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DENVER EMBRACES FUTURE WITH AEROTROPOLIS PLANS

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By Garry Boulard



Bill Wichterman, Vice President A&C Properties

The purchase of 55 acres near the Denver International Airport is being regarded as the next step in the creation of an aerotropolis long dreamed of by Denver city leaders.

“This is something that is very much going to happen,” remarks Bill Wichterman, vice-president and general counsel of A&C Properties, of the proposed aerotropolis, or airport city.

“Anytime anyone has built a greenfield airport, the growth has followed it,” continues Wichterman. “And I can’t think of any reason why Denver would be the exception to the general rule—in fact, I can think of some reasons why Denver would be even more successful.”

Altogether, the Phoenix-based A&C Properties owns over 1,200 acres just 2.5 miles south of the DIA terminal. The company envisions transforming those acres into a thriving blend of offices, warehouses, shops, restaurants and hotels.

It’s a vision that neatly folds into the original aerotropolis proposal announced three years ago by Denver Mayor Michael Hancock, who said: “We have a unique opportunity to take our region’s biggest

economic engine and spark a new era of growth that will transform metro Denver and revitalize the regional economy.”



Photo Credit: John Birkey

Denver’s aerotropolis would ultimately see the development of aerospace, bioscience and a range of other industries in the roughly 9,000 acres of unused DIA land.

Hancock added that the aerotropolis will “create a development that thrives on the airport’s natural synergy, attracting businesses and jobs that benefit from a close relationship to the airport and its inherent access to national and international markets.”

The most prominent proponent of airport cities is University of North Carolina business professor John “Jack” Kasarda, who, in his book, *Aerotropolis: The Way We’ll Live Next*, foresees aerotropolis developments in decades to come blooming across the country, each representing not just a new function for the nation’s airport spaces, but a “vital new economic paradigm.”

Aerotropolis supporters often point to similar developments in the Amsterdam, Munich and Dallas/Fort Worth airports. But airport officials in those cities say building an aerotropolis is something that takes time, and needs to be done with regional cooperation.



Photo Credit: John Birkey

During the first Aerotropolis Americas conference last fall at the Dallas Fort Worth International Airport, Dallas Mayor Mike Rawlings emphasized the need for cities and counties to come together with a single aerotropolis vision.

Rawling’s remarks were particularly important given an ongoing dispute between the City of Denver, the City of Aurora, and adjacent Adams County regarding the Denver aerotropolis. Adams County officials have maintained that Denver’s plans are in violation of a 26 year-old intergovernmental agreement between Adams and Denver counties regarding future development at the airport.

Adams County officials are additionally worried that if the aerotropolis is developed as currently planned, it will hurt business in Adams and perhaps even tempt some industries to move out of the county in favor of the aerotropolis.



Porteos Concept Plan

Negotiations between the various governmental entities have been on-again, off-again. Mayor Hancock has expressed his frustrations with the differences of opinion, noting at the Aerotropolis Americas conference that “Regions that don’t figure out how to work together will be left behind in the 21st century.”

Despite the dispute, the Federal Highway Administration has awarded Denver a \$500,000 grant to begin regional aerotropolis planning.

Meanwhile the recent \$9.6 million sale of the 55 acres owned by A&C Properties to the Denver-based Forum Real Estate Group is being seen as evidence that the aerotropolis is becoming a reality.

“Its huge news,” says Wade Fletcher, managing director of Newmark Grubbs Knight Frank Capital Markets, in reference to a deal that will eventually see the development of a 7,500-space parking complex in the aerotropolis.

“It’s just one more piece of the puzzle falling into place,” adds Fletcher.

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