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Commissioners
Port of Kennewick
350 Clover Island Drive, Suite 200
Kennewick, WA 99336

Gentlemen:
Concerning the Future of Vista Field Airport

Should the Vista Field Airport in Kennewick, Washington remain open, or be closed?
It depends upon one's perspective.

If you are a casual, recreational airplane user, the answer would probably be yes.
If you are a commercial user of the facility, the answer is probably yes.
If you have your airplane based at the airport, the answer is probably yes.
If you are a person that likes to see open space in this area of Kennewick, the answer is probably yes.

However, if one wants to consider other factors, such as how much public money and assets are being set aside for the use by very few people, one may come to a different conclusion. If one is trying to find the greatest good for the greatest number of people you would come to a different conclusion.

When I was in college I took a couple of real estate classes in the MBA program at the University of Oregon. One phrase that I remember is 'highest and best use of the land'. I think any commercial real estate agent or governmental economic development director would tell you that Vista Field airport is not the highest and best use of the land. By the very fact that you have the Columbia Center Mall, Vista Field has become central to making the region a commercial hub of the entire TriCities area – if it developed properly.

When I look at the airport, and I'll define that as being the land within the chain link fenced boundary around the runway, I have to ask myself, "What further development can occur on the airport property that will enhance its use?"

The answer is not much can happen.
This might include the placement of an FOB operator and additional hangers. There are not enough airplane operations to justify a control tower.

When I look at how much revenue and expense the Port of Kennewick will have incurred to support this investment, I don't see the growth at the airport making much money:

What the Port of Kennewick is forgoing is the revenue from:

- The sale of the property

- The creation of new property in the private sector that will pay property tax
- New construction that will generate new sales tax, and increase the value of property that pays property tax.
- New commercial businesses that will pay, on an ongoing basis, sales tax.

I have been a resident of Kennewick since 1972. In that period of time I have seen a lot of changes occur around our area. I first got involved in local government issues when I saw the K-Mart store being built at the end of the cross wind runway. At the time I had a private pilot's license and viewed the issue from the perspective of a pilot.

Since that time, little by little you see development that raises the issue about the continued viability of the airport.

- Hangers were built on the south side of the runway so close to a taxi way you could not park your plane outside your hanger without being on the taxi way.
- Closure of the cross wind runway.
- Buy-out and closure of the FBO operation.

Does this really sound like a trend that will sustain an airport? Do you really want to work against the tide to keep it open?

Even with the improvements the Port has done, (i.e, the extension of the main runway) have you seen a true increase in use of the airport? No.

How much development around the airport has occurred that is directly related to the airport? Not much. Maybe Cadwell Laboratories, although I don't think it used the airport when it was first built) and UPS. Almost all the other development along Canal Drive and within the section of land outside the 'airport' has been developed because the land is there, not because of the airport. A lot of the development occurred when the cross wind runway was closed.

Had the airport been abandoned in the 1970's you would have seen an entirely different road pattern emerge. But because of the airport, the road pattern is less than optimal.

The airport has a significant impact outside the chain link fence. The clear zones to maintain open airspace around the airport impact the ability of adjacent property owners from developing the full use of their property.

Personally, I would hope the airport is closed. Secondly, I would hope that a good development plan is used to maximize the attractiveness of the area to the community and the region in the sense of open spaces being mixed with quality commercial and recreational uses.

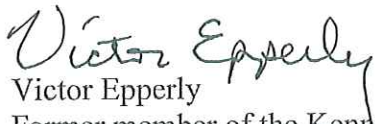
In the early 1970s I remember going to Seattle and passing through Bellingham in the Interstate Highway. Bellingham had an airport right next to the highway. It was closed. Now it is totally built over with commercial development that makes a lot of tax revenue.

Let's don't stay in a holding pattern. Don't make the same mistake the City of Kennewick did. Kennewick leased the airport to the Port and lost control of the land – then decided an airport wasn't the best use of the land and doesn't have much say in the matter any more..

I hope the Port is more visionary and does not make the same mistake by locking itself into a decision that will only prolong the inevitable and make the decision more costly when it does occur.

Let's use our public resources wisely.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Victor Epperly". The signature is written in dark ink and is positioned above the printed name.

Victor Epperly

Former member of the Kennewick Planning Commission

Former member of the Kennewick City Council