



"Looking Toward Tomorrow's City"

July 28, 2009

Letter to the Editor

The recent debate concerning the FAA height restrictions on new buildings at the oceanfront seems to have become emotionally charged. We believe sound public policy is the product of careful and logical analysis of facts and options. To that end, we would suggest a more measured approach.

It should be stated first that the safety and defense of our coastline cannot be compromised for any reason. That does not, however, end the discussion of alternatives that could ensure both the public's safety and the economic viability of our resort area.

Putting safety first, it must be noted that there are more than 30 buildings in the resort area that exceed the recently established FAA height limitation of 110 feet. These buildings were all constructed having met height restrictions at the time including the 31st Street Hilton at 200 feet tall. When it was approved, the Navy's air height restrictions map actually allowed for a 520 foot structure.

The FAA's aeronautical study findings now indicate that the existing structures in the resort area can "create a wall that the radar can no longer see around." Tearing down these 30+ obstructions is obviously not an option legally or practically. Rather than sustaining this compromised radar coverage system, can our safety be better served by increasing the height of the existing radar? Are there technological upgrades that can be employed? These and other alternatives should be considered.

Beyond public safety, there are other community impacts that must be addressed. The tourism industry can be credited as being a significant contributor to keeping Virginia Beach property tax rates the lowest in the region and among the lowest in the state. The resort area generated \$78 million in new tax revenues for the City in 2008, representing 14 ½ cents on the real estate tax rate.

While the FAA's sole mission is air safety, Virginia Beach City Council must consider many other factors in their deliberations including the city's economic sustainability, private property rights and quality of life for all citizens. The City was right to ask the FAA to clarify their recent change

Virginia Beach Vision, Inc. is a non-partisan, issue-oriented group of business and community leaders dedicated to creating a vision and advancing initiatives necessary to the future development, prosperity and quality of life of the City of Virginia Beach and the Hampton Roads region.

in height restrictions given that as recently as June 14, 2007 the FAA indicated a height of 180 feet was acceptable. What changed? They should also ask that other alternatives be considered before it is concluded that limiting all future development to 110 feet or less is the only answer to protecting our air space.

Until then we will all be better served by avoiding inflammatory rhetoric and focusing on finding rational solutions.

Stephen R. Davis
President
Virginia Beach Vision, Inc.
499-7003

Virginia Beach Vision, Inc. is a non-partisan, issue-oriented group of business and community leaders dedicated to creating a vision and advancing initiatives necessary to the future development, prosperity and quality of life of the City of Virginia Beach and the Hampton Roads region.