

## **ADA-09547 Proposal to Lease State Airport Land at Girdwood Airport**

The Alaska Department of Transportation & Public Facilities proposes to lease approximately eleven acres (ADA-09547), at Girdwood Airport for 55 years. Applicant: Glacier Valley Lodge, LLC. Annual rent: \$48,830.76. Authorized uses: Mixed Aeronautical and Non-aeronautical - up to 150 short term lodging units, private aircraft storage, fueling, and maintenance. Ancillary facilities for a winter/summer sports center, fly out base, meeting space, and food and beverage service along with ten 600 square foot residences for employees in the upper two floors of the Ancillary facility.

Written comments must be received by 4:30 p.m., July 13, 2023, after which the Department will determine whether or not to execute the lease. The Department's decision will be sent only to persons who submit written comment or objection to the Department, at the address and by the date and time specified in this notice, and include their return address. Information is available from Britton Goldberg, (907) 269-0731, or Vickie Swain, (907) 269-0745, Aviation Leasing, Central Region, PO Box 196900, Anchorage, Alaska 99519-6900. Anyone needing hearing impaired accommodation may call TDD (907) 269-0473.

The Department reserves the right to correct technical defects, term, or purposes and may reject any or all comments.

The Girdwood Board of Supervisors (GBOS) and Land Use Committee (LUC) held a joint special meeting July 3, 2023 to have a formal community discussion with Glacier Valley Lodge LLC (GVL) for additional information sharing regarding their Proposal to Lease State Airport Land at the Girdwood Airport (ADA-09547). The Airport Lease has been on multiple GBOS and LUC agendas since the original public notice was published in early May. The July 3rd meeting provided the first opportunity for discussion after closure of the competitive leasing proposal period, so GVL was able to share more detailed plans.

Thank you for extending Public Comment to July 13th which enabled GBOS and LUC to consider additional information from GVL. This letter acts as a supplement to GBOS' earlier public comments in our June 2, 2023 letter.

We welcome the continued engagement of GVL and their consistent commitment to working with the Girdwood community to find a successful outcome. We hope that, as the land owners, DOT&PF will also engage with the community to the same goal.

The most prominent community concerns remain:

- increase in traffic, both by road and by air, and especially heavy construction traffic along Mt Hood Drive associated with site preparation and construction
- the proposed project using all remaining land along the extended taxiway, therefore precluding other high priority aviation needs at Girdwood Airport
- the proposed lack of public process during the remaining development phases and the intent to develop without regard to local plans and processes.

In addition, the community has continued concerns about the proposal's impact on recreation and viewshed.

### **Road access and traffic**

Current access is via a narrow gravel neighborhood road, Mt Hood Drive.

Residents living on and near Mt. Hood Drive were adversely affected by the construction of the new hangars four years ago and these memories are still fresh on their minds. The proposed project has the potential to have at least the same volume of construction traffic. Furthermore, as business at the airport has increased, so has the vehicle and aircraft traffic. The current and proposed business growth will cause greater impact and worse traffic.

As stated in our prior letter, GBOS requests that a Traffic Impact Analysis is performed before any additional development at the airport.

The 2005 Girdwood Airport Master Plan and several community plans all anticipated an alternative road access to the airport as airport development increases, with an anticipated schedule that has already been exceeded. Construction of that alternative access should be completed before development of a hotel or lodge at the airport.

### **Airport improvements**

Multiple airport users have expressed concerns that the proposal could limit the most pressing needs of airport users. They stated that Girdwood airport is currently beyond capacity for tie

downs and transient parking. Leasing the remaining available land near the taxiway to one entity potentially limits the potential for more space exactly for tie downs and transient parking in the future. In fact, the 2005 Girdwood Airport Master Plan and subsequent Airport Layout Plans show additional aircraft tie-downs along the extended taxiway in the area of the proposed lease. The Airport plans do not mention a hotel.

We request a requirement that a minimum of 20 additional public or leased tie-downs are constructed in the area of this project, either as part of the GVL development itself or by DOT&PF.

### **Public process and local plans**

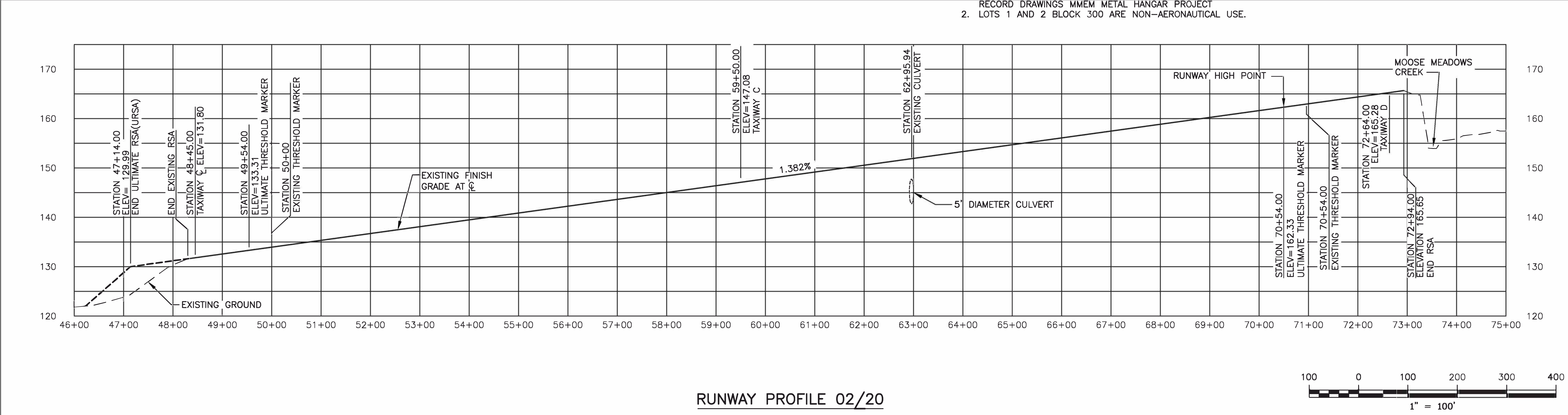
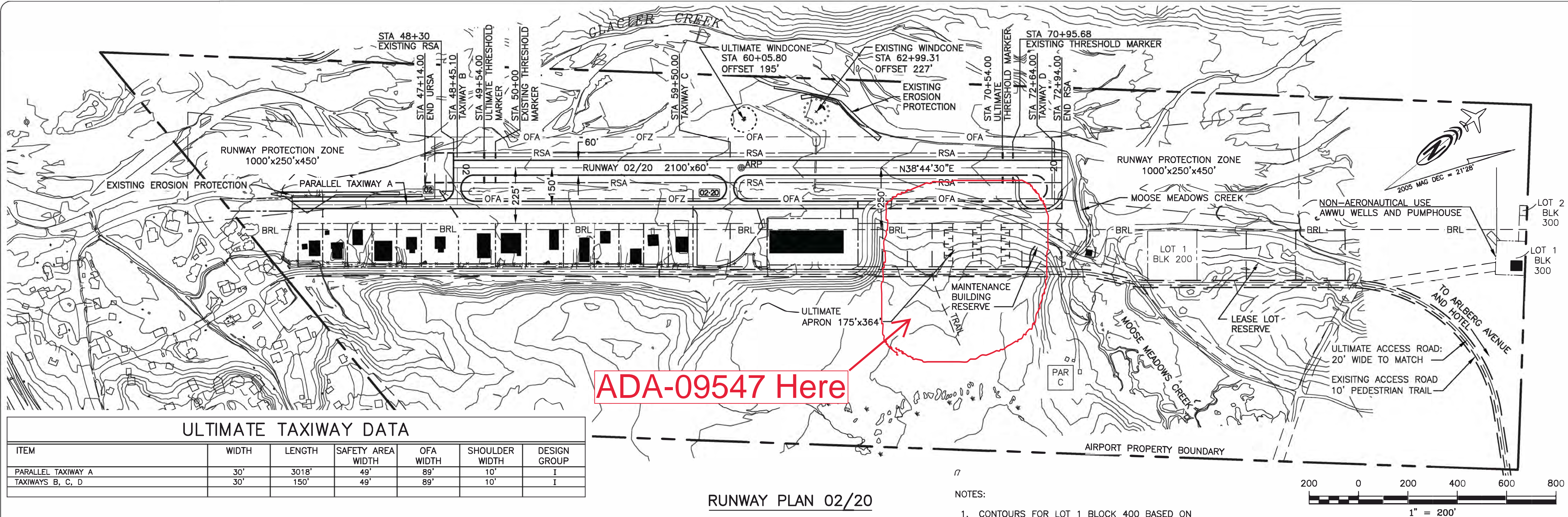
The community has considerable concerns that Alaska DOT&PF does not intend to follow local requirements for development. For a development of this size, Anchorage Municipal code requires community engagement during the pre-development phase and at minimum the issuance of a Land Use permit before any land disturbance.

In fact, Anchorage Municipal Code (AMC 21.09.040) defines specific zoning for Girdwood Airport with associated allowed uses, requirements and processes. A hotel is not currently an allowed use within the Girdwood Airport zone so a Land Use permit could not be issued. If this proposal was on any other piece of private or public land within Girdwood, the land owner and developer would seek local support for a code update to expand the use regulations. If the lease is approved, we encourage DOT&PF and the developers to seek an update to Land Use code and to follow the Municipal process.

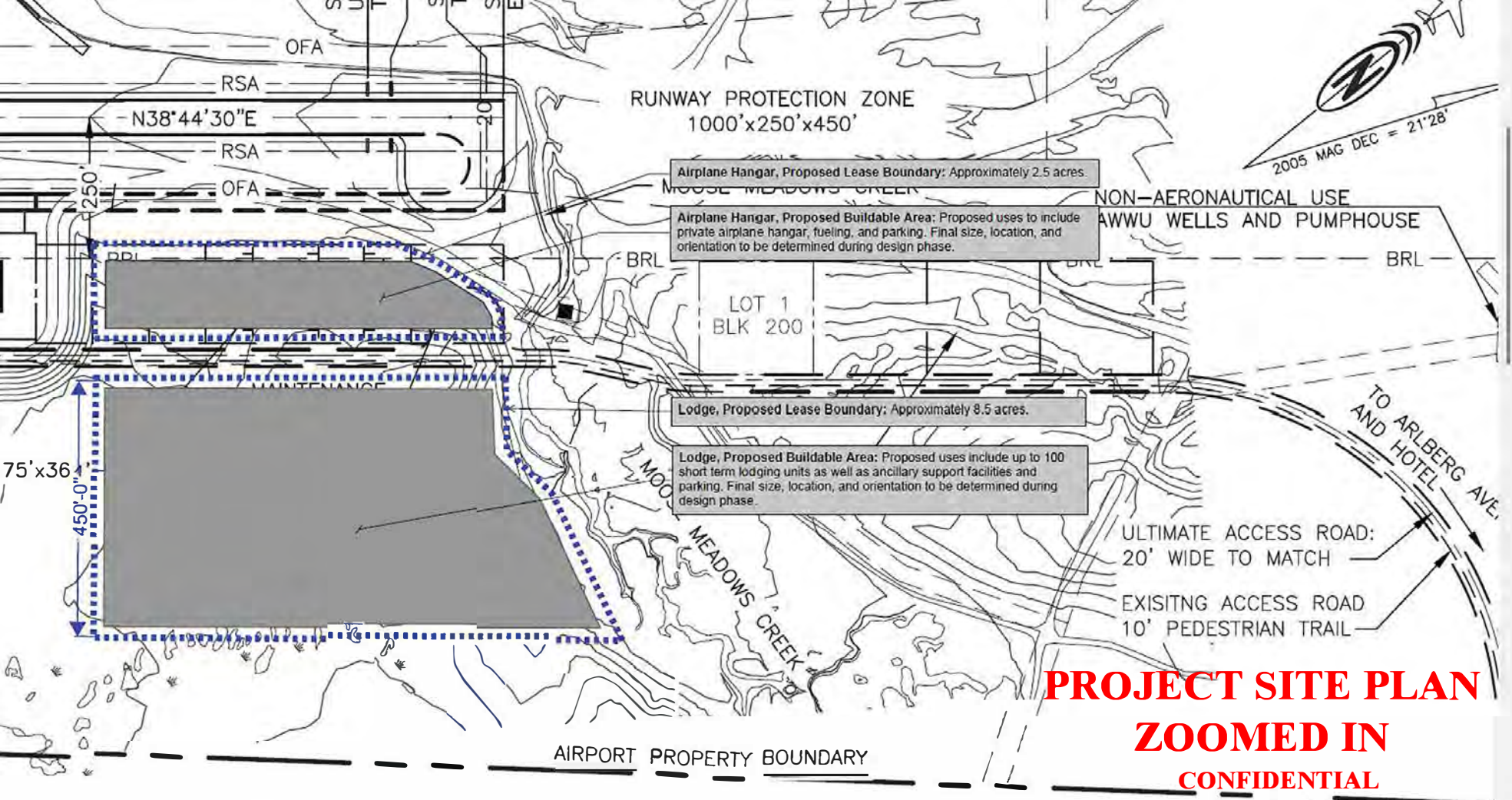
In conclusion, the proposed development is a significant expansion of the airport which will require a new access avoiding residential neighborhoods. A development of an airport hotel should further support aviation uses and not preclude the needed increase in aircraft parking at the airport.

Finally, as an elected body of the Municipality, GBOS is unable to support a project which does not follow the required Municipal code whatever the merits of the project itself. We urge DOT&PF to work toward finding a solution that respects community planning as embodied in the adopted local code.



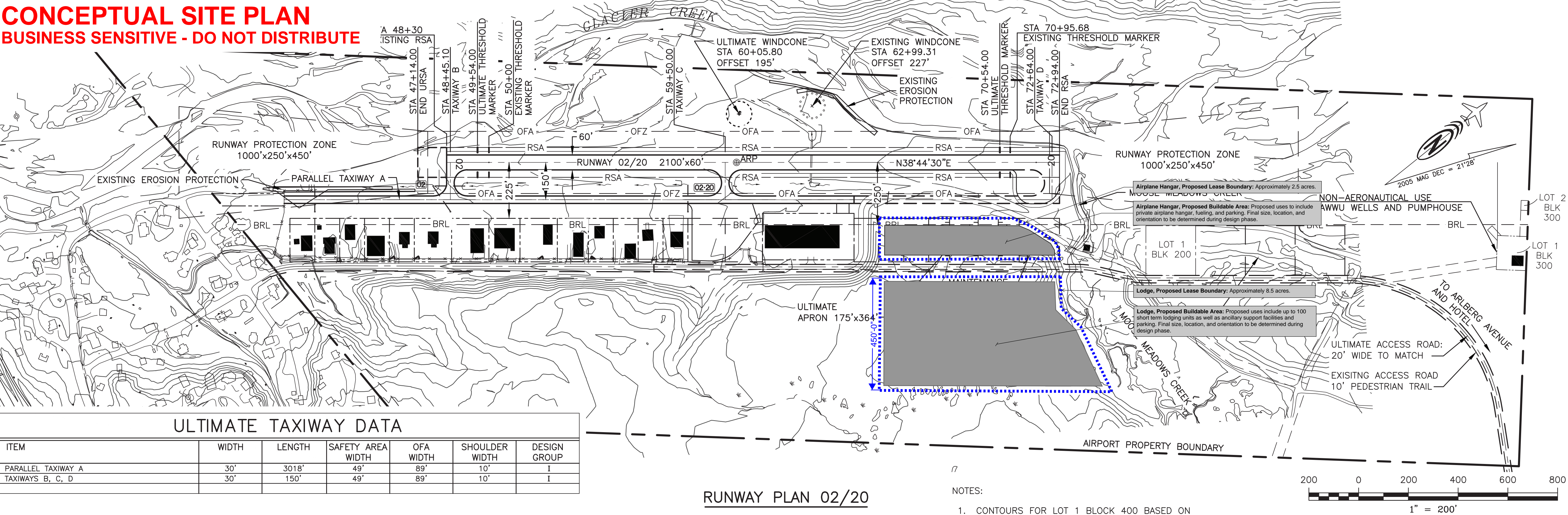








CONCEPTUAL SITE PLAN  
BUSINESS SENSITIVE - DO NOT DISTRIBUTE

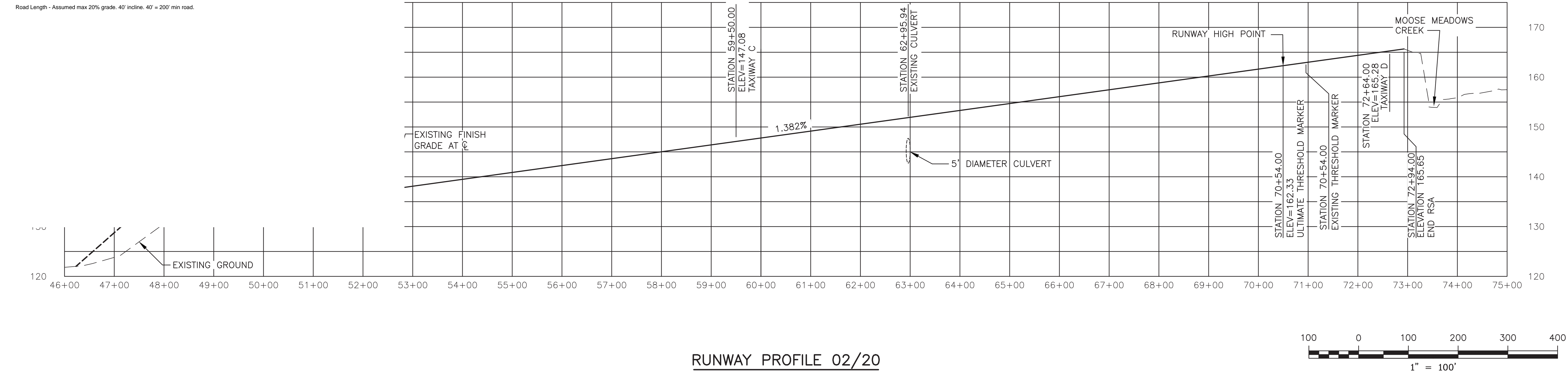


Notes:

Building Footprint - 100 units, 375 sf/unit, ~68% efficiency, 5k sf restaurant; 65k gsf. 3 story building, 65 foot width = 308 ft length.

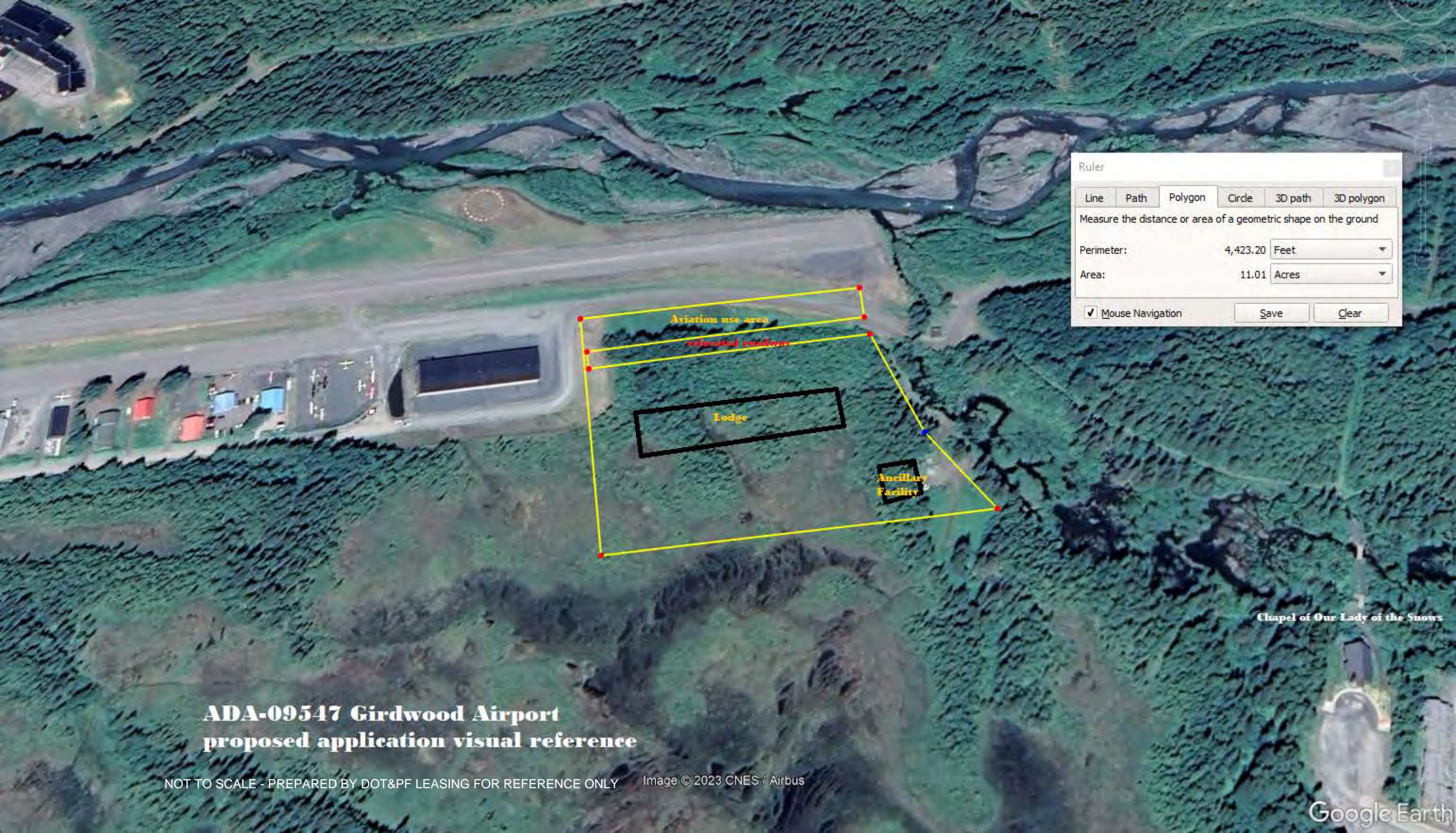
Road Length - Assumed max 20% grade, 40' incline, 40' = 200' min road.

- NOTES:
1. CONTOURS FOR LOT 1 BLOCK 400 BASED ON RECORD DRAWINGS MMEM METAL HANGAR PROJECT
  2. LOTS 1 AND 2 BLOCK 300 ARE NON-AERONAUTICAL USE.



FILE: Z:\07072\207\CAD\ALP\GALP-c03_P-P.DWG DATE:06/23/05	AIRPORT LAYOUT PLAN CONDITIONAL APPROVAL SUBJECT TO ALP APPROVAL LETTER DATED: _____	4/2020	AS-BUILT MMEM & SIMONIS HANGERS	STATE OF ALASKA DEPARTMENT OF TRANSPORTATION AND PUBLIC FACILITIES CENTRAL REGION-DESIGN AND CONSTRUCTION-AVIATION  APPROVED: _____ HARVEY M. DOUTHIT, P.E. AVIATION DESIGN GROUP CHIEF  APPROVED: _____ GARY E. LINCOLN, P.E. PROJECT MANAGER	DATE: 05/04/05	GIRDWOOD AIRPORT  AIRPORT LAYOUT PLAN EXISTING AND FUTURE PLAN AND PROFILE	SHEET 3 OF 10	
	By: _____ FAA, AIRPORTS DIVISION ALASKAN REGION, 02AAL-190NRA				DESIGN: DJG			
	DATE: _____				DRAWN: LJW			
	FAA AIRSPACE REVIEW NUMBER: 2005-AAL-26-NRA	BY	DATE		REVISIONS			CHECKED: DAH





Ruler

Line Path Polygon Circle 3D path 3D polygon

Measure the distance or area of a geometric shape on the ground

Perimeter: 4,423.20 Feet

Area: 11.01 Acres

☒ Mouse Navigation

**ADA-09547 Girdwood Airport  
proposed application visual reference**

NOT TO SCALE - PREPARED BY DOT&PF LEASING FOR REFERENCE ONLY Image © 2023 CNES / Airbus

Chapel of Our Lady of the Snows



To: Girdwood Board of Supervisors  
Fr: Glacier Valley Lodge, LLC  
Re: Project Testimony  
Date: June 19, 2023

Dear GBOS:

Please accept the following responses to concerns raised by GBOS and other residents of Girdwood Community. These may only partially address the concerns expressed, but GVL will continue to augment our effort to answer directly the issues raised about our proposed project.

**Access:** Our primary goal is to minimize traffic impacts to the residents of Girdwood. Our secondary goal is to confine impacts to the existing and longstanding historic access route to airport lands—and to avoid creating new impacts. Our third goal is to mitigate future impacts.

There are several access options, but the most feasible and beneficial to the community appears to be improving Mt. Hood.

**Traffic:** A traffic impact analysis will be conducted, one purpose of which is to recommend upgrades to existing traffic controls. Traffic volumes will increase but will be mitigated by the following operating conditions of GVL.

- a) Access improvements will improve drainage, pedestrian movement and traffic flow.
- b) GVL's restaurant and ancillary facilities will be sized and purposed primarily to serve hotel guests, limiting additional traffic to the site.
- c) Hotel demand will draw roughly 34% of its occupancy from packaged tours, arriving in groups. Additionally, another 18% of occupancy will derive from "shared transportation"—more than a single room sharing a single vehicle. If annualized occupancy is projected to be 82%, this equates to 30% of occupants on average, or 45 cars, accessing the hotel in a private vehicle.

**Affordable Housing** GVL believes that one effective remedy to the shortage of long-term affordable housing is to limit the conversion of SFRs to short-term rental. We believe the additional inventory of 150 permitted hotel rooms into the Girdwood market will increase available housing by reducing the financial incentive to convert homes to STRs.

Further, GVL's employee housing will at least be sufficient to satisfy the demands for housing for the business, thus limiting any further burden on affordable housing in Girdwood. GVL has experience operating a hotel in a very popular seasonal resort community of Homer. (See **Glacier Valley Lodge Employee Housing** below).

**Employee Housing** GVL has 40 years of experience in Alaska operating a hotel of similar profile. We anticipate a peak staff of 62 people.

We anticipate providing on-site housing for 30 employees. We anticipate employing 18 residents of Girdwood, and 14 who either work remotely or are willing to commute from outside Girdwood.

GVL will build employee housing at the same time as the hotel. If GVL's employee housing proves insufficient, the business will bear the consequences most directly.

**Profile of Hotel** While it is too early to understand all physical constraints of building design, GVL's goal is to minimize the impacts of the hotel's design on the surrounding landscape. The present concept is to access the hotel from the current elevation of Mt. Hood, thus allowing an overall building height of 30' before any roofline becomes visible from Moose Meadow and Arlberg. Trees, vegetative buffers; elevated berms and low-profile rooflines can all contribute to a beautiful design that minimizes impacts on the view scape.



# Municipality of Anchorage



P.O. Box 390  
Girdwood, Alaska 99587  
<http://www.muni.org/gbos>

**David Bronson, Mayor**

**GIRDWOOD VALLEY SERVICE AREA BOARD OF SUPERVISORS**

*Briana Sullivan & Jennifer Wingard, Co-Chairs  
Mike Edgington, Amanda Sassi, Guy Wade*

June 2, 2023

Attn: Ryan Anderson, AK DOT&PF Commissioner: [dot.commissioner@alaska.gov](mailto:dot.commissioner@alaska.gov)  
John R Binder III, AK DOT&PF Deputy Commissioner: [john.binder@alaska.gov](mailto:john.binder@alaska.gov)  
Wolfgang Junge, Central Region Director: [wolfgang.junge@alaska.gov](mailto:wolfgang.junge@alaska.gov)  
John Linnell, Central Region Deputy Director: [john.linnell@alaska.gov](mailto:john.linnell@alaska.gov)  
Vickie Swain: [vickie.swain@alaska.gov](mailto:vickie.swain@alaska.gov)  
Britton Goldberg: [britton.goldberg@alaska.gov](mailto:britton.goldberg@alaska.gov)

Re: ADA-09547 Proposal to Lease State Airport Land at Girdwood Airport

Dear DOT Aviation Leasing

The Girdwood Board of Supervisors (GBOS) is the elected local government body which formally represents the community of Girdwood and oversees the operation of the Girdwood Valley Service Area (GVSA).

GBOS has listened to multiple community members' questions and concerns about the proposed lease of 11 acres of land at Girdwood Airport for a lodge and associated development. We also heard from the applicants, who have committed to engaging with GBOS and the community throughout the development process. We welcome the ongoing communication with the development team. Girdwood is also actively updating its Comprehensive Plan so it is an opportune moment for consideration of large projects such as this.

On May 5th, 2023, the Alaska Department of Transportation and Public Facilities (DOT&PF) published a public notice inviting Public Comment on the above proposed lease at Girdwood Airport. The following information was provided in the Public Notice about the proposed lease, along with a general location map of the proposed facilities. In a follow-up conversation with DOT&PF Aviation Leasing, it was explained that DOT&PF would not release any further information until after the public comment period was closed.



The Alaska Department of Transportation & Public Facilities proposes to lease approximately eleven acres (ADA-09547), at Girdwood Airport for 55 years. Applicant: Glacier Valley Lodge, LLC. Annual rent: \$48,830.76. Authorized uses: Mixed Aeronautical and Non-aeronautical - up to 150 short term lodging units, private aircraft storage, fueling, and maintenance. Ancillary facilities for a winter/summer sports center, fly out base, meeting space, and food and beverage service along with ten 600 square foot residences for employees in the upper two floors of the Ancillary facility.

We note that the information provided in the Public Notice is very limited, and therefore inadequate to provide comprehensive public input. Regardless, we offer the following comments.

### **1) The proposal is not a permitted use under adopted Girdwood Airport Zoning**

Anchorage Municipal Code Title 21, Chapter 9 contains the Land Use code for Girdwood. The Airport is zoned “GA”, and the set of allowable uses are listed in Table 21.09-2 under AMC 21.09.050. Aviation uses such as aircraft repair, storage and maintenance are permitted, some with additional procedural steps. However, the proposal includes substantial non-aviation uses including a large hotel/lodge, meeting space, residences, and sports center. These are all non-permitted uses in Girdwood Land Use code.

We acknowledge that DOT&PF have previously asserted an interpretation of statute and regulations that any development on state airport land is outside the land use jurisdiction of a Municipality. The correctness of this assertion is outside the scope of our comments.

Notwithstanding DOT&PF’s previous position, the land in question has been provided specific zoning under Anchorage Municipal Code to allow aviation use while protecting broader community interests. Quoting AMC 21.09.040 F

#### *2. GA (Girdwood Airport) district.*

*a. Location.* The GA district consists of State of Alaska-owned property where the Girdwood airport is currently located. The airport property is located north of Alyeska Highway and straddles Glacier Creek. The airport facility itself is on the east side of Glacier Creek, but much of the airport property is either wetlands or river floodway

*b. Intent.* The intent of this district is for continuation of uses that are primarily aviation related, but also for wetlands and river floodway to be minimally disturbed by development within this district.

### **2) The proposal is not primarily aviation related**

Girdwood Airport is suitable for small, single-engine aircraft and due to configuration and surrounding terrain, is unlikely to see larger traffic. Transient aircraft mostly originate from nearby airports in SouthCentral Alaska, so the demand for lodging and related services is very low from fly-in visitors. The demand for the proposed lodge will primarily, and arguably almost exclusively, come from visitors arriving by road. A substantial majority of the economic activity and site usage appears to be for road-access visitor accommodations, so the proposal would neither meet the letter of current zoning, nor the broad intent of being primarily for aviation use.



### **3) Inadequate road access to the site - requirement for Traffic Impact Analysis and recommended mitigation measures**

The only road access to Girdwood Airport is via underdeveloped local neighborhood roads. Almost all traffic accesses the airport via sections of Davos Road and part of Mount Hood Drive, both of which are under Municipal management through GVSA, until becoming State-managed road at the airport parcel boundary.

Considering the current commercial uses of flightseeing and seasonal heli-skiing, Mount Hood Drive experiences substantially more traffic than was anticipated when it was originally built. The proposal, at full scale, would generate a large amount of additional traffic - likely over 1,000 vehicle trips per day. Such large commercial development must be preceded by a full Traffic Impact Analysis and recommendations for traffic reduction and/or mitigation measures. Mitigation may include construction of an alternative road access to avoid residential areas and/or upgrades to existing roads. Costs for off-site traffic mitigation should be borne by a combination of the State as airport owner, and/or the developer, and not by Girdwood service area tax payers. If upgrades are made to Municipally managed roads, there also needs to be consideration of future maintenance costs which would be borne by GVSA.

### **4) Impact on recreational resources**

Girdwood's economy is intimately tied to its role as an outdoor recreation gateway community. Developments at current grade above the airport would significantly impact the viewshed and recreational experience on Moose Meadows, a Class A wetland and dedicated Municipal park. Once adequate snowpack is established, Moose Meadows sees continual use through the winter as a multi-use trail, while its primary use in summer is a wildlife corridor. Even if the facilities were constructed at airport grade, their rooflines and possibly upper stories would negatively affect the viewshed. Light and noise pollution from the development would alter both human and wildlife experience of Moose Meadows Park. The entire area is a special place and the wetlands are particularly susceptible to disturbance from nearby construction.

This proposal could also provide improvement to needed trail connectivity in the vicinity of the airport. There have been long-running conflicts over access on, and adjacent to, airport land, so both the community and airport management have a mutual interest in reducing conflict and maintaining safety within aircraft movement areas.

### **5) Impact on existing aviation use**

The 2005 Girdwood Airport Master Plan and subsequent Airport Layout Plans show development of additional aviation facilities continuing to the northeast of the existing facilities - a pattern which was followed by the recent hangar development. We have heard from multiple airport users that a lack of aircraft parking, especially tie-downs for visiting aircraft is the most pressing problem. However, this proposal devotes a significant amount of land to non-aviation uses in place of needed space for tie-downs and additional lease lots for hangars.

### **6) Impact on community housing**

GBOS appreciates the addition of employee accommodation in any commercial development and welcomes the proposed 10 units of employee housing in the project. However, a 150-room hotel providing lodge-like accommodation with food and beverage services would be expected to have a large staff of 100 or higher. Even considering the inclusion of 10 housing units, a development of this size



would place additional burdens on an already unsustainably constricted local housing stock. We recommend construction of employee housing from the earliest stages of the project with housing complete before the facility becomes operational.

#### **7) Drainage and lessons from the recent hangar development at Girdwood Airport**

The construction of the new hangar at 730 Mt Hood Drive illustrated several problems which we also anticipate for this project. Excavating the hillside down to airport grade and the removal of material required a continual stream of trucks every day for two summer construction seasons. This accelerated damage to local access roads as well as caused sustained nuisance and safety risks to local residents. Increased daytime noise and traffic impacts were felt throughout the Girdwood valley. This proposal could require double or more volume of material removed during the previous hangar construction. Furthermore, the removed material proved unsuitable for use as fill for other local projects, so there was no counterbalancing benefit to the community.

The hangar development has also caused ongoing problems with area drainage. There is evidence of erosion on the steep slopes around the hangar, and the drainage pattern directs water and eroded material toward and through the residential area to the south. This proposal should be required to direct runoff to the north and northwest draining directly to Glacier Creek rather than the residential neighborhood to the south. Appropriate measures should be taken to avoid erosion both within the project boundary and to surrounding land.

#### **Deadline for Competing Applications and Reopening of Public Comment**

GBOS supports maintaining the deadline for Competing Applications as 4:30pm on June 12th 2023. GBOS requests that public comment be reopened after June 12th to allow qualified potential lessees to provide additional details to Girdwood community about their proposal(s).

#### **Conclusion**

Many more questions and concerns were raised that relate to the applicant's potential design, building, and operation phases. These would usually be addressed during the further planning and permitting process when more detailed information has been developed by the applicants. GBOS appreciates the outreach from the development team and we look forward to their continued public engagement.

While the concept of an additional large hotel/lodge in Girdwood likely does meet the needs of projected visitor growth, there are substantial challenges with the proposed location at Girdwood Airport as described in our points above.

Since so little information has been made public at this point, GBOS is not able to support or object to the proposal in its current outline form.



Briana Sullivan  
GBOS Co-Chair



Mike Edgington  
GBOS Housing and Economic Stability Supervisor





Memorandum

07/03/2023

To: Girdwood Board of Supervisors Land Use Committee

From: Glacier Valley Lodge, LLC

Subject: Proposed findings and resolution for GBOS comments to DOT

In preparation for today's meeting Glacier Valley Lodge has prepared two draft documents for you to consider that reflect our discussions to date and what we have heard from the Girdwood community.



## Draft Resolution

Whereas, Glacier Valley Lodge, LLC has applied to lease 11 acres of Girdwood airport land from Alaska DOTPF for a 55-year duration; and

Whereas, the proposed development includes aeronautical and non-aeronautical uses, up to 150 short term lodging units, private aircraft storage, fueling, ancillary facilities, food and beverage services, and limited employee housing; and

Whereas, the Girdwood Board of Supervisors wishes to indicate conditional support for the development, based on expectations that DOTPF and the developers will address the number of issues raised in public comment and that the developers will put a project plan out for Girdwood Board of Supervisors review before requesting a building permit from DOTPF.

Therefore, be it Resolved:

That Girdwood Board of Supervisors recommends conditional approval of Glacier Valley Lodge's application, by DOTPF and FAA, subject to their performance and satisfaction of the conditions herein.

A) Access

B) Drainage

C) Building Height

D) Impacts to trail system

E) Airport Improvements

Approved this \_\_\_\_\_ day of July, 2023

By Girdwood Board of Supervisors



## Findings in support of Resolution:

- 1) Benefits: Both the proposed aviation and non-aviation uses will provide substantial benefits to the Girdwood community. Including, 50-70 year-round jobs; tax revenues; support for aviation users; growth in outdoor recreation; etc.
- 2) The impacts of development will be mitigated by substantial regulatory review by multiple jurisdictions; including GBOS;
- 3) Additional Lodging: Lodging options in Girdwood are limited, placing a strain on monthly residential rentals, increasing the cost of living and at the same time reducing economic activity, and forcing people to commute from areas outside Girdwood. Additional lodging would help alleviate all of these concerns for Girdwood.
- 4) Airport Development: The proposed development would potentially help address many needs at Girdwood Airport, such as addressing the inadequate access road in Mt. Hood, extending the airport taxiway, extending utility services. Girdwood area pilots have expressed a need for additional tie-downs, hangar space, and fuel sales.
- 5) Additional Tax Revenue: The proposed development would provide additional tax revenue to the community for future development or improvements.
- 6) Reliable Operator: The proposed development team includes a reliable Alaskan hotel operator that we believe would bring superior lodging options to the area, focused on serving Alaskans.

Finding #1: "From the beginning, Mt Hood has acted as the primary FAA and DOT approved access to their airport Lands."

Finding #2: "The Community has an interest in expanding airport related development"

Finding #3: "Long term, the airport may benefit from alternative access routes. In the short term, Mt. Hood presents the least disruptive and least environmentally impactful of all other known options".



A) Access: While Mt. Hood is the only existing access to Girdwood Airport, other access options may exist in the future. GBOS is committed to identifying safety upgrades to Mt. Hood Dr and identifying long-term airport access alternatives with DOT, residents, and airport users.

B) Drainage: During construction of the existing hangar and modified road access to the hangar at the airport, the area experienced large, unforeseen drainage problems. GBOS believes new construction at the airport should take this experience into consideration, and that DOTPF should require appropriate hydrology studies and a mitigation plan.

C) Building Height: We understand the FAA has building height limits which increase as distance increases from the airport runway. While keeping aviation safety requirements in mind, GBOS asks DOTPF and project developers to protect the viewshed of the moose meadow, and to avoid undue “light pollution” from the project.

D) Impacts to trail systems: We understand that access to the lodging, hangar and winter sports facilities proposed in this project may require appropriate fencing and/or other measures to prevent, as much as possible, pedestrians, unauthorized vehicles, and dogs from entering active taxiways and runways. We request DOTPF and project developers to ascertain that these improvements enhance, not impair, access and use of trails in the project’s vicinity.

E) Girdwood area pilots have expressed a need for additional transient tie-down, hangar space, and fuel sales. GBOS requests DOT and project developers ensure options for these improvements are provided, or that additional suitable land is made available for leasing by others.