+ businesses and their owners? What will happen to them? Will they lose their livelihood? Will they lose their homes due to loans they may have on their businesses? How will they be compensated for this huge loss of income?

The motion hopes to limit the touch and goes at the airport to one a day. Who is the one who gets to do it? Limiting the landings to full stop only means more time taxiing and more exposure to lead emissions. Practicing landings and take offs is critical to learning how to fly.

The motion asks for proper enforcement of all airport rules. There was no information presented that this was not already occurring. There are no "noise" rules at the present.

The motion attempts to take away the ability of the Supervisors to select whomever they think would best represent them on the Aviation Committee by dictating that at least two members be "non-airport related". Which airport and which Supervisors are impacted by this mandate? The Commission deals with a number of complicated issues and persons not involved in aviation many times do not understand all that goes on. Also, what is "Non Airport Related" mean? Does this preclude anyone who has ever flown in an airplane? Been a nonflying member of a volunteer organization that has a relationship with aviation? Former Girl Scouts who earned an Aviation Badge at Whiteman or any other airport?

The final section concerns aircraft operations away from the airport. During take offs and landing there are no Above Ground Level limits. If there were, no one could ever land or take off. After takeoff and climb out or during the approach aircraft are already required to follow FAA regulations to above Ground clearances. The Helicopter Association International provides guidelines for helicopter operations all over the world and in compliance with the laws of those other countries. The basic rules follow the FAA rules but some above ground clearance recommendations are higher. Following those rules in the airspace over Whiteman would create

potential hazards which do not currently exist. This is an example of where a non-pilot does not understand the rules and environment that aircraft operate in.

The motion by Ms. Padilla-Campos is ill conceived and poorly thought out. Her goal is the closure of the airport and to shift the expense of operations to the County of Los Angeles until the airport closes. There was no re-envisioning the airport. Her motion certainly does not allow Los Angeles County to “operate and maintain smart, active, safe and sustainable transportation infrastructure” or “maintain the property’s primary function as an airport.”

Ms. Padilla-Campos wants the County to spend well over \$30,000,000.00 just for noise mitigation. This is just the tip of the iceberg on the costs associated with her proposal. Part of the closure of the airport is facilitating the relocation of aircraft and businesses. Van Nuys Airport does not have any available space to accommodate an influx of 600 aircraft. Burbank Airport is a busy Commercial Airport and will not welcome a large number of piston aircraft disrupting their operations. Aviation businesses at Whiteman Airport hold several distributorship agreements, whose companies allow only one distributor per airport. All of the airports in Southern California have existing distributors, so they cannot be relocated and will be forced out of business. What amount will these actions cost the County?

Pacoima Beautiful and Monica Rodriguez were given more than their fair share of time to be heard and their ideas were given weight, but they failed to re-envision an airport that was of greater value to the community, than the airport currently is. The airport currently contributes \$110,000,000.00 to the local economy, has eight non-profit groups, five of which support local youth, helping them prepare for employment in high paying fields related to aviation. This all goes away if the airport closes.

Although those voting to close the airport claim to represent the community, it was apparent that they do not. The number of community members speaking at the meetings was at least two to one, and sometimes three to one, in favor of keeping the airport open and improving the airports value to the community. Petitions to keep the airport open have been signed by 8088 persons. The petition for closure has only 3026 signatures. That is after Pacoima Beautiful hired persons to canvas the neighborhoods asking residents to sign the petition and required the person going door to door to sign it themselves. Additionally, every Los Angeles City Neighborhood Council, including the Pacoima Neighborhood Council, voted to keep Whiteman Airport open. Neighborhood Councils are elected to represent the local communities, they are not self-appointed “community leaders”.

The Department of Public Works was tasked with drawing up a plan that included input for the Community and in particular, Los Angeles City Councilwoman Monica Rodriguez and Pacoima Beautiful. They utilized a Community Advisory Council platform to allow for the collection of input, not just from the members of the Community Advisory Committee, but the whole community which uses and is impacted by Whiteman Airport. This process gave the Department of Public Works a clear picture of the issues facing some Pacoima residents, and the value of Whiteman Airport to the Pacoima community and the entire Southern California Region. The plan must reflect the desires of all the members of the Pacoima community and the Southern California Region, which is to keep Whiteman Airport open. The small vocal minority of the

Community wishing for the closure was overrepresented on the Committee and thus given a voice much louder than they deserve. That said, their concerns were heard by the Department of Public Works, as reflected in the General Recommendations and the Recommendations for Scenario 2, keeping the airport open. Those wishing for Whiteman Airport to remain open are in full agreement with the efforts to mitigate the impacts of Whiteman Airport on the Community. Many of these are the same issues addressed in the motion by Ms. Padilla-Campos, but clearly stated as not feasible under Scenario 1. Ms. Padilla-Campos motion disregards this by calling for the County of Los Angeles to undertake the mitigation at their own cost, a cost the County of Los Angeles is not prepared to bear. Again, we believe Ms. Padilla-Campos motion should be viewed as nonresponsive to the Motion by the Board of Supervisors.