

Open Work Session

Amendment to FY19-2023 Capital Improvement Program – STARS Project and Runway 14-32

Extension

September 18, 2018

Mrs. Dawn Veatch, Airport Manager, and Mr. John Longmaker with Delta Airport Consultants, came before Council. Mrs. Veatch said Council has a handout in front of them, and it is very short, but she wants to lay a foundation for their request to reallocate some excess funds into another project that was already approved in the Capital Improvement Program (CIP), and she wanted to explain why. She said, basically, in the County, they do their planning in November and December for the CIP, and then it goes to June when the budget is approved, as Council knows, for the County. She said the State asks for their CIP sometimes as early as December, but this year it was in February, and then the Federal Aviation Authority (FAA) and Maryland Aviation Authority (MAA) do theirs concurrently together because they supplement their grant programs.

Mrs. Veatch said last year in December, and then later in June, the County Council approved her budget. She said, in that budget there was a request for STARS, which is an automated system that is new technology. She explained, basically, it replaces radar, and it also provides communication not only from the controller to the airplane back and forth, but lets the airplanes also see the other airplanes in their geographic area. She said it provides a better surveillance, and is part of what everybody calls next-gen on TV and in FAA publications. She reported, in May she received an email from the Air Traffic Main Office in Atlanta that said, basically, that STARS is no longer being supported into the National Airspace System due to the fact that Raytheon, the manufacturer, is no longer producing it, nor are they providing product support because there is a newer type technology out there now. She said, with that, the Maryland State funding that was given to them by MAA, which would have augmented the County funding that was given to her in full, pulled their grant because the County could not install it.

Mr. Cannon said Mrs. Veatch stated they discontinued STARS because there is new technology. He then asked what would prevent everyone from just transferring those funds to the new technology, to which Mrs. Veatch responded, because they are not eligible for the FAA new technology. She explained, they have to have a certain number of operations at an airport. She said, for example, Easton has STARS, but they did not get it through the FAA procurement because they do not have enough activity, such as number of airplane operations per year, and types of operations. She said, when they buy it on their own, it is considered a non-Federal procurement, and when they accept that into the National Airspace System, air traffic has to be able to take that component, manage the data, and it goes through all of their systems. She said they got that because of Dick Cheney. Mr. Cannon asked, with STARS being approved as a high priority, and now Mrs. Veatch says it is not being addressed at all, what will the County be lacking if they, obviously, have to forego this, to which Mrs. Veatch responded, right now their tower is a non-Federal tower, and they pay a contract for that service. She said that service being non-Federal means they can only land an aircraft visually, so they are not allowed to operate with a radar environment. She said PAX River, who does their approach control, hands incoming aircraft off to the tower at Salisbury and can see them so far, but then there is a void because they do not have ADS-B, and they do not have a radar. She said then what happens is they will clear the pilot for the approach, and until they cancel on the ground either through radio communication or a phone call if the radios do not reach, or if the tower is closed, they cannot release or enter another aircraft. She said it ties up airspace when they are busy, or when the weather is bad. She said, basically, PAX River will have an aircraft coming in, they will clear them for the approach, and once they can no longer see them, the

pilot is, basically, already established on the approach. She said it is a safe operation, but they cannot let another aircraft in that airspace because they cannot see it. She said, normally, if they look at any other large airport, they have a lot of airplanes one right after the other, but Salisbury cannot have that opportunity to feed more traffic. Mr. Cannon said they wanted the STARS program, and considered it to be an integral part of advancing their operations, but now she is saying it is being discontinued. He then asked what will be substituted for, to which Mrs. Veatch responded, they will substitute ADS-B, which she will show Council in the rest of the presentation. She said the request she had was for STARS and ADS-B, which will allow the tower cab to see all of the aircraft, so it gives them better guidance, better situational awareness, and better separation. She explained, unless that feed goes to PAX River, PAX River is restricted from releasing them on the ground until the pilot reports he is on the ground.

Mrs. Veatch said, around the end of June or the first of July, the FAA announced there was another billion dollars in supplemental discretionary money, which means lots of things, but, at the end of the day, it means they can accelerate their runway extension project. She said they had a meeting with the FAA last week and got huge support to push this project forward instead of the five to seven years it could take. She said the discretionary money coming in frees up other money, and allows the FAA to put this project on the fast track, which, actually, accelerated their need for the environmental assessment that is part of the runway extension project that was approved in the CIP last year. Mr. Dodd asked, when was the last time the runway was extended, to which Mrs. Veatch responded, she believes 2010. Mr. Dodd said he knows there was property the County bought for that, and it looks like they are going to buy more property, to which Mrs. Veatch responded, yes. She said the environmental study for that project was done in 2003, so there has not been an updated environmental study on this airport since 2003. She said, basically, they are required to update their master plan every five years to include the environmental study, so they are way behind on doing things of that nature as far as routine upkeep. Mr. Matt Holloway asked how long the environmental study takes, to which Mrs. Veatch responded, about a year. She said it normally takes a lot longer, but they are hoping they have it on the fast track.

Mrs. Veatch said the next page of her handout summarizes where STARS and ADS-B was input for \$600,000 in the budget. She said the ADS-B component is \$130,000 and comes with display monitors for the tower and drone facility, and for anybody else who needs a monitor to look at traffic inbound and outbound, and it also gives a very good projection of weather. She said, right now, the folks in the tower use weather.com, the Weather Channel, and local weather that is just immediate over the airport, but not the whole surface of things coming and going, so this will give a lot broader reach. She said the detection system that she will be marrying up with the ADS-B for the drones will be able to put all the drones on that ADS-B display so they can see the aircraft and drones that are operating within their program. She said, when adding that up, it leaves about \$420,000, and the environmental assessment is estimated at about \$900,000. She explained, because they are in the middle of the fiscal year, only six to seven months need to be paid because it would be budgeted in increments over accomplishments, so they would end up needing \$450,000, which is almost exactly what they have, so she is requesting reprogramming of previously allocated funds. She clarified, both projects were approved in the CIP, so she would like to reallocate that money to the environmental assessment so they can move that forward.

Mr. Cannon asked, if they are applying the \$420,000 towards the environmental assessment for the runway extension, are there other sections in the CIP that also need to be amended since they are removing similar funding of \$420,000 from future years of planning runway extension or environmental studies, to which Mrs. Veatch responded, not at this time. She said once they get to this year's planning for the CIP, those adjustments will get done there. She said, basically, she cannot put her foot forward again until the assessment is done. She said they will not let them do hardly anything because they are

coming up on their planning cycle again, and those adjustments will be made for 2020-2021 to accelerate the runway extension, and they are very hopeful there will be digging shovels at the end of calendar year 2020. Mr. Cannon said it just appears that without making any other adjustments in taking the \$420,000 and applying it to the environmental assessment, they are frontloading what they have already approved for that. He said he would think if they were amending the CIP to a certain degree, she would say they are putting the \$420,000 in 2019, and then that would be \$420,000 that should be coming off next year, to which Mrs. Veatch responded, it could, but there are also additional expenses that will roll into next year because everything is rolling forward. She said 2021 will now roll into 2020 because the whole program is going to a three-year program instead of seven, and, hopefully, it will keep American Airlines and Piedmont here, which is the whole reason for accelerating this runway.

Mr. Davis said he sees where Council approved STARS and the ADS-B equipment for \$600,000, but he does not see where they approved the detection receiver, to which Mrs. Veatch responded, it was in her other budgets. She said it is not really capital improvement, but it is just technology under hardware. Mr. Davis asked if it was approved in the budget last year, to which Mrs. Veatch responded, she believes so. She said it is part of the drone hangar they are building because it was a product that went with the hangar. She said she did not bring that line item with her as a breakdown.

Mrs. Hurley said this does require a Public Hearing, and they can have that at the next Council meeting on October 2nd. Mr. Cannon asked if Council is okay with this, to which everyone agreed. There was no further discussion.



John T. Cannon, President



Larry W. Dodd, Vice President, District 3




Ernest F. Davis, District 1



Marc Kilmer, District 2

absent

John B. Hall, District 4



Joe Holloway, District 5



Matt Holloway, At-Large



Laura Hurley, Council Administrator