

Grand Haven Airport Board Meeting Minutes,

January 27th, 2026

Chairperson Ben Ennenga called the meeting to order at 5:30 pm

Roll Call: Richard Clapp, (board secretary)

Members present: Dennis Swartout, Dale Hagenbuch, Richard Clapp, Ben Ennenga, Tricia Harrell

Others Present: Earle Bares- Airport Manager, Tom Mandersheid- Airport Liaison

Guests: Mayor Bob Monetza, Jennifer Bares, Robert Shelley (BLP), Mike Dora (city council member), Rex Slingerland, Jim Hagen, Roland Ashby

Summary:

This document provides a comprehensive summary of the recent Grand Haven Airport Board meeting. The meeting covered a range of operational, technical, and administrative topics, including weather advisory systems, maintenance updates, financial reviews, and community engagement.

Approval of Meeting Minutes, November 25, 2025

Tricia Harrell: Did we decide to remove the circle to land approach limitation.

Earle Bares: Prudent to pursue this. In process.

Amend 11/25/25 minutes to reflect change to remove the word “must” regarding tree removal as related to the circle to land minimums. This is an amendment to the Airport Managers report section.

Motion by Dennis Swartout to accept the minutes as presented. Support by Richard Clapp.

Motion carried unanimously.

First Call to the Audience:

Jennifer Bares regarding planning for airport open house/ dawn patrol.

Request to allow fiberoptic line to be run on airport property.

Message Shape to request their review to keep fiberoptic line on their property.

Motion by Clapp to table discussion pending review by shape. 4/5 approved, Ennenga dissents.

Old Business: Community Solar Project Overview, Rob Shelley (BLP)

Proposed Location & Rationale

- The preferred site is a city/airport-owned parcel just south of Comstock and 168th, chosen for its suitability and existing infrastructure (double circuit pole line for easy grid connection).
- The site is inside city limits, which avoids extra township taxes and leverages city-owned land for future expansion (e.g., battery storage, training).

Project Details

- The solar array would be about 500 kW, with 12–15 rows of south-facing panels, spaced 15–17 feet apart for maintenance.
- The project is intentionally small, with room for future expansion if needed.

Regulatory & Safety Considerations

- All FAA regulations must be met; no construction can proceed without FAA approval.
- The site is in the runway approach path, so compliance with airspace and safety standards is critical.
- Board members emphasized the need for FAA and state approval as a first step before further planning.

Project Process & Next Steps

- BLP is seeking feedback from three stakeholders: its own board, City Council, and the Airport Board.
- If supported, the next steps include issuing an RFP for design/costing, seeking grants, and working out land lease/sale details.

- The goal is to pre-sell about 50% of the panels before signing contracts, with construction targeted to begin before July 4, 2026.

Board Discussion Points

- The board raised concerns about selling airport land, preferring leasing to preserve airport property.
- Safety, airspace, and long-term airport needs were emphasized as priorities.
- The board recommended moving FAA approval to the top of the project checklist.
- In exchange for the easement, BLP proposes clearing approximately 10 wooded acres of airport property to install solar panels, which would allow for future expansion up to 1 MW in capacity, though the immediate investment is .3 MW. All necessary paperwork will be coordinated with City Council and stakeholders.
- A preliminary schedule includes seeking City Council approval next week, issuing RFPs for land clearing and project development in the spring, and completing FAA permitting as part of the developer's design submission. Construction is planned for 2027. Only once sufficient leases are sold will land clearing and panel installation proceed, with the developer required to obtain all necessary FAA approvals based on their specific site design.
- Concerns center on whether using airport property for solar panels fits FAA safety requirements and city development plans, especially regarding approach zone clearances and potential runway expansion. Some board members stress the importance of adhering to federal guidelines, securing fair compensation, and maintaining flexibility for future airport growth. There are mixed opinions on moving forward, with suggestions to let city officials and relevant agencies make the final decisions based on full input and regulatory review. Existing contracts for similar city-owned properties are cited as references for compensation, and survey results indicate only a minority of residents would buy into a proposed solar program without broader support.

The board discussed FAA regulations and the complexities of managing airport property, including compensation for land used in projects. Concerns were raised about contract details, particularly regarding payment, easements, and project timelines. The group agreed to table the discussion until members could review the contract and gather more information. A special meeting was scheduled for February 5th at 5:30 PM at the airport to continue discussions and address outstanding questions related to the solar facility easement, project duration, future investments, and city interests.

Airport Managers Report

- Airport activity has been steady, with fuel sales above average despite lower overall operations. Weather may have reduced flight activity but did not affect fuel demand.
- Tree trimming and removal projects are ongoing to ensure compliance with state and FAA standards. Costs and contracts for North, South, East, and West approaches were outlined, and work is scheduled or underway.
- The weather station works reliably, although there have been occasional conflicts with runway lights during activation. This issue is being addressed.
- Hangar doors have been problematic recently due to freezing; adjustments and repairs continue. There are new shutoff valves installed for water systems in maintenance areas.
- Runway rehabilitation and construction of new hangars are planned for spring. A grant from the state covers recent crack sealing and pavement marking with no cost to the airport.
- Fuel sales reached their second-highest total in ten years, attributed to active new tenants and increased skydive activity.
- Maintenance issues persist with lighting (multiple edge lights out) and older heaters in aircraft maintenance buildings, which are scheduled for replacement.
- All hangars are rented, with a waiting list growing. Some interested parties require larger hangars than currently available.
- Land lease rates have increased to \$0.40/sq ft/year, with comparable Michigan averages at \$0.46. Lease agreements and possible hanger locations are under review, including changes to the airport layout plan if needed.
- Most aircraft fit into 42-foot wide hangars, though there's rising interest in larger spaces for bigger planes.

Airport Liaison Report

- Accounts receivable overdue by over 90 days at \$727.65; the cash balance stands at \$451,722.82.
- A contract amendment was received regarding crack sealing and paint markings, but work hasn't started yet. The contract number appears incorrect, relating instead to gas dispensers, which have been paid and closed out.
- A new contract for crack sealing and marking, valued at approximately \$54,000, arrived unexpectedly. We are awaiting confirmation on its validity.

- Tom Mandersheid will be unavailable from February 10th due to knee replacement surgery, likely until the end of March.
- Capital budget draft is completed and sent for City Council review. Budget includes funds for replacing runway lights.
- Regarding tie-down fees: our fee schedule lists \$25 per day, but the budget reflects \$0. There is a need for clarification on whether to charge fees or rely on fuel sales for revenue, as fuel purchases currently provide more benefit than charging tie-down fees directly.
- Board discussion is required to decide on tie-down fee policy upon meeting February 5th.

Second Call to the Audience

Roland Ashby, 15003 River Bluff Place, Grand Haven, praised the board's efforts to creatively use unused airport property. He suggested creating a safe landing area near runway 27, possibly a 50-foot-wide lane in the overrun leading to the solar field, to add safety in case of engine failure on takeoff. This could enhance safety and might even receive FAA approval.

Adjournment

There being no further business, the meeting was adjourned at 7:56 pm.

Respectfully submitted,

Richard Clapp

Airport Board secretary