

MINUTES

Beaufort County Airports Board

April 9, 2026 | 10:00 am | Meeting called to order by Chairman Chris Butler
[Video and Transcript](#)

ATTENDANCE

Present: Chris Butler, Jim Starnes, Mark Bailey, Rich Sells, Leslie Adlam Flory, Thomas Sheahan, David Nelems, Dr. Eli Roth, and Mike Szczechowski

Absent: Nick Mesenburg

County Staff: Steve Parry, Deputy Airports Director; Jeremy Mathes, ARFF Chief; Brandon Chavis, ARW Airport Manager; and Rocio Rexrode, Airports Senior Administrative Specialist.

Hilton Head Island Town Council Liaison: Melinda Tunner

Public: Judy Elder, Talbert, Bright and Ellington, Inc.

AGENDA ADOPTION

The April 9, 2026, BCAB meeting agenda was adopted with unanimous consent.

APPROVAL OF MINUTES

Jim Starnes made a motion to approve the February 5, 2026, meeting minutes. Tom Sheahan seconded the motion. All were in favor, and the motion passed.

PUBLIC COMMENTS

TSA Support Initiative Recognition: Melinda Tunner recognized the Board's efforts in supporting TSA agents at the airport through a GoFundMe initiative. She expressed appreciation for the Board's leadership in organizing the effort and noted the strong community response, highlighting that Hilton Head residents once again demonstrated significant generosity and support. It was shared that the initiative generated approximately \$790 per agent, along with additional contributions from community members, including donated meals. Tunner emphasized that the support was meaningful and well-received by TSA staff. While the hope was expressed that such efforts would not be necessary in the future, it was acknowledged that similar situations could arise again.

DIRECTOR'S REPORT

Acknowledgment of Mr. Howard Ackerman's Passing: Steve Parry remarked that Howard will be missed, noting his extraordinary passion for the airport and his service on the Board. Condolences were extended to Mrs. Ackerman, who has been invited to attend the grand opening. It was noted that efforts will be made to include her in the event and related recognitions. The Board expressed appreciation and took a moment of silence to acknowledge Howard's contributions before proceeding.

New Board Member: Steve Parry recognized Mr. Michael Szczechowski and welcomed him as a new Board member, noting appreciation for his willingness to serve and contributions moving forward.

TSA Support Initiative: Steve Parry expressed appreciation for Board member Rich Sells and noted his role in launching and managing the GoFundMe campaign and in delivering cards to TSA agents. Parry expressed appreciation to all who contributed, including donations of food and gift cards, stating it was meaningful to TSA staff. Noted this was the second time such assistance had been provided and suggested the Board has identified a way to respond effectively if similar circumstances arise again, while expressing hope it would not be necessary.

- **TERMINAL UPDATE:**

Steve Parry emphasized that the project team is actively working through outstanding issues as the opening approaches, noting that this phase is often the most complex and fast-paced as systems are completed, tested, and integrated. He added that supply chain delays and pending system deliveries continue to present challenges during this stage. He provided updates on key milestones, including the successful test-fitting of jet bridges with aircraft, which confirmed alignments and the placement of permanent aircraft markings. Noted that flags were raised on the new flagpoles for the first time and that exterior signage at the terminal entrance is installed and illuminated. He reported interior progress, including the completion of carpet installation and the delivery and installation of furniture underway. Noted that TSA screening areas are being configured to allow for two operational lanes. Also reported that new TSA screening equipment has been delivered, tested, and is currently operational. Shared that gate areas are nearing completion, with counters and supporting infrastructure nearly finished and visual display equipment being installed. In response to a question, it was confirmed that the interior art installation is scheduled for completion shortly, following prior test fitting to determine appropriate levels of opacity.

- **PROJECT UPDATE:**

ARW Hangars Site Work: Steve Parry reported that ARW site work is expected to be completed by the end of April. He noted that the project is transitioning into the design-build phase, with a bid anticipated for a 7,200-square-foot transient hangar, which will be the first hangar constructed under this phase. Funding has been identified to support the initial build, and the project is moving forward as planned. He added that an update on the bid process is expected within approximately 30 days. Parry also noted that discussions continue regarding remaining vertical construction work and that staff are working through these matters with the Finance Committee and relevant stakeholders. He further reported that HTAX funding has been pursued to help cover the remaining funding gap, which is expected to generate future revenue to support additional hangar development.

Steve Parry introduced updates to the Hangar Use Agreement developed with the ARW Committee and airport leadership. Key revisions include added provisions on entity ownership (LLCs and shared ownership), strengthened tenant recertification requirements, and the establishment of an Agreement Review Panel to address disputes and ensure a fair review process. He noted the changes were made to address prior ownership and eligibility challenges, informed by practices at other airports. He also highlighted high hangar demand and stated the updated agreements take effect July 1, with a mid-June ARW meeting or town hall planned for further review.

FAA Identified Tree(s): Steve Parry reported that, following prior tree removals related to airspace conflicts, the FAA identified a small additional group of four trees requiring mitigation. He noted that the current approach is to top the trees rather than remove them entirely, consistent with FAA guidance, allowing for continued wildlife use while addressing obstruction concerns.

He explained that the trees are located behind the area near the new development by the Parker's and are within a larger tree cluster, making the impact visually minimal. Parry confirmed that the work will be completed in coordination with FAA timelines and that the airport is currently compliant, with no aircraft load restrictions in place and no Notices to Airmen (NOTAMs) required at this time.

Tower: Steve Parry reported that the FAA-approved Onyx UAV radar system is now fully installed and operational at the tower. He noted positive feedback from air traffic controllers, who are pleased with the system's enhanced situational awareness. The display allows controllers to view surrounding aircraft, including altitude and speed information, across a broad operational area extending toward Savannah, Ridgeland, and Beaufort airports, with customizable filtering settings available. He also reported that the tower beacon has been relocated to the top of the tower during the rehabilitation project, improving maintenance access and visibility. The tower rehabilitation is nearing completion, with only back-ordered blackout screen components remaining before final completion.

Steve Parry added that there have been no significant concerns from surrounding communities regarding beacon lighting and that the aviation community has expressed appreciation for improved visibility.

Parking Gates: Steve Parry reported that temporary parking gates are being installed at the airport while the design of the permanent system is finalized. He noted that materials are being installed and power connections are being completed, with the gates expected to arrive and be operational next week, enabling the implementation of a tag-based parking revenue collection system at the terminal. He stated that all tenants, including rental car operators, have been briefed on the new system. He also confirmed that parking gates will be installed at the general aviation area with appropriate flexibility for airport users. He explained that the intent is to ensure parking spaces are

used for airport-related activity while discouraging long-term storage of non-airport vehicles, such as derelict cars, boats, or trailers. He noted that airport users conducting legitimate business at the facility will continue to receive parking validation options through the FBO. A potential grace period (e.g., free initial parking time) is under consideration to accommodate short-term airport activity such as drop-offs, pickups, taxis, and deliveries. Parry stated that the effective date for paid parking operations depends on the arrival and activation of the gate system, which is expected imminently.

Entry Corridor Landscape Enhancement: Steve Parry reported that the area was redesigned to create a more welcoming and aesthetically aligned “Hilton Head Island” appearance, including upgraded plantings and overall entryway improvements. He noted that the landscaping contractor will maintain the area under an ongoing maintenance plan, including replacement of plants as needed and seasonal rotation of annuals. Parry added that additional flower beds are planned once fence repairs are completed. He emphasized that the improvements are intended to create a more attractive and welcoming airport entrance experience.

- **DEPARTMENT UPDATE:**

Converge Conference: Steve Parry reported that staff attended the Converge conference, where regional counties gathered to discuss economic development opportunities. He noted that the team highlighted the role of Hilton Head Island Airport in supporting economic development for Beaufort County and Hilton Head Island, as well as potential opportunities to support surrounding counties, including Jasper and Hampton.

ARFF Triennial Training: Steve Parry reported on the required FAA triennial emergency exercise and extended appreciation to the ARFF Chief and the Hilton Head Island Fire Department for their exceptional coordination and expedited planning of the event. He noted that the exercise was developed and executed in record time, and that it included participation from local schools and emergency response personnel. He described the exercise scenario as highly realistic, involving simulated aircraft incidents, fire response, and on-site casualty triage and transport. Parry emphasized that participants treated the exercise with a high level of seriousness and professionalism, contributing to a successful training outcome.

He concluded by thanking all involved agencies and staff for their efforts and noted the importance of the exercise in meeting FAA requirements and maintaining preparedness.

Wheels with Wings car Show: Steve Parry reported on the second annual Wheels and Wings Car Show, noting it was a successful community event held at the airport, with active airfield operations maintained throughout. He clarified that the airport was not closed and that the event was conducted alongside normal airport activity, with aircraft owners participating by displaying aircraft on-site. He reported that the event featured over 100 cars, approximately 500 spectators, and food

truck vendors. Steve Parry emphasized the strong community interest and noted the event's role in showcasing the airport as a public asset and encouraging community engagement.

He commended Brandon and Marlene for their leadership and coordination in organizing the event, including weekend efforts to ensure its success.

AIRPORTS' BUSINESS UPDATE:

Websites Under Construction: Steve Parry reported that the Beaufort Executive and Hilton Head Island airport websites are currently managed under Beaufort County's government system, which is not specifically designed to support enterprise fund operations or expanded commercial functionality.

He noted that the County has granted permission to develop separate, airport-specific websites to better support marketing, outreach, and operational needs. These new platforms will provide enhanced functionality, including the ability to book flights directly through the Hilton Head Airport website. He stated that the new websites are currently under development and are expected to significantly improve the airports' online presence and user experience.

Washington, DC Trip: Steve Parry mentioned that the Airports Director participated in the annual Washington, D.C. delegation visit with representatives from 11 airports across South Carolina and Georgia. He noted that the group met with congressional staff, representatives, and senators to discuss the overall health and needs of regional airports. He added that the Director also conducted additional independent meetings with local congressional offices to advocate for airport funding priorities, including support for Phase II of the terminal project and future development needs. Parry stated that the discussions were well-received and that feedback from staffers was positive, indicating potential progress on funding efforts moving forward.

SC Statehouse Trip: Steve Parry reported that the Airports Director visited the State House to engage state officials and provide advance notice of upcoming federal advocacy efforts. He noted that during this visit, the Director also discussed funding opportunities for Phase II of the terminal project. Steve Parry emphasized that the Director has been actively working to secure the funding needed for the continued development of the terminal and its future phase.

A/HTAX Applications: Steve Parry reported that it is currently the HTAX and ATAX application season. He noted that applications have been submitted for HTAX funding at both Beaufort Executive and Hilton Head Island airports, including support for hangar development and advertising initiatives.

He explained that HTAX funds may be used for local advertising, while ATAX funds are intended for broader marketing efforts targeting out-of-area markets and potential travelers in destination cities. Parry stated that these advertising efforts are designed to increase Hilton Head's visibility as a travel

destination through digital marketing platforms. He added that, with the development of the new airport website, there will be expanded capability to support and enhance these marketing efforts.

Media/Comms: Local TV, Chamber PowerHour (topics: APRT, TSA, Terminal, Seasonal Travel):

Steve Parry reported ongoing media and community outreach efforts, including interviews with local television outlets and participation in Chamber PowerHour events. He noted that discussions have focused on key topics, including the APRT (UAV Onyx radar system), TSA operations, terminal progress, and seasonal travel trends. He emphasized that the Director has been actively engaged in public-facing communications, helping to share the airport's story, provide operational updates, and communicate ongoing needs to the broader community.

This is Our Terminal - Life's a Beach! Steve Parry shared a photo of a passenger sunbathing on the grass while waiting for a flight, noting it as an example of positive passenger engagement with the airport's outdoor space. He highlighted that travelers are increasingly utilizing and enjoying the improved terminal environment and amenities, reflecting an enhanced customer experience.

UNFINISHED BUSINESS

There was no Unfinished Business.

NEW BUSINESS – ACTION ITEMS

The Action Items were rearranged; the Board decided to approve the Grant Item before electing the officers, and a new item (Nomination of Brian Turrisi – Board Appointment Consideration) was introduced.

DISCUSSION:

Board Membership and Appointment Process: The Board discussed membership classifications and qualification requirements for Board appointments, including distinctions related to pilot qualifications, proximity to the airport, and liaison roles. It was noted that Northern Beaufort County occasionally struggles to fill certain positions. A request was made for Board representation during future interview processes to ensure an appropriate understanding of general aviation-related questions and candidate qualifications. The Chair indicated that this request had been submitted to the County for consideration, though approval remains pending. Members discussed the importance of maintaining flexibility in Board composition to ensure access to highly qualified candidates, while also adhering to County rules and appointment structures. It was noted that while flexibility is desirable, final authority rests with County Council policies and procedures.

VOTE:

NOMINATION OF BRIAN TURRISI (BOARD APPOINTMENT CONSIDERATION):

A motion was introduced to recommend Brian for reappointment to the Board due to his prior service and unique qualifications, including his experience as a flight instructor, AOPA liaison, and active pilot with high

utilization. It was noted that Brian previously served on the Board and brought significant value through his aviation expertise and engagement.

The motion was seconded and discussed.

During the discussion, clarification was provided regarding Board classification requirements, appointment terms, and the County Council's role in the nomination and interview process. It was noted that appointment terms are generally two years with renewal options, and that the County has formalized its interview process.

Concerns were raised about prior informal reassignments between Board categories, and it was clarified that such adjustments are no longer permitted without County approval.

The Board acknowledged a prior misunderstanding regarding Brian Turrisi's classification and appointment status and clarified that coordination with County officials is required for future adjustments.

It was further noted that Turrisi would fill the vacancy previously held by Howard Ackerman, with the appropriate qualifications, including both proximity and pilot status.

The motion was called to a vote and passed unanimously. The Chair agreed to sign a recommendation letter on behalf of the Board.

1. GRANT ACCEPTANCE – RECOMMENDATION TO APPROVE A RESOLUTION TO ACCEPT SCAC ENTITLEMENT GRANT IN THE AMOUNT OF \$1 MILLION FOR THE HILTON HEAD ISLAND AIRPORT TERMINAL IMPROVEMENT PROJECT

Rich Sells made a motion to approve a recommendation to approve a resolution to accept a SCAC entitlement grant in the amount of \$1 Million for the Hilton Head Island Airport Terminal Improvement Project. Leslie Flory seconded the motion. All were in favor, and the motion passed.

2. ELECTION OF OFFICERS: CHAIR AND VICE CHAIR

CHAIR: Chris Butler made a motion to nominate Rich Sells as the BCAB Chair. Tom Sheahan seconded the motion. All were in favor, and the motion passed.

VICE-CHAIR: Rich Sells made a motion to nominate Tom Sheahan as the BCAB Vice-chair. David Nelems seconded the motion. All were in favor, and the motion passed.

CHAIRMAN UPDATE

The outgoing Chair, Chris Butler, expressed appreciation for the opportunity to serve as Chair of the Board and thanked fellow Board members for their support and collaboration during his tenure. He noted that it has been a positive experience working with the Board and commended the group for its teamwork. He stated his anticipation of continued progress on key airport projects, including the completion of the terminal Phase 2, and the advancement of hangar improvements at ARW.

Board Member Introductions

The outgoing Chair invited the newly appointed Board members, Mike Szczechowski and Dr. Eli Roth, to

introduce themselves.

Mike Szczechowski provided an overview of his background, noting that he has lived in the area full-time for approximately 3 years and has long-standing personal ties to Hilton Head Island. He described his professional background as being centered in business and general aviation. He previously worked for Gulfstream in Savannah and later spent a significant portion of his career in aviation management with a major fixed-base operator (FBO) at Teterboro Airport in New Jersey, now part of General Dynamics/Gulfstream. He stated that he currently works part-time as an aviation consultant and is also a licensed pilot with aircraft ownership and active engagement in general aviation.

Dr. Roth introduced himself as a retired cardiologist who has lived full-time in the area for approximately 11 years, with prior part-time residency as well. He noted that he is also a twin-engine instrument-rated pilot with prior aviation experience.

The Chair thanked both members for their willingness to serve on the Board and expressed appreciation for their time and expertise, noting his anticipation of working with them going forward.

1. Finance Committee

Members: *Vacant* (Chair), Chris Butler, and Tom Sheahan.

The Committee had nothing new to report this month.

2. Passenger Service Committee

Members: Leslie Adlam Flory (Chair), David Nelems, Jim Starnes, and Tom Sheahan

To bring new members up to speed, an update was provided on the Airport Ambassador Program, a volunteer customer service initiative that operates primarily during peak weekend travel periods.

The program supports passengers in the terminal by assisting with wayfinding, queue management, and general customer service. It was noted that volunteers serve on a rotating basis, typically once or twice per month, and undergo training prior to deployment. A training session is scheduled for May 7, with program operations expected to begin around Memorial Day weekend on Saturdays and Sundays. The program was described as highly successful and well-received by both the community and travelers, with continued strong volunteer participation.

3. ARW Facilities Use and Improvement Committee

Members: Chris Butler (Chair), Mark Bailey, David Nelems, Jim Starnes, and Nick Mesenburg

The ARW Committee provided no additional updates at this time beyond those previously discussed, including continued work on the new hangar use agreements and related policy updates.

4. HXD Airport Improvement Committee

Members: *Vacant* (Chair), Rich Sells, and Chris Butler

The HXD Committee provided no additional updates at this time beyond those previously discussed.

5. Government Affairs Committee

Members: Rich Sells (Chair)

It was noted that Board members and staff continue to engage in government affairs and legislative coordination efforts, with ongoing support at the local, state, and federal levels.

PUBLIC COMMENTS

There were no Public Comments.

ADJOURNMENT

The motion to adjourn was made at 11:13 a.m. It passed unanimously.

NEXT MEETING

May 14, 2026 | 10:00 a.m.

Town of Hilton Head Island, 1 Town Center Ct., Hilton Head Island, SC 29928