



HOW WE DID IT

FRIENDS OF ARCADIA AIRPORT, INC.

AVIATION CITY | A FLY-IN/CAMP-OUT CENTER



Introduction and Background

This document was prepared by George Chase, President of Friends of Arcadia Airport, after the successful establishment of an FAA approved “On-Airport Camping Area”.

We call the facility Aviation City because the City of Arcadia, Florida was known as Aviation City during World Wars I and II. Many British and American pilots were trained right here at nearby Carlstrom and Dorr Fields.

West of the Mississippi airport camping is a common aviation activity and you will find many airports with dedicated areas for pilots to camp out on the field.

That was not our experience here in Florida where our Airport District Office interpreted the lack of mention of such facilities in the official FAA Airport Compliance Manual as proof that the activity is not allowed. Airport District Offices in other regions may interpret the lack of rules to mean such activity is allowed.

The process of establishing an on-airport campground proved to be much harder than we imagined so we have tried to list the major issues and hurdles and how we managed to move through them to make the facility possible. Your local challenges will vary but we hope you can use this document as a guide of things to consider to make such a facility happen at your airport.

The Friends of Arcadia Airport Board of Directors

www.AviationCity.org



1. SELECT YOUR SITE CAREFULLY

We chose an area that was slated to be left outside the new airport security fence after discovering that a project like this could not be located on an area designated for aeronautical use. The FAA currently does **not** consider flying to an airport and taxiing to a designated pilot shelter and pitching a tent next to it to be an aeronautical activity. You need an area either already designated as non-aeronautical or able to be designated for a non-aeronautical use.

If your airport is grant obligated, you need to be careful how and where you set up non-aeronautical areas. How parcels of land may be used and what rents are applied in the future can have huge consequences on your plans and expenses going forward.

An area near the airport boundary that can be designated “future aeronautical or non-aeronautical development area” on your Master Plan will be helpful. The FAA will require that the area can be returned to the airport sponsor at any time it is needed for aeronautical purposes in the future. If airport property is leased for non-aeronautical use, the FAA expects the lessee to pay Fair Market Value (FMV). Your area will be considered a “short term use area” by the FAA. Choose a place that has little chance of ever being needed for aircraft movement, a future aviation business, or other aeronautical purpose.

If possible, choose an area that is easy to taxi to and yet be close enough to facilities (restrooms, water, etc.) for pilots to use or you will probably be required to supply those facilities on your site.

2. SITE LAYOUT

Make a site plan that shows what facilities you want to include and where they should be located. Start with a satellite image of the site, then add features to the image including boundaries and distances from other parts of the airport. This will become your visual aid for a presentation to the airport sponsor.

3. GET THE AIRPORT SPONSOR ON BOARD

Once you are satisfied with your plan make a presentation to the airport sponsor and let them know how this will benefit the airport. This could include increased fuel sales, additional tie down fees, adding to the daily operations count, positive publicity, supporting local airport businesses as well as the local economy.

If you have a great airport sponsor or FBO willing to do all they can to grow and promote the airport, they may be willing to develop the site and oversee it themselves. This route could prove to be easier to get the project accepted and finished as the sponsor is in charge of the process. So perhaps all you will have to do is to develop a plan and help it along. Numbers are important. If you have an airport support group, get the leaders of that group onboard with your plan. Showing that a large number of airport users support your project will help the airport sponsor understand its value.



4. FAA APPROVAL

If your site will have a structure you will need FAA approval for that structure. The FAA may look at the overall plan and decide if it will interfere with airport operations and if it will benefit the airport in any way. Form #7460-1, Notice of Proposed Construction or Alteration, is a short form but all-important.

Our local ADO required us to submit this form prior to moving forward and it took 5 months for the FAA review. You need to make sure the FAA understands how your project will benefit the airport and general aviation.

If your airport is getting any Federal or State funding you will want to make certain your use of the facility will not cause any grant assurance issues. We got the area designated as “Future Aeronautical/ Non-Aeronautical Development area” on our new Airport Layout Plan with-in our Master Plan as suggested by our ADO. Make sure only aviation-related use of the facility is allowed since use by the general public can cause grant assurance problems and can cause you to pay FMV for any rent you may be required to pay. That means more cost to operate the campsite.

5. CONTRACT WITH AIRPORT SPONSOR

A contract is a must if you want to have a say in how the site is utilized and managed. Depending on your situation and the size of the airport this contract can get complicated. We thought a 3-page agreement would suffice but we were wrong. We have a very small airport but once the attorneys and the FAA got involved the size of the documents required became unthinkable.

Detail what you will do to develop the site and what you will do to maintain it if you will be handling that as well. Decide who gets the revenue and how it can be used as this affects federal grant assurance issues. Make sure any income will be used to benefit the airport. The airport sponsor required us to have both a Project Development Contract and a Commercial Lease.

If you want control of the campsite, include a list of things you will do to manage the site on behalf of the airport and a diagram (your site plan) of the premises. Show the site’s location on the airport with its exact boundaries, campsites, portables/restrooms, pilot shelter, fire pit etc.

The development contract made clear the responsibilities of our group and of the City, which is the airport sponsor. For example, the City was responsible for running utility services to the site. We were responsible for clearing the land and getting the necessary permits and funding the construction. We also agreed to donate the facilities to the airport once completed.

While it was a challenge to develop the campsite ourselves, by agreeing to take responsibility we got full control of the project and the campsite. This allows us to control how visitors experience the campsite. If they have a great experience they’re more likely to come back... and bring some friends with them!

Since the FAA generally requires airport sponsors to collect rent for any use of airport property, you should expect to pay rent in addition to carrying liability insurance. As we manage the facility, we collect fees and determine how we will use them to support the airport.

6. SANITATION

When I went to see the local health department about our plan the first thing they asked me is “how many campsites will you have?” I said, “We would like 8 or 10.” Their reply was we would have to build ADA accessible restrooms and showers for both men & women with a septic system and that it had to be on the site. This would take up some room we did not want to give up.

My response was, “Then we are dead in the water as we are funding this ourselves and that kind of money is out of the question for us at this point.”

He went on to tell me that our State health department has a “threshold” number of campsites that triggers higher standards. In our state the number is 5.

So, I decided to allow only 4 “designated” camping spaces on the 3-acre plot that could be used on a regular basis. This meant that the health department would not require those expensive facilities and we could use portable toilets instead. If you are fortunate enough to have restrooms nearby be sure to check on the distance from those facilities to the site to make sure they are satisfactory.

In our location, if the site is to be used by more than 4 campsites at one time we are obligated to get a “special event permit”. That allows more campers for a “temporary use” of the premises as long as we supply the mandated number of extra portable toilets for the expected number of guests. We now have sufficient restrooms and showers so a special permit is no longer needed.

7. FIRE AND EMS ACCESS TO THE SITE

Your fire department may have very specific rules for this, and they need to be discussed carefully to make sure you meet the requirements. You may expect fire extinguishers to be required but what about an access road and staging area acceptable to the fire department? We had to improve the existing road and build a staging area so the fire trucks would have approved access. We also had to adjust the location of fire pit and BBQ grills to gain approval. Make sure you talk to them early on so you understand all that will be required before you begin.

8. PLAN YOUR FUNDING

Decide how you will fund the project, be it through private fund raising, the airport sponsor, or another source. As an airport support group designated as a 501(c)(3) corporation we decided to fund the project ourselves and donate it to the airport. This helped us get approval from the airport sponsor. It is doubtful that you could ever get AIP grant money for such a project, even if the airport sponsor is the applicant. Private funding can mean less time than applying for grants or public money if you have good contacts in place. We raised funds with pancake breakfasts, private donations, and applied for grants.

9. BUILDING PERMITS

Make sure you apply for the proper building permits prior to any construction. In our case dealing with the County was not much of an issue but it took many times longer than what we were told to get approval. Our project took over 2 years to carry out. When dealing with municipalities remember that things can take forever. If you think that a certain approval or permit should take a few weeks to get approved, plan on a few months!

10. PROPERTY TAXES

As our airport is owned by the City but located in the County the airport sponsor does not pay property tax on that land. Once they lease it however, that entity then needs to pay the property tax unless they are exempt. Being a 501(c)(3) and meeting the “public good” threshold can make you exempt. Talk to your local property appraiser as this could add a big expense to your operating budget.

11. WATER

Can you get water to the site easily? If you are allowed to use portable toilets and do “primitive camping” perhaps you could get by without water on the site and just have a water barrel on a trailer to fill when needed for hand washing, cleaning, etc. If you can get the airport sponsor to run water and electric, you’ll be ahead of the game!

12. MOWING

Grounds must be kept mowed and in good order. Who will do this? If the airport sponsor already has a good mowing plan in effect, then perhaps they can take care of it. This is something you can negotiate in the contract.

13. RESERVATIONS

We wanted to control the site's use and not just let pilots fly in and camp unannounced. This allows us time to make sure the site is ready for guests. We have a [registration form](#) on our website that pilots can fill out online and return to us requesting use of the site. The only charge is a \$10 fee per tent for each night.

The reservation also allows us time to send the guest a packet by return email with info on site use and other instructions. We include a diagram which shows the location of the campsite and how to taxi to it. We offer to assist visiting pilots upon arrival in any way we can and we have recently added a 7 passenger courtesy van for our guests to use as well. This allows them to go into town for a nice lunch, dinner or food supplies and visit local attractions easily. It gets used multiple times daily. We ask it be brought back with the same amount of fuel as when it left. This works well.

14. GOOD PRESS

One of the most important issues you will deal with is getting the word out to the community in a way that helps your cause. Establish good relationships with the local press and keep them informed whenever you accomplish something that benefits the airport. We have found that if we draft a story and send a press release that we get articles to appear in local newspapers more often than if we just ask for a reporter to cover an event. We also make a post to our website www.FoAA.us as a notice in advance of any

event and then after as a summary. These posts get sent automatically to our very large email list. This keeps our members up to date on things we are doing and helps spread word about our facility. You may sign up for our email list on the front page of our website.

15. SUCCESS

The Aviation City campground has been very successful in the few years since we began. The airport sponsor is very pleased with the increase in fuel sales and the number of out of town visitors we attract. We have a definite flying season here in southwest Florida for this activity and it runs from October through April. Arcadia Airport is a small rural GA airport yet our numbers are impressive. We track our visitors the same way the County Tourism Department does (Visitor Days and Visitor Nights). This season we are on track for 300 + visitor nights and over 800 visitor days for airplane camping at Aviation City! We do this by promoting and hosting 3 day fly-in/camp-out events for pilot groups. We are having a positive impact on our airport and our community. You can do the same.

This document covers most of the issues that we encountered during the process of developing our "on airport campsite". This is intended as reference only as your rules and issues may be different. Make sure you do your homework and consult with the proper authorities prior to starting your project.

