Brown Aviation Strategies

Research Report No. 001 — Executive Summary

Longmont Airport Noise Town Hall

Understanding FAA Authority, Local Government Responsibilities, and Community Expectations

Version 1.0 | July 30, 2026

> Airport-community conflict cannot be addressed effectively through isolated noise procedures. It requires an integrated system of FAA-informed governance, measurable performance, transparent communication, technical expertise, financial capacity, and continuous community engagement.

On July 27, 2026, the City of Longmont held an Airport Noise Town Hall addressing what the City can and cannot do about aircraft noise associated with Vance Brand Municipal Airport. John Putnam of Kaplan Kirsch, serving as the City's special airport counsel, presented the federal framework governing airspace, aircraft operations, airport access, federal grant obligations, and the airport-proprietor role. Community questions reflected frustration with repetitive operations, preferred hours, touch-and-go activity, complaint response, and the limits of voluntary procedures.

The meeting demonstrated an enduring expectation gap. Aircraft noise is experienced locally, but legal authority is divided among federal control of airspace and flight, FAA regulation, airport-sponsor obligations, limited proprietor authority, and local land-use and property-management powers. Municipal ownership does not give a city unrestricted authority to direct pilots, establish a curfew, or prohibit an aeronautical activity. It also does not eliminate local responsibility.

Within the federal framework, an airport sponsor remains responsible for airport property, leases, facilities, reasonable and nondiscriminatory access, compatible land-use efforts, airport revenue, financial planning, communication, and evidence-based administration. The practical issue is therefore not whether local government has a role, but how that role should be defined and exercised lawfully.

On July 28, the Longmont City Council considered consultant work that shifted the discussion from authority to implementation. Airport Monitoring Systems assessed the City's Voluntary Noise Abatement Program. Its written report found that approximately 88 percent of **total 2025 operations** occurred during the preferred 8:00 a.m.–8:00 p.m. window and approximately 65 percent of total operations used preferred Runway 29. Neither figure alone proves program effectiveness. The preferred-hours measure does not establish conformance with every VNAP element or isolate causation. The runway-use result is materially affected by wind and should be normalized for operating conditions.

Flight-path, altitude, pattern, operator-specific, complaint-response, and community-outcome measures require additional analysis. This supports the report's principal finding:

> A comprehensive voluntary noise-abatement program is not necessarily effective unless its objectives, conformance, and outcomes are measurable.

That finding does not conclude that Longmont's VNAP is ineffective. It establishes that a comprehensive list of procedures, communication channels, and recommendations is not sufficient evidence of effectiveness.

Council unanimously directed the City Manager to return by the end of the third quarter of 2026 with implementation options addressing the AMS recommendations, operational data, a technical advisory group, operator-specific analysis, measurable targets, structured complaint tracking, resident feedback, and public reporting. A second motion, approved 6–1, directed communications improvements involving AWOS, the airport website, third-party aviation platforms, quiet-hours and touch-and-go guidance, and saturated-pattern information. These directions did not establish mandatory operating restrictions.

Bolton & Menk presented a rates-and-charges study covering leases, development, reserves, capital capacity, and landing-fee scenarios. The study modeled $1, $2, and $3 per 1,000-pound cases. These were estimates, not approved fees or guaranteed revenues. Council's 4–3 direction requested an all-of-the-above financial-sustainability package, including $3 models for based and non-based aircraft; it did not enact a landing fee.

During the meeting, City budget staff orally corrected the study's published working-capital forecast, stating that carryover had been duplicated and that the corrected balance declined but remained positive during the five-year period. BAS has not obtained a corrected exhibit or adopted minutes. The report therefore does not publish replacement balances or independently validate the oral correction.

Findings

1. Federal authority and local sponsor responsibility coexist.
2. Municipal ownership does not equal unrestricted operational control.
3. Voluntary programs can and should be measured without being converted into mandatory restrictions.
4. Complaints document community experience but generally cannot carry the evidentiary burden for a restriction by themselves.
5. Operational measures require context, including wind, weather, safety, airspace, aircraft performance, and data quality.
6. Council direction is not implementation; capacity, cost, ownership, and timelines must follow.
7. Financial accuracy and version control are governance requirements.
8. Operating sustainability and capital capacity are separate questions.
9. Technical expertise should be organized through an accountable advisory structure.
10. Trust requires recurring public reporting, visible corrections, and continuous engagement.

Colorado Relevance

Longmont's experience is applicable to other Colorado communities experiencing growth in general aviation and flight training. Effective governance begins by identifying authority, establishing a defensible baseline, selecting measurable objectives, assigning technical and financial capacity, reporting results, engaging stakeholders, and adjusting measures based on evidence.

This executive summary is educational research and does not provide legal advice or advocate for a particular restriction, fee, or development outcome.