

AIR TAP Briefings

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Building and maintaining good relationships with your board

Airports can be owned and operated in many ways, and an airport's ownership—whether by an airport authority, county, municipality, park district, state, or private owner—will dictate how it's run. For public airports, members of an airport board are appointed or elected to oversee the work of the airport manager and approve funding and high-level decisions regarding airport operations. Most airports in the United States are directly managed by an airport manager who works with the airport's governing board in a variety of ways.

A good partnership between the airport manager and the local airport board members or commissioners is needed for the airport to run smoothly. Keeping the board informed of current activities at the airport, as well as the reason for any changes, increases the likelihood that airport management can move forward with a common goal—and it will help build a good relationship between the airport manager (the implementer) and the board members (the decision makers). Increased effectiveness and the ability to implement positive changes are in everyone's best interest and will keep an airport healthy and viable.

According to the Airport Cooperative Research Program's *Guidebook for Managing Small Airports*, communication and coordination with the airport owner and governing board is one of the airport manager's key roles. The manager serves as the airport's representative onsite and



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to the public, but the owner and governing board assign the manager's responsibilities, and the manager reports back to the board. Typically, the manager performs the day-to-day functions of the airport owner or authority, acting for the board members or commissioners as necessary to maintain efficient operations. In doing so, it is the manager's responsibility to keep commissioners or board members informed of activities that may reflect on them.

Airport managers aren't the only public

employees who must work with governing boards; city and county engineers report to them as well. In a session at the 2011 National Association of County Engineers Annual Conference, Don Theisen, public works director for Washington County (Minn.), outlined some ideas for building an effective relationship with board members. What follows is a list of "10 commandments" for working with an airport board, adapted from Theisen's original recommendations.

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An airport's story: Thief River Falls Regional Airport

Located three miles south of Thief River Falls, the Thief River Falls Regional Airport in northwestern Minnesota is actively involved in providing services and educational tours to the local community.

The airport is owned and operated by the Thief River Falls Regional Airport Authority, which was created in 2011 from an agreement by the city of Thief River Falls and Pennington County. The airport authority has helped the airport stay up to date with regional industry infrastructure needs and has further developed economic growth within Minnesota. Joseph Hedrick has been the airport's manager since 2011.

The airport's primary runway, 13/31, is 6,504 ft. by 150 ft. and was built in 2011. Runway 3/21 is 4997 ft. by 75 ft. The airport also owns five hangars, including two T-hangars, two classic single-stall hangars, and one open-area hangar.

The National Plan of Integrated Airport Systems classifies the Thief River Falls airport as a non-primary commercial service airport.

In 2011, Delta discontinued its services at the Thief River airport, as well as several other small Minnesota airports, to consolidate business and jobs in order to cut costs for the airline. Hedrick says he was dismayed at first, but since Great Lakes Airlines has taken over as the carrier and business has picked up, he's no longer worried about the airport's future.

The airport sees an average of 85 aircraft operations per day. Of these, 64 percent are transient general aviation, 32 percent are



The Thief River Falls Airport terminal

local general aviation, and 4 percent are commercial. Twenty-one aircraft are based on the field.

As the fixed-base operator, Thief River Aviation provides aircraft maintenance and fuel. Multiple businesses operate on the airport, including Hertz car rental, air cargo (Federal Express and UPS), Aabra Delivery and Transportation, Northland

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