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## MEMORANDUM TO COUNCIL

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To: Mayor and City Council Members  
From: Bil Homka, Acting City Manager  
Date: September 27, 2022  
Re: Airport Master Plan Update

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**SUMMARY:** The Airport Master Plan was initiated by the State of Alaska to update the existing master plan and address issues concerning safety, runway improvements, terminal needs and compliance with FAA / DOT guidelines and regulations. The State hired planning firm Michael Baker International to update the 2008-2012 airport master plan.

**PREVIOUS COUNCIL ACTION:** None

**BACKGROUND:** The State of Alaska owns the Unalaska airport and prepares master plan updates every 10 years. This update was scheduled earlier than anticipated due to the plane crash that happened in October 2019. Together with the State, City administration and the Ports and Planning Departments worked with the consultant to kick off the process in September 2020.

Several committee meetings occurred during 2020 in an effort to identify issues and discuss possible ideas for improving the airport's safety and operational needs. Everyone knows there are many cancelled flights due to weather impediments. During this time Unalaska also experienced travel impediments resulting from Pen Air discontinuing service to Unalaska, Ravn Air acquiring the route and subsequently filing for bankruptcy, the City operating a "charter" operation for three weeks, and access to the mainland was reduced to charter service mostly on small planes (6-8 seats). At some point Dena'ina Air began charter service with a larger plane that ran between Unalaska and Anchorage 2-3 times per week.

The schedule for the master plan was offset by the COVID-19 pandemic and most of the meetings anticipated to happen on island were held virtually with online platforms. KUCB and Channel 8 assisted with coordinating public meetings to obtain comments from island residents and businesses. In all, the community and planners did what needed to be done in order to move the planning effort forward.

About September 2021 coordination efforts between the City and the consultant started to wane. The last public presentation was scheduled for October 2021, but was rescheduled to the prior month. No public presentation was ever made of the final plan submitted to the State of Alaska.

**DISCUSSION:** Unalaska's airport faces extreme challenges: it is surrounded by Ballyhoo Mountain on the north and water on the other three sides. At just 5,500 feet in length, the airport is not rated for large jets to land and depart. The wind and weather conditions are often unfavorable for planes to land and the airport lacks electronic navigational aids that would help overcome some of the less extreme weather situations such as fog and clouds. Therefore, regular scheduled passenger service between Unalaska and Anchorage is often cancelled.

As of now it appears the plan to improve the airport's safety includes an EMAS system (Engineered Material Arresting System). EMAS would flank both ends of the runway and serve to

capture the plane wheels should they transgress into either of the two safety zones. Basically the EMAS consists of large concrete type blocks that crush when the plane wheels run across them, thus causing a plane to decelerate rapidly.

Not presenting the results of the master plan to the community at large leaves the public's expectations, right or wrong, hanging in limbo as to what plans are being considered for the airport. At the community input meetings it was clear participants want a longer runway and any other improvements that would facilitate flights more regularly and safely. The cost estimate to achieve a longer runway is said to be around \$250,000,000. The State of Alaska believes this is too expensive a plan to implement.

Tonight, representatives from Alaska Department of Transportation and Michael Baker International will attend via Zoom to present the firm's recommendations for airport improvements.

Attached is a slide they will use during their presentation.

