

What They Haven't Told You

The following was submitted to *The People News* by Erin Fuller

As a concerned Bradley County resident and a property owner in the city, I have been watching the funding and construction of this new airport with much concern. This airport will never host a commercial airline. It is not going to be for the general public's use as a way to get to a commercial airline or larger airport as some of the public believes or does not understand. Basically it is just a longer runway for small private jets. This new airport will move into a one mile distance from my home which was just built three years ago. Since I have built, the land on which the airport will exist was purchased for a considerable amount of money. The land owners received a varying amount of money for their property. The prices range from between \$24,000-\$44,000 an acre, after the City turned down land for \$10,000 an acre because that was too much to pay. To my understanding, it is illegal for the government to pay above market value for land that is for government use. This law was circumvented by private citizens paying for the land. I've yet to find out how the government plans to reimburse these local citizens. Will or did the taxpayers pay above market value too?

The land that the airport will be built on is a mature karst area as stated in the Environmental Assessment that the Cleveland Airport Authority's hired consultants have created. This type of area is filled with underground caverns, caves and cave rivers. Some karst areas you may have heard of are the Lost Sea, Cumberland Caverns, Raccoon Mountain, and Sequoyah Caverns. There is a large cavern to the north of us in Kentucky called Mammoth Cave. They have discovered 365 miles of the caverns so far and have many more miles to discover. Its discovery has totally changed the focus of the University there making it one of the leading geology

colleges in the nation. The economy of the area has grown tremendously creating jobs and businesses that can support the tourist traffic. Leading people from around the world come to study the plant and wildlife that exist only within its protected environment. Could the airport land hold such a valuable resource for this community? As of now, the consultants and the Cleveland Airport Authority can't or won't answer any questions pertaining to the underground system that exist on the property. They state they are going to develop 150 acres of a 311 acre piece of property, much of that by explosives or huge equipment. Why is this important? Most property owners of this area are on well water. This water comes from an underground aquifer that is in this region. The destruction of this property could destroy lots of water resources for miles around. There are five springs within this area that did not dry up during the existing drought. There must be a large water source feeding these springs. If our water source is destroyed leaving many homes and farmers without access to water the cost of developing the airport just went up. And the cost of farming just went up by having to pay for the water that our herds need. Now being a county resident and this is a city project, who is going to pay for my water access? Is the county neglecting its responsibility for protecting the rights of a county resident by not asking question of this city project? Is the city responsible for the destruction of county land when a city project is destroying county property? I've been told that I could have city water for \$100,000.00. Why should a county resident have to pay for water that the city is going to take away? Either way taxpayers could pay more money than what was told to us in the beginning of the discussed airport moving locations.

There's more. On this property there are wetlands.

This is also typical of karst geology. These wetlands must be mitigated. That is... moved. The consultants have proposed to move these wetlands to Marion County at a ratio of 1 to 1.5. That is for every 1 acre of wetlands they move they must create 1.5 acres of wetlands somewhere else. During my research I have only been able to find that the usual amount of wetland ratio is 1 to 4 acres or as much a 1-16 ratio. I believe this is the normal requirement from the state. We must pay to move these wetlands and must continue to pay for its maintenance for up to five years. The Cleveland Airport Authority and their consultants have not been able to answer the question of how much this will cost us. My question is "why is this area not being moved into our county's watershed?" I'm sure someone in this county could use the extra income instead of supporting Marion county residents. The Airport Authority have yet to answer a lot of questions concerning the wetland mitigation's cost and maintenance and why this money is leaving this area, who they have talked to and how much taxpayers will have to pay to move and maintain this area. And why the county would give up such a valuable resource. Again, the taxpayers funding of the airport just went up.

There's more. When these wetlands are mitigated, what then happens to the water that drains into this natural floodplain? During the last seven inch rainfall, this area was a lake for a few days until the water soaked through the limestone pores and cracks into the underground water table that exists here or was carried away by two streams. Is this water going to go into a detention pond in the future? How much is a detention pond going to cost taxpayers in the future? Where will this detention pond be? The cost of the airport just went up. Since 2005, the city of Cleveland has spent 4 million taxpayer dollars for detention ponds

created due to construction. This year's city books states that they have spent \$1,901,485.02 as of June 30, 2008, and another \$800,000.00 since on these ponds. Most of the money for these detention ponds has been spent during drought years. How much will we spend when this drought season ends? Again, who will pay for this, will it be city and county residents? Will they allow this water to flood other property owners land in this area destroying it in the process? Will the lack of water naturally being absorbed into the underground river or aquifer dry up any wells that manage to make it through construction unharmed? Again, it will probably be the taxpayers, both city and county, that will ultimately fund this project due to the fact that these issues aren't being openly discussed now by either government. Once again, costs just went up.

There's more. The sinkholes on this property are typical of karst geology. The consultants hired to survey the property have done minimal (i.e. nothing) to research these sinkholes. Where do they lead? How big are they and is there an "active throat" on this property? This means do these sinkholes feed the aquifer in this region by draining into them. By not researching the sinkholes, when contamination of the underground water system occurs during construction or afterward, can they claim lack of knowledge as a protection from possible lawsuits? As of the public hearing on February 10th, 2009, the consultants on this project could not answer any of the questions about the sinkholes and their affect on water quality or quantity. Is it because they have not done the testing needed to find this information or they don't want to answer in public because then it would be prior knowledge of a possible problem that would cause concern in the public eye and raise questions of more cost at a time they are wanting to raise our taxes because of lack of funding for

say... capital outlays. They are having sinkhole problems now at Mayfield Elementary which is also built next to a large spring, Fillaouer Lake. I've been told that as the underground cavern's water supply is destroyed the land above those caverns will eventually collapse. Could this whole area, homes and farms start to have problems with the collapse of land due to this mature karst system being destroyed? What would be the cost then? Again, the cost just went up.

There is still more. The county road, Tasso, which is a main road for the citizens of this area to come and go into the City is now going to be rerouted approximately 1.5 miles to the north of the Cleveland Utilities water treatment plant. This will add additional cost to maintain as it increases the length of the road considerably. The FAA money will pay for the new road but county money must maintain it. Yes, the cost again goes up because of its added length.

Still there is more. The county residents that are in a three mile radius from the future runway will have zoning restrictions applied to their property that don't apply to county residents at the existing Hardwick Airport. Why you ask? That's a great question. These zoning restrictions will limit our ability to use our land that others did not have to comply with. Such as putting metal on our barns or houses that might reflect into the pilots eyes, erecting or building a structure that is a certain height above the runway, allowing your trees to get too tall and putting lights that might inhibit the pilots sight. I'm sure there are more restrictions coming but it will have to come up for a vote to our commissioners. I'm still trying to figure out why county residents are getting all these restrictions on what I'm told is a city project? I know that we in this area have already been flagged by the FAA with cell tower and wind turbine compa-

nies. Hence, we are already restricted. But if the county government doesn't pass these restrictions, I've been told the FAA will withhold the money they are to give us. Why did they not do that at Hardwick? No ritzy developments for us on our now low valued land.

The Environmental Assessment states that the cost to build the airport in the Tasso area will be between \$30-35 million. A local pilot said that this could actually cost a lot more. The local taxpayers would be responsible for 10% of the cost and the FAA responsible for 90%. But does this take into consideration that the City has already spent \$8 million for the airport and no construction has yet taken place. Could that money have been used for maybe... a new science wing? I find it hard to believe that the airport with all these possible costs in the future, could ever make a profit for the citizens of this community that could cover all these added expenses. Some may say I'm against a nice airport, I'm not. I've never said anything negative about the existing airport. I'm against the adding of a new airport with all these unknown costs attached. I'm for funding the existing airport and making it the runway length they want if they want a longer one. However, if they spent the recommended \$20-25 million upgrading that airport then I do believe that would be the cost and there would not be all of these unknowns. But I'm sure that land must be better suited for a custom home development than a non profit airport. I'm against the government raising our taxes for funding of pet projects that have no end in cost to the taxpayers. I'm against wasteful spending and then trying to bleed more money from the taxpayers when they have spent our money inappropriately. Since no appraisal of the Hardwick Airport has been done, it will be auctioned off at wholesale cost, per the Cleveland Airport Authorities.

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