

Life Flight threatens to leave Aurora Airport



The Aurora State Airport in Aurora on Wednesday, Oct. 24, 2018. There is a \$37 million dollar proposal to expand the airport. ANNA REED / STATESMAN JOURNAL

Backs rezoning plot of land to allow expansion

Bill Poehler
Salem Statesman Journal
USA TODAY NETWORK

The fate of a long-vacant church camp in north Marion County could lead to the Northwest's largest air ambulance service to move its headquarters elsewhere.

A 16-acre parcel adjacent to the Aurora State Airport and bordered on three sides by airport-related businesses has long been eyed for development for decades and its owner, TLM Holdings, is seeking land-use exemptions to allow the land to be turned into hangars, shops and offices.

Neighbors and nearby cities are fighting the zone change, arguing the land should remain farmland, increased traffic from the development could clog roads and the development could lead to water quality problems.

But if it isn't rezoned and developed, one of the major employers at the airport, Life Flight Network, has threatened to

leave. "Because of the uncertainties of our ability to expand at the Aurora Airport, we are in the process of evaluating whether we stay at Aurora, or leave Aurora altogether and relocate to Redmond, Oregon, or Boise, Idaho," LifeFlight CEO Michael Griffiths wrote in a letter of support for the zone change.

"Both of these airports have land available for us to build sufficient office and hangar space to fulfill our long-term needs," he wrote.

The church camp

The land on Keil Road was a Methodist Church Camp until 1977, when it was purchased and the site was used to train Pacific Island pastors at the Beyond The Reef Theology Center.

More than a dozen small buildings were constructed among the trees to give the visiting pastors a place to stay while training. But the land was never rezoned from its

exclusive farm use designation.

It hasn't been used as a retreat since 1989 and the on-site church ceased operating in August 2017.

The plot has been eyed for airport-related development for decades as it's the only major portion of the remaining developable land that could be connected to the airport.

"The addition of this area to the airport only makes sense," said Tony Helbling of Aurora Airport-based Wilson Construction.

According to Marion County tax assessor records, the parcel was purchased in 2015 for \$2.1 million by TLM Holdings, a company owned by Ted Millar, who owns a number of parcels around the airport.

In 2017, the church training center was moved to Hawaii and the land has sat vacant.

It has not been farmed in the last half century.

"It's never made money as a commercial farming operation," said Alan Sorem, an attorney for TLM Holdings. "We're not going to see any kind of loss to the farming community as it's never really been part of the farming

community as we understand it."

Airport an economic driver

The Aurora State Airport, one of 28 airports owned and managed by the state, is on unincorporated land at the northern tip of Marion County.

It has grown to be the third busiest airport in the state with nearly 95,000 flights per year, trailing only Portland International Airport and Hillsboro Airport.

Life Flight, which has been based in multiple buildings at the airport since 2003, is the largest nonprofit air ambulance in the nation with 600 employees in four states.

Griffiths said the company has run out of space at the airport and moved some support services into Wilsonville. They estimate they needs 65,000 square feet for office and training and 100,000 square feet of hangar space to consolidate operations.

A concept plan for TLM Holdings at the site includes over 276,726 square feet of hangars, offices and shops, with enough space to house 37 aircraft. That plan could accommodate Life Flight.

Businesses have thrived at the airport and there were 1,087 jobs at Aurora Airport as of 2019, according to a presentation by TLM Holdings, and the new development is estimated to add

about 110 jobs.

The businesses proposed to be housed there are projected to bring in \$15 million each year.

But the more than 100 jobs the redevelopment would bring would further increase traffic, despite its remote location from population centers among farms.

"We've basically lived with the traffic for so long, on the weekends, the dull roar is pretty constant," said Lee Barkman, a neighbor of the airport.

TLM is offering to pay \$323,500 in improvements that would go towards intersections at Arndt Road and Airport Road and Ehlen Road and Airport Road, projects that have been identified as needed though they area not funded, but not the road itself where the workers would travel to the airport.

And there are also concerns about how additional traffic from people working at the airport could impact the already busy Boone Bridge on Interstate 5 south of Wilsonville.

Traffic engineer Lacy said the land would increase fewer than 200 trips during the peak hours.

"Based on our distribution of traffic, we're estimating at most 50 people at the peak hour heading north," Brown said.

Cities line up to oppose change

The cities of Aurora and Wilsonville have opposed the plan, as have private citizens, citing water quality issues that would come with the expansion because there is no sewer system at the airport and the desire for it to remain agriculture land.

"There are a lot of concern about water quality issues," said Joseph Schaefer, planning commission chair for Aurora. "The basic idea of having a public sewer system instead of septic systems is the same reason why Aurora about 22 years ago installed its first sewer system."

Aurora has expressed interest in annexing the airport into the city, something Marion County Commissioner Sam Brentano said he supports.

But that would take years.

In the meantime, once the plot of land is rezoned from farm use to public, it won't go back, despite it not being used as agricultural land for at least half a century.

"This is land that has been determined historically and by law as agricultural land to support the economy," said Dan Pauly, senior planner for Wilsonville. "With that, there is well established case law that any goal exceptions the burden of proof is intended to be high."

The Marion County commissioners held a public hearing for the property June 24 and voted to leave the record open on the zone change until its July 15 meeting, when it is expected to vote.

Bill Poehler covers Marion County. You may contact him at bpoehler@statesmanjournal.com or [Twitter.com/bpoehler](https://twitter.com/bpoehler)

Harold J. Wellman

MT. ANGEL - Harold J. Wellman passed away peacefully on June 21st, surrounded by his wife and the love of his family. He was 95 years old.

Harold was born in Silverton on November 7, 1924 to Leo & Frances Wellman. He grew up on the family farm in Scotts Mills with his older brother Clarence.

After school Harold worked with his dad on the farm. He also worked in the Portland Shipyards during WW II. After the war he returned to the family farm, eventually taking over from his father.

He met his wife, Betty Lou Phillips of Gervais, at a dance and they were married in 1949. They celebrated their 71st anniversary in February. They welcomed and raised 5 children.

Harold grew several varieties of grass seed and also ran a seed business for other farmers. Harold was very active in the Oregon Grass Seed Industry, including representing the industry in trade shows both here and in Europe.

While farming, Harold began giving to his community. He was a long term member of the Scotts Mills Fire Department and of the local School Board.

They sold the farm in 1991 and moved to Silverton, where Harold continued to give to his community. He was a volunteer driver for the Silverton Hospital Care Van and at the Oregon Garden for many years. His outgoing and friendly personality were a great asset to both of these organizations.

He and Betty Lou moved to Mt. Angel Towers in 2013.

He enjoyed hunting, fishing and woodworking, making a number of handmade gun stocks. Harold was also an avid reader and did the daily crossword puzzle most of his life. He also enjoyed helping friends & family whenever needed.

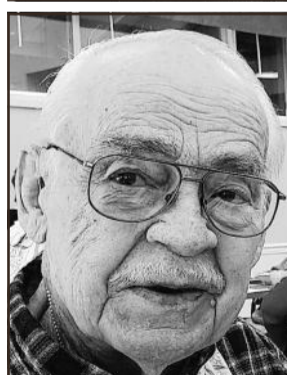
He will be greatly missed by his family and friends, especially his contagious smile and his sense of humor. Many will also miss sharing a "wee nip" with him!

He was preceded in death by his parents and brother. Harold is survived by his wife, his children - Mike (Debi) Wellman of Silverton, Julie (Dale) Bystrom of Molalla, Lorri (Jim) Abel of Bend, Mary (Gary) Casqueiro of Keizer and Suzanne (Rick) Toman of Carlsbad, CA. He also enjoyed his 11 grandchildren and 9 great grandchildren.

The family would like to say a special thank you to the staff of the Health Center at Mt. Angel Towers and to Willamette Valley Hospice for the loving care they gave to Harold.

A private service will be held with his family. A celebration of Harold's life will be held when possible.

The family suggests remembrances in Harold's honor be sent to Willamette Valley Hospice.



Due to the holiday, our office hours and obituary placement times may vary.

Please contact us at 503-399-6789 or obituary@statesmanjournal.com for further details.

CROWN
MEMORIAL CENTERS • CREMATION & BURIAL

Simplicity - Convenience - Low Cost

Simple Cremation \$795
Simple Direct Burial \$995
Church Funeral \$2965

SALEM 275 Lancaster Drive SE (503) 581-6265	TUALATIN 8970 SW Tualatin Sherwood Rd (503) 885-7800
PORTLAND 832 NE Broadway (503) 783-3393	TIGARD 12995 SW Pacific Hwy (503) 783-6869
EASTSIDE 1433 SE 122nd Ave (503) 783-6865	MILWAUKIE 16475 SE McLoughlin Blvd (503) 653-7076

Privately owned cremation facility. A Family Owned Oregon Business.

"Easy Online Arrangements"

www.CrownCremationBurial.com

OR-GC0348841-02