

AN OPEN LETTER TO THE MEMBERSHIP OF THE OAK HILLS FLYING CLUB

Hello and let me introduce myself for the many whom have no idea who I am. My name is David Muldoon, I presently fly C-FJZI, a Fleet Canuck and C-FSOJ, a Steen Skybolt.

As of June (for the balance of the term-year), I am filling the position of Acting-President and will continue to do so beyond the August time-frame, should the membership continue to approve as such.

I look after the canteen and this is something that I will be continuing regardless of Executive position. So if you have any ideas as to what to keep in-stock or to no longer buy, please let me know.

I also look after the equipment you see around the field, such as the lawn mowers, snowblower etc. This, I will no longer be doing as of the AGM in August, ideally an individual with better mechanical abilities than mine, would be greatly appreciated to fulfill the role.

WHAT HAPPENED TO THE PREVIOUS PRESIDENT?!

At the last Executive meeting, the President, Duane Capstick, advised at the beginning of the meeting, that he would be, very reluctantly, resigning for personal reasons. While catching us all off-guard, we fully understood and acknowledged his struggle to balance his personal time with Club matters.

As the Vice, the role of acting-President fell to me and this is where we are today.

On behalf of the Executive and the membership of the Oak Hills Flying Club, I would truly like to extend a thank you to Duane for all his time, energy and ideas as the President.

Along that line, I would also like to extend a very big thank you to Rob Burns, as he filled the position for many years before passing the torch to Duane last year. Rob continues to provide valuable guidance to the Executive to this day.

NEW MEMBERS

I would like to send out a very warm welcome to all our new members whom have joined the club over the past year. Many of you have been through the misfortunes of other locations, however, rest assured that the Executive of this club, with the help of the membership-at-large, will be doing their best to ensure the long-term viability of the airfield and the Oak Hills Flying Club.

We are a small community of members, whose interests in aviation, range from the hard-core, fly-anything-any-day-anywhere folks, to the weekend-flyer, to those who just like the social aspects of being around others, swapping tales, having a BBQ from time to time and telling a good story to anyone who'll listen!

We are a diverse group of people, with varied backgrounds, some with mechanical skills, others with talents that truly benefit the membership in times when it is needed. I would encourage the new members to come out, spend some time just having a good chat with any of the regulars you'll meet at the clubhouse.

Whether you have an airplane or not, doesn't matter, if you need help in one form or another, there are always resources to call upon, or to be referred to.

MOVING FORWARD

I would like to take this opportunity to pass along to all of you, some ideas we have been chatting about at the Executive, regarding moving the Club forward.

As we are only viable as long as we have interested members, the key to that is communicating what we are up to and where we see the club going in the years ahead. General aviation is dying in Canada, more rapidly in many locations than others, however, the decline can't be ignored and we are no different.

There is a struggle between keeping our little field a "hidden" gem, or growing too large, whereby we run into too many internal political issues, lose support from our neighbours around the field due to flying practises that prove unwelcome over time. We should be working to open our doors to general aviation as a whole, promoting it as much as possible and being open to chat with those who know nothing of what we do.

Stirling is indeed a little gem in the aviation woods, a great group of members, low fees, a challenging airport for sure, as well as a healthy group of friendly faces to chat to after a flight, or just a BS/coffee session in the clubhouse.

The key moving forward, will be to balance sustained growth, ensuring a continued positive experience for members, keep the neighbours happy, upgrade our facilities, be welcoming to our fellow general aviation friends from other fields, through fly-ins, as well as setting-up and advertising overnight camping facilities.

WHATS IN THE CARDS AT THE MOMENT

1. Long term viability of the full length of Runway 09

To continue to offer a field for pilots to use, we will need to obtain either a long-term lease, or outright purchase of the land that forms the first 600 feet of runway 09.

The present landowner of said property is quite friendly and tolerant of our usage of that 600' of his property. However, as he has recently tried to sell the parcel of land, we may not be guaranteed that a future owner will be as accommodating. To lose that 600' of runway would see Stirling being unusable to a significant number of the aircraft based here.

To alleviate this, later this month, we will be approaching the land owner with the intent of securing a long-term, leasing arrangement. An outright purchase is simply not financially viable, at the present time.

At the present moment, we have an issue with the threshold end of RWY 09. A large portion of trees have been felled. While this has provided a benefit for the approach end of 09, it has the potential to inflict serious damage to an aircraft over-running the available runway, while landing on RWY 27 (as was demonstrated last year), this has also caused some consternation with the Owner. To alleviate any issues moving forward, we are going to be organizing a work-party day to clean-up the approach end trees, also seeing what trees we can fell (with the Owners' approval), in order to replace many of our fence posts around the property.

At the Executive meeting on July 5th, we will decide upon a date for the work party day. We will ensure the canteen is topped-up, as all will be free to members volunteering that day, as well as ensuring the BBQ propane tanks are ready to go for the lunch.

Securing the rights to use that 600' of runway is very important for our membership as a whole, so I believe it is important for the Club to step-up, help clean-up those trees that have been felled, work with the parties involved to show goodwill towards the property owner and be respectful of his wishes as well.

2. Hangars

Of continuing concern are the condition of the present club hangars, property tax fees for private hangars, the construction of new hangars (both club and or private) and fees as we develop our new hangar plan.

The club is receiving requests for hangar space daily, sadly, at the moment we cannot accommodate all those whom are seeking a new home for their aircraft. There have been many requests to build a hangar, while there is land available, it really isn't as simple as saying "...okay go ahead and build your private hangar..."

The whole issue of the private hangars, at the east end of the field, has raised questions from individual members regarding their continued subsidy of the property tax increase (which saw an increase in their monthly fees, as a result of the construction of said hangars), also the building of future hangars, by members who do not have a vested interest in those hangars. To alleviate this concern, the Club Treasurer, James Erskine, has looked at the taxes that are paid and has determined a "mill rate" much like the way our municipal taxes are paid for our homes. We are exploring the possibility of implementing this mill rate, this will see some members monthly fees decreasing and others increasing. Essentially, the bigger your hangar, the more you can expect to pay and vice versa. We are not talking about significant increases, however we feel this will alleviate those concerns expressed by those members.

I would ask the membership to give this some thought, bring forward your concerns or ideas regarding this matter, to either the Annual General Meeting in August, or simply express your concerns to the Executive at any time via a chat over coffee or an email.

At the AGM we will be putting forth our ideas for new hangars and the proposed implementation of the fee structure.

The present club hangars are in sad shape, an eyesore and need to be replaced. The funds to do so are limited at the moment, however we can alleviate this through long or short-term loans, which will affect the monthly hangar rental fees.

Our plan (at the moment), will be to first-off, seek approval from the membership to move forward with the hangar project. These will be significant capitol expenditures and approval from the membership-at-large is a necessity.

We have identified areas where we can build up to 20 new hangars, with the first 10 to replace the club hangars for those current occupants. Those hangars are tentatively planned to be built where the present tie-downs are right now (tie-downs moving to east of the fuel pump). We would like to build the first hangar in a similar style to the 5-bay hangar at the east end of the field. Once the old hangars are torn down, the ground can be shorn-up and a new row of hangars built on that stretch of land.

The three other areas identified, are one on the south side of the runway, near the threshold of RWY 27, a row of hangars, south of the runway and west of the runway intersection of 09-27/ privately owned runway. The last row will require a significant amount of site preparation, as it is planned to be built adjacent to the private hangars and north of the parallel taxiway.

The locations are all tentative and will be presented at the AGM, however, none of this can take place without the membership agreeing to support the proposals. The AGM will also be a time to voice your concerns and provide ideas on this matter.

There are many questions for which we have no answers to, right now, particularly regarding what style of hangars we (the COMPLETE MEMBERSHIP) , would like to see. As a minimum we

are envisioning concrete flooring, electrical, WIFI access, doors (?!), however this is all up in the air.

We acknowledge there will be those members who do not wish to support any changes that will bring about an increase in fees, we simply cannot upgrade our facilities and not have a way to pay for it. None of the Executive want to see fee structures that are in-place at other fields, where hangar fees are simply ridiculous and detrimental to the long-term viability of the Club as a whole.

We presently have solutions for seeing the monthly hangar fee range from \$75 to \$150 per month, depending on the amortization periods of the required loans and the applied mill rate for property taxes.

3. Trees At The East End Of The Field

As many have experienced, the trees at the east end of the field are, a challenge at the best of times, throw in a breeze and you're airplane can be quite a handful. The trees, along with the associated CFS warning of a displaced threshold, may have been a factor with the overrun incident last year. Yes there were/are many other issues with this incident, however the combination is a recipe for an incident or worse, to an unsuspecting pilot.

We need to seek a solution to this matter to reduce the risk of future incidents. While I understand the members suggestions of just simply going in, cutting them down, then begging for forgiveness, this is not a solution. At the last Executive meeting the subject was brought forth again, so, we will be having a chat with the land owner to see if we can come to an agreement, perhaps even a financial agreement that would benefit him.

Please keep in mind that clearing the trees to ground-level, may not be the best solution. A member has pointed out that doing so, by clearing a corridor for the aircraft to land close to the threshold, will place the pilot in a position where-by vehicular traffic will not be visible. This increases the risk of an incident between an aircraft and a vehicle.

Stand-by for further on this one...

4. Winter Operations

This is a sticky issue each fall as to whether to continue operating through the winter months. Concerns have been raised by members as to why we continue to offer snowplowed runways for so few flights. First off, this is a decision by the membership, if you want the Executive to continue, then we will, if not, we won't.

Last winter we were able to offer a runway that was suitable for both ski, as well as wheel equipped aircraft and would prefer to continue doing so.

5. On-Field Camping

This proposal was put put forth last year by a member and it was initially deferred due to other matters, however' this is a proposal that we feel we should be embracing and have a plan put in place. This is something we feel will help promote general aviation, bring awareness to our field and spread a bit of goodwill.

There are obvious challenges with this, however, at the AGM, we will be seeking an individual to run with this idea, form a committee if that is what he/she wishes to do, with the purpose of formally putting in-place a plan to implement overnight camping.

6. Public Awareness of OHFC

To remain “welcome” to our neighbours, ideas have been put forth to increase local awareness of the club through Open-house days, holding events like classic car shows on the field.

Encouraging youth to become involved in aviation is key, none of this will matter if the younger generations lose interest completely. Promoting our passion for flight is something that we should embrace whenever the opportunity arises.

7. Volunteers

Running the club requires the help from many members, the members of the Executive, work many hours that are unseen, or acknowledged, we rely on assistance of all forms, be it fixing the snow-removal equipment, cutting the grass, the list goes on. Should you have skills, equipment or access to equipment, you feel the club could benefit from and you are willing to share please let us know, preferably via email so we can maintain a list of whom can would or would like to help. It is a frustrating to offer help by speaking to someone, then there is nothing further and all because the individual simply forget.

We have a dedicated group of members like Peter Thompson, who keeps the grass cut, Carl MacDonald, whose technical skills have been key to keeping most of the machinery operating, John Davies for his invaluable help returning the plow-truck to operational status, Mark Bamford, for his work on the plows and winter clearing.

These are just a few names whom you’ll see always at the forefront, along with Kirk, Alex, Don and many others. I truly thank all of them for the continued support of this club, many times at the expense of a nasty leer or two from the spouse waiting at home!

I thank all those whom I haven’t mentioned, but tirelessly come out to help on the work-party days, or simply offer their help when you have a question. We have many members who physically cannot help, but they are there on work party days doing their best.

FINAL WORDS (Honestly!!!)

As your Executive, we can do nothing major without your consent, every member has a voice. YES, every complaint, idea, suggestion, or criticism is heard and discussed. The outcome of these discussions may not be to the individual members’ wishes, however, we must consider the membership as a whole. In the end the primary concern moving forward must be for the membership, if you don’t like a decision, it is your right to seek a reason why, if you are still not happy, then raise the issue at an AGM, convince your fellow members, if they support you, then we, the Executive MUST do so as well.

Please come out to the AGM in August, it is a chance to voice your opinions, ideas, see what we propose for the updating of our facilities and there will be a BBQ afterwards.

There is a young lad whom cycles by the field regularly, he has been doing this for quite some time now. I would ask that you please be patient with his many questions, he is super keen to fly and hopefully we can accommodate that at some point (with his parents consent due to his age). He is an example of who we need to bring forth to keep general aviation going and the OHFC.....

Thanks for your patience with me

David