

Virginia Helicopter Association

2007 January

Bob Reid brought the meeting to order at 1:30 pm and opened the floor by asking for suggestions on future meeting times and locations. The group was in general agreement that once per month at the Williamsburg Airport should continue.

Andy Gibbs suggested a phone tree or contact list that would allow participants to ‘carpool’ in empty helicopter seats with advance notice and coordination. Bob informed the group that a phone/email tree contact list was in the works.

Bob explained that the board of directors were all entering the second year of a three year term and presented a proposed officer slate for 2007 for VHA approval that was subsequently approved by hand vote:

President	Bob Reid
Vice President	Jim Lockhart
Secretary	Byron Childress
Treasurer	Byron Wright
Aviation Safety/Technical	John Musser
Aviation Membership	Ray Jarman
Aviation Information Coordinator	Bob Tapscott

The agenda then turned to off-site helicopter operations and an incident where York County cited Mr. Garrett for improper aircraft operation in response to a neighbor’s complaint.

Bob Tapscott attended the hearing and shared the following observations about the proceedings:  
--the zoning board does not understand helicopter operations and this complicates matters greatly  
--in the final analysis, the hearing discussion turned to the question of “Is Mr. Garrett operating a helipad?”

--“Helipad” as defined by York County is whatever they license and approve by special use permit as a helipad. Additionally, a helipad as defined by the county is authorized in two types of industrial zoning.

--although operating a helicopter isn’t specifically prohibited, the county may pursue a cease and desist order for ‘unapproved accessory use of property’ because the location is not a helipad/heliport and the ‘unapproved accessory use of property’ clause includes aircraft operation.

--another hearing to follow may apply the rule of a ‘like situation’ in which they wrote a letter to another helicopter operator. In this case the operator made peace with a complaining neighbor and continued to operate the aircraft for another two plus years. This would be a course of interest to pursue if it applied in this particular case.

--both Bob and Dr. Nichols strongly recommended a proactive relationship with the cities and counties to defuse or blunt potential objections to helicopter operations before they arise

John Musser then presented ideas for a direction the VHA can pursue to become more proactive in maximizing the freedom and utility of helicopters in Virginia:

#### CIVIL HELICOPTER USE

- Residential property use
- Take off and landing rights
- Public safety (proximity, altitude, perception)
- Noise

#### PUBLIC REACTION

- Based on ignorance/fear
- Often excessive
- Knee jerk
- Passionate

#### RESULTS

- Local citations/appeals
- Media attention (often negative)
- Imposed restrictions

#### POTENTIALS

- Blanket restrictions
- Prohibitions
- Restricted benefits to private ownership

#### VHA RESPONSE

- Must be a single voice
- Individuals should not represent the VHA
- Recognize and assume responsibility (educate local government, provide assistance in appeals, propose clear and concise compromises or adjustments)

#### COURSES OF ACTION

- Educate ourselves on local ordinances
- Create educational briefings for municipalities
- Develop proposed ordinance verbiage
- Create a database of municipal helicopter issues
- Refer our actions to HAI for review and input

Bob then solicited ideas on how to posture the club moving forward. Andy suggested getting involved in participating in local government ..... if we aren't involved in the re-write then helicopters will be left out. Dan Bohlke and Randy Burdette both suggested that the VHA become the authority 'go to guy' on helicopter matters in the commonwealth.

Others posited that we can't sell the public on helicopters .... instead we need to target the media, decision makers, and local businesses. Develop a briefing and begin scheduling it NOW to key local decision makers and make best friends with the media and be ready to give out some free rides.

Andy asked for a VHA response on what we'd like to do on the Garrett issue. The following motion was submitted by Dan Bohlke and approved by hand vote:

Task the board to proactively approach this situation and others to establish a protocol for action(s) needed to allow helicopters to be authorized for use in our communities.

Morris suggested the need for an experienced aviation attorney to help craft a local model ordinance that other communities might adopt as precedent. The idea met with general approval, but no decision was made. [NOTE: After the meeting adjourned and with the approval of one of the board members, I contacted a Lynchburg lawyer about attending our next meeting to give an overview and answer questions of civil and property law vis-à-vis helicopter operations. In the interest of full disclosure, the lawyer is my brother, Andrew Childress, and his fee for the above is a free lunch and a rip or two around the pattern in someone's R44. If this is unacceptable to anyone, please contact Byron Childress at 804-400-8085.]

Bob announced that Dr. David Nichols had earned the "Country Doctor of the Year Award" and the news was met with great enthusiasm. Well done, sir.

Mark provided an update on the website....we have a domain, but no further work has been performed at this time.

There being no further business, Bob adjourned the meeting at 3:40 pm.