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County won't fund Paine Field terminal

By [Bill Sheets](#)
Herald Writer

EVERETT -- Snohomish County opened the door to building a new airline terminal at Paine Field on Wednesday.

Over the objections of many in a packed meeting room, the Snohomish County Council made official its preference for a county-built terminal at the airport as opposed to one built by airlines.

The terminal would not be built with county money. Any improvements would have to be paid for through leases, airline fees and federal grants, according to the resolution.

It was approved 4-0. Councilman Brian Sullivan was not present because he needed to take care of a personal matter, Council Chairman Mike Cooper said.

The council emphasized that it is not a final decision to build a terminal or to allow commercial air service at the county airport.

Opponents said the resolution amounts to the same thing.

"This is a Trojan horse and you're bringing it right in our midst," said Dave Zunkel of Mukilteo.

Councilmen pointed out that the Federal Aviation Administration can withhold funds from any airport that refuses to accommodate an air carrier who wants to operate there.

Paine Field has received about \$60 million in funding from the federal government over the years, and Boeing has said that money is important to its operations at the airport.

"I'm not willing to play a high-risk game of chicken with the FAA when tens of thousands of jobs are at risk," Councilman Dave Gossett said.

Many who support commercial air service also were at the meeting and encouraged the council to make the statement in favor of a terminal.

Glen Bachman of Everett said he flies five times a year on his job, and being able to use Paine Field as opposed to battling his way back and forth to the Seattle-Tacoma International Airport "is a very big deal to me."

The statement says the county will continue to negotiate with Horizon Air and Allegiant Air, two airlines that have said they want to operate commercial passenger service from the county-run airport.

The resolution said those negotiations should proceed on the premise that if a terminal needs to be built, it should be built and maintained by the county.

"Somebody's going to build it," said Councilman John Koster, who made the motion for the resolution to be approved.

Port of Everett officials said Tuesday they would be glad to build and operate a passenger terminal at Paine Field if the county didn't want to. Cooper said allowing the port to build a terminal isn't going to happen.

County Executive Aaron Reardon praised the council for providing a "clear course" in the county's negotiations with airlines, including Seattle-based Horizon Air, which has stated it wants to fly planes from the airport as soon as April.

"While I and a majority of the council personally remain opposed to commercial air service at Paine Field, due to federal requirements the County Council had no other choice than to take the necessary action to establish the parameters by which my office can continue to negotiate in good faith, through the terms defined in today's resolution," Reardon said

in a statement.

Gossett said the decision was difficult for him because he had come out against passenger service before.

"I don't like where I'm at," Gossett said.

More than 40 people spoke on the issue, with more than half speaking against the resolution. They didn't believe the county would gain more control over limiting commercial air service by owning the terminal.

"It will take decades" for leases and fees charged to airlines to cover the cost of building a terminal, Mukilteo Mayor Joe Marine said.

In the past, estimates for building a terminal were in the ballpark of about \$3.2 million.

If commercial service begins, "it's just going to grow and grow and grow, and we're going to have another Sea-Tac, and all the pollution that comes with it, the noise pollution and air pollution," said Bob VanHollebeke of Lynnwood.

Many proponents of commercial flights were from the business community and said flights would keep jobs in the county or bring them in.

"I think there's tremendous opportunity when I see the potential that commercial air flights could bring to our region," said Heidi Happonen of Silver Lake, who runs a communications business in Everett.

County Councilman Dave Somers said that in the past he's supported a noncommercial role for the airport, but that under the circumstances it's better if the county builds a terminal than if someone else does.

"I think that both the benefits and the impacts have been overstated by both sides on this issue," he said.

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