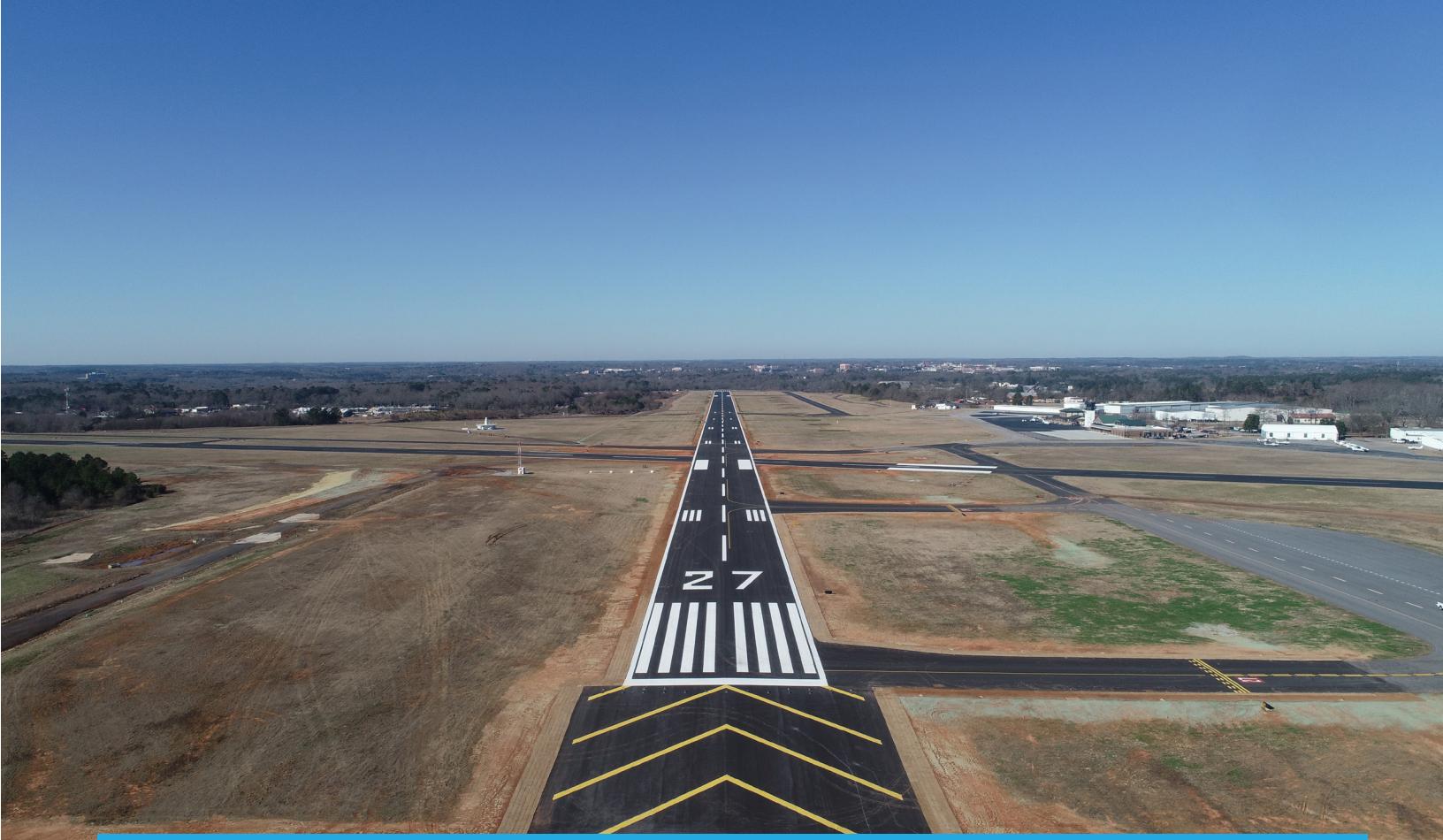


# ATHENS-BEN EPPS AIRPORT

## STRATEGIC PLAN 2019





## CONTRIBUTORS

### ATHENS AIRPORT AUTHORITY

Les Shindelman, Chair  
Robert Miles  
Michael Pierce  
David Asman  
Elizabeth Higgins  
Bayne Smith

---

### AIRPORT DIRECTOR

Mike Mathews

### AIRPORT COORDINATOR

Angela Dalton

### STRATEGIC PLAN ADVISOR

Catherine Bennett

### STRATEGIC PLAN CONSULTANT

Amanda J Hill, MaesAwyr, LLC

# TABLE OF CONTENTS



MESSAGE FROM THE CHAIRMAN	4
MESSAGE FROM THE DIRECTOR	5
HISTORICAL CHALLENGES + FUTURE OPPORTUNITIES	8
FOUNDATIONAL ELEMENTS	10
STRENGTHS, WEAKNESSES, OPPORTUNITIES, AND THREATS ANALYSIS	11
STRATEGIC PRIORITIES, GOALS, AND INITIATIVES	12
IMPLEMENTATION PLAN	18



I am proud to introduce the 2019 Strategic Plan for Athens-Ben Epps Airport (AHN). This plan was jointly developed by the Airport Authority and AHN staff to guide and direct collaborative efforts to achieve an exciting future for our airport.

Our Strategic Plan includes six key elements. Our Mission describes our core purpose. Our Vision defines what we aspire to achieve over the next five years. Our Strategic Priorities and Goals define our critical objectives. Initiatives outline how we will achieve our priorities and goals. Finally, Performance Measures establish targets for attainment and a means to measure progress.

The Strategic Plan goals for charting the airport's future direction are ambitious but achievable. They are focused on passenger service, expanded general aviation services, community engagement, financial strength and development. The safety and security of our customers is interwoven in each of our goals and is a reflection of the importance we place on creating and maintaining a safe and secure environment.

With our Strategic Plan now developed, we turn our attention to its implementation. Executing the initiatives that we have defined will require a great deal of organizational focus and teamwork. I am confident that the results will deliver important benefits to our customers and the community.

The Airport Authority and AHN staff are committed to the successful implementation of our Strategic Plan. We look forward to actively engaging with all of you as we work together "to comfortably connect Athens to the world".

**Les Shindelman, Chair**  
ATHENS AIRPORT AUTHORITY

The Athens – Ben Epps Airport is currently experiencing an exciting and challenging time. The Airport is focused on attracting general aviation business along with working toward new, sustainable air service development for Athens Clarke-County and surrounding communities. This Strategic Plan demonstrates and highlights both the desire and dedication among the Athens-Clarke County leadership, the Airport Authority, and Airport Staff to take on the priorities and goals necessary to enhance our role and service offerings in the region for our customers, residents, partners, and stakeholders.



The Airport is a vital and growing economic catalyst within our community – one which provides services to corporate, military, and charter operations, along with general aviation services for business and individuals across the state and region and throughout the United States.

We are continuously mindful of our responsibilities and continue to be good stewards of the airport. We strive to keep the mission of the Athens - Ben Epps Airport in mind as we provide quality services and work to stimulate the economic growth and development of Athens-Clarke County and its surrounding areas. We welcome your continued support as we continue to serve this great region with the priorities, goals, and initiatives gained from this Athens-Ben Epps Airport Strategic Plan.

**Mike Mathews, Airport Director**  
ATHENS-BEN EPPS AIRPORT

“

“Athens-Ben Epps Airport is a valuable resource in strengthening our economic development efforts in Athens-Clarke County, as well as providing jobs, opportunities, and quality of life for our residents and visitors. This critical infrastructure link to the world will continue to contribute to our region’s growth and success.”

**-- KELLY GIRTZ, MAYOR**  
*ATHENS-CLARKE COUNTY UNIFIED GOVERNMENT*

“The Airport Authority and airport management have been deliberate and professional in formulating this Strategic Plan. Behind the plan is work already well underway to attract a commercial airline and, in collaboration with our partners, provide professional education programs for our citizens.”

**-- JERRY NESMITH, DISTRICT 6 COMMISSIONER**  
*ATHENS-CLARKE COUNTY UNIFIED GOVERNMENT*

“Even within the last three years, there has been substantial federal, state, and local investment in the Airport in the form of an extended/reclaimed runway and a new commercial passenger terminal. This Strategic Plan will guide the direction of operations to optimize this incredible community asset.”

**-- BLAINE WILLIAMS, MANAGER**  
*ATHENS-CLARKE COUNTY UNIFIED GOVERNMENT*







# ATHENS-BEN EPPS AIRPORT

Historical Challenges + Future Opportunities

Athens, Georgia was established in 1805, named for Athens, Greece with the intention of creating a “center of learning.” As Georgia’s fifth most populous city with more than 120,000 residents in 2017, major employers include the University of Georgia (UGA), Piedmont Athens Regional Hospital, Pilgrim’s Pride Corporation, and Caterpillar. Forbes ranked Athens number one in Georgia and number six nationwide of best small places for business and careers in 2018. Recreational, arts, and cultural activities abound throughout the area for residents and visitors.

# Airport Environment

Athens-Ben Epps Airport (FAA identifier: AHN) is home to Georgia's first aviator, Ben Epps, and was the first civilian airport in the state, established in 1919. Today it's a public-use airport certificated under 14 CFR Part 139 with two runways – Runway 9/27 the longest at 6,122 feet and recently rehabilitated – an air traffic control tower, aircraft rescue and firefighting equipment, a modern commercial passenger terminal, general aviation terminal, full services and amenities to accommodate nearly any aircraft, and space to expand and improve its facilities in the future. For Fiscal Year (FY) 2018, AHN's operational statistics were as follows:

- 37,506 AIRCRAFT OPERATIONS
- 3,013 PASSENGER ENPLANEMENTS
- 95 BASED AIRCRAFT

## Air Service Status

AHN is currently without scheduled airline service. The Airport has enjoyed varying levels of successful service over the years since 1950, while as recently as 2014 dealt with significant service challenges and disruptions through the Essential Air Service program administered by USDOT.

The Transportation Research Board (TRB) reports the primary challenges currently faced by small communities, including for Athens-Clarke County, include:

- PASSENGER PREFERENCE FOR LARGER AIRPORTS, LEGACY NETWORK HUB AND/OR LOW-COST CARRIER SERVICE
- LOCAL DEMOGRAPHIC AND ECONOMIC CHARACTERISTICS THAT HISTORICALLY APPEAR UN-ATTRACTIVE TO AIRLINES
- FRAGMENTATION OF LOCAL PASSENGER TRAFFIC BASE AMONG COMPETING NEARBY AIRPORTS

The trend of airports in small communities losing and experiencing service reductions began nearly two decades ago. Historical factors include fuel pricing, fleet efficiency, airline consolidation, hub consolidation, and global recession. Further, the industry-wide pilot and aviation mechanic workforce shortage disproportionately affects small communities.

As of March 2019, AHN is undertaking an Air Service Development Study to provide analyses and recommendations for recruiting a network airline to the Airport.



# FOUNDATIONAL ELEMENTS

---

Considering and establishing AHN's mission, vision, and values provides guidance and standards to staff and Authority members in how they navigate their work priorities and actions. The mission statement serves as AHN's purpose and reason for existence. Vision is more forward focused in communicating to stakeholders and the public what AHN strives for in its mission. Values statements are the basis of organizational culture and principles to guide decision making. These elements form the basis of this strategic plan.

## Mission

AHN's mission is to promote a safe, consistent, and efficient aviation environment; provide quality aviation products and services; and serve as a catalyst in the creation and development of aviation-related industry in Athens-Clarke County.

## Vision

AHN envisions being the regional airport for Northeast Georgia, driving economic development while comfortably connecting Athens to the world.

## Values



SAFETY AND SECURITY

FINANCIAL SELF-SUFFICIENCY

CUSTOMER FOCUS

EMPLOYEES ARE OUR GREATEST ASSET

ATHENS PRIDE

## STRENGTHS, WEAKNESSES, OPPORTUNITIES, AND THREATS ANALYSIS

A Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities, and Threats (SWOT) analysis is a high-level strategic planning tool for organizations to identify and evaluate internal and external influences as they pertain to a common vision or goal. Considering these factors together help identify paths to achieve priorities and goals during the strategic planning process.

The SWOT analysis for this plan was conducted with AHN staff and Airport Authority members at the onset of the strategic planning process as a foundational exercise for Strategic Priorities and Goals framework.

### STRENGTHS

Certificated Commercial Airport (FAR Part 139) – One of Only Nine in The State Of GA

Robust Charter Business with UGA Athletics

Highly-Utilized Hangar Facilities

Department of Defense (DOD) Military Fuel Contract

Falcon Flight School Consistently Growing

Convenient Location and Access

Staff is Competent and Airport Authority is Engaged

Operations Financially Sustainable

### WEAKNESSES

Lack of Commercial Service

Relatively Higher Cost to General Aviation Operators

Lack of On-Field Support Vendors (Catering, Maintenance, Fueling, Etc.)

Certain Aspects of Facilities Could Limit Growth (Runway, Land, Inadequate Ramp Space)

Low Awareness in Community

Staffing to Support On-Going Operations

Lack of Cohesive Vision within Community

### OPPORTUNITIES

Local Industry, Classic Center, And UGA Demand for Commercial and Charter Service

Proximity to Athens Tech/Training for Future Businesses

Strengthen Relationships with Public and Local Partners

Workforce Availability – Internships + Assistance

### THREATS

Airline Industry Structure + Pilot Shortage Not Favorable to Service Smaller Airports

Future Federal Funding



## STRATEGIC PRIORITIES, GOALS, AND INITIATIVES

---

Strategic planning in general is a process by which organizations formalize their goals and priorities for the subsequent few years and define the path to achieve them. The context of strategic planning for airports involves specialized considerations given the technical, operational, political, and regulatory environments in which airports exist. In AHN's Strategic Plan, the following Priorities, Goals, and Initiatives establish the framework for development, growth, and visibility through 2023, though many priorities and goals are planned for implementation in the shorter term.

## 01

STRATEGIC  
PRIORITY ONE

## Develop a Comprehensive Development Plan

Implementation of most of the Strategic Plan priorities and goals rely on vital planning and analyses of a long-term comprehensive airport development plan, as significant market demand and capital priorities have emerged in the years since the last major plan was completed. Forecasts, airport design and safety standards, operational and capacity constraints, facility development alternatives, timelines, and financial feasibility for future infrastructure development will be considered and coordinated closely to support these strategic priorities.

A comprehensive development plan will help drive development, marketing, and recruiting decisions and initiatives throughout the term of this Strategic Plan, while also meeting FAA and GDOT requirements.

### **Strategic Goal 1.1 Complete an Airport Layout Plan by December 2020**

- Begin project scoping with GDOT by May 2019 and complete by June 2019 and communicate contracting preferences to GDOT
- Execute project contract with GDOT + consultant by August 2019

### **Strategic Goal 1.2 Update Five-year Airport Capital Improvement Program (ACIP) Annually**

- Regular review and alignment of ACIP priorities related to Strategic Plan and complete by October each year
- Identify local and non-FAA/GDOT funding sources

### **Strategic Goal 1.3 Evaluate need to update Master Plan by 2024**

- Formally meet biannually with FAA and GDOT to discuss priorities and goals



## STRATEGIC PRIORITY TWO

### **Establish Scheduled and Increase Non-Scheduled Passenger Service**

Sustainable, viable passenger air service at AHN, both scheduled and non-scheduled, is a key economic development force to serve the Athens-Clarke County community and Northeast Georgia region, and contribute to increasing on-airport revenue generation. As of early 2019, AHN is working on an Air Service Development Study to provide analyses and recommendations for recruiting a network airline to the Airport. AHN to American Airlines' hub at Charlotte Douglas International Airport (CLT) has been preliminarily identified as the ideal non-stop route for which to solicit new service.

Given AHN's previous air service challenges and highly competitive nature of the US airline industry, particularly with service in small markets and AHN's proximity to Delta's Atlanta hub, focusing efforts and budgets on new network air service routes and exploring additional non-scheduled options are critical priorities of this strategic plan. Currently, UGA sports teams and their competitors utilize charter flights into and out of AHN, and there may be additional charter demand to explore within UGA, both sport and non-sport related.

Further, the 10,000 annual enplanements threshold enables AHN to receive \$1 million in federal Airport Improvement Program (AIP) entitlement funding each year rather than the \$150,000 reserved for non-primary airports. This will assist AHN in funding its capital needs to support higher levels of service and facility development. Enplanements from certain non-scheduled charter flights are reported to USDOT and count toward the 10,000-enplanement threshold for FAA AIP funding.

#### **Strategic Goal 2.1 Recruit and establish sustainable scheduled air service with 10,000 annual passenger enplanements by June 2022**

- Complete the pro-forma forecast and Air Service Study for non-stop service AHN-CLT and begin pitching/negotiating with American Airlines
- Prepare and submit 2019 Small Community Air Service Development Program (SCASDP) proposal for AHN-CLT
- Attend two Air Service Conferences as budgets and schedules allow with presentations to two airlines each

#### **Strategic Goal 2.2 Increase the non-scheduled enplanements by 50% from 3,000 to 4,500 by June 2021**

- Explore additional Athens-area charter opportunities including UGA, Classic Center, and casino charters
- Develop and execute a marketing plan for non-scheduled carriers

## 03

STRATEGIC  
PRIORITY THREE

## Expand the General Aviation Experience

General aviation operations encompass recreational and flight training in small aircraft, business and charter aircraft of all sizes and purposes, corporate flight department operations, medical evacuation and air ambulance services, law enforcement, agricultural operations, and much more. It contributes economic and quality of life impacts on communities through job creation, education, tourism, healthcare, and public safety.

AHN's t-hangars and FBO hangars are more than 95% full, which indicates there may be unmet demand for these facilities. Continuing to attract general aviation tenants and visitors of all varieties will impact AHN in positive ways by propelling demand for on-airport facilities and services, and ultimately increasing on-airport revenues and community tax base.

### **Strategic Goal 3.1 Identify and enhance facilities, products, and services to retain and increase the general aviation customer base**

- Establish customer satisfaction survey program for both tenants and visitors to identify potential customer service and facility/service initiatives

### **Strategic Goal 3.2 Increase annual operations to 50,000 by 2023**

- Prepare general aviation initiatives feasibility study and plan, including feasibility of self-service fueling



## STRATEGIC PRIORITY FOUR

### **Inform and Connect Community, Businesses, and Customers**

AHN, the Athens-Clarke County community, and visitors from beyond the region will benefit greatly through increased Airport communications, engagement, and visibility. Prolific online technology provides valuable tools for outreach and engagement, while fly-ins, airport events, and community meetings offer chances to introduce and forge connections with the aviation and non-aviation public. Communicating and disseminating on-airport news such as construction projects, economic benefits, new or expanding operators or businesses, and celebratory student pilot milestones help bolster the airport's image as a community resource and encourage public participation. Educational partnerships and workforce assistance opportunities with UGA and Athens Tech abound to support this Strategic Priority.

#### **Strategic Goal 4.1 Publish an annual report by November 30 each year for prior fiscal year beginning in 2020**

- Identify resources, budget, timeline, and content
- Internal draft for FY2019 annual report will serve as preparation for FY2020

#### **Strategic Goal 4.2 Implement a communications plan that encompasses strategies for marketing, community outreach and engagement by July 2019**

- Determine media and online platforms and develop content management plan and strategy for quarterly newsletter and social media engagement
- Initiate website update
- Pursue local partnerships with economic development agencies, business leaders, and community groups

#### **Strategic Goal 4.3 Utilize UGA connections to provide experiential opportunities to lessen work burden on staff by May 2019**

- Draft workforce assistance requests, management plans, and budget
- Identify and leverage UGA contacts to encourage student interest and evaluate potential hires

#### **Strategic Goal 4.4 Pursue aviation maintenance technology curriculum partnership with Athens Technical College by 2022 with goal of graduating first class in 2024**

- Brainstorm with peers and state partners for financial requirements; identify on-airport needs; and determine feasibility
- Solicit interest and contributions

## 05

STRATEGIC  
PRIORITY FIVE

## Achieve and Maintain Financial Self-sufficiency

The FAA stipulates that airports receiving federal funding should strive to be financially self-sustaining as possible and AHN is committed to continuing its path toward financial self-sufficiency. Managing airport finances based on for-profit business principles will help AHN be more proactive and capture and potentially create opportunities as they arise.

Review and analyses of existing financial performance and determination of opportunities to increase revenue, based on priorities and goals in this Strategic Plan, will be key to this priority.

### **Strategic Goal 5.1 Become revenue neutral from Athens-Clarke County for operating expenses by primarily increasing operating revenues by June 2023**

- Implement enhanced management reporting - financial statements and key performance measures (KPMs)
- Inventory existing leases and conduct a rates and charges survey of peer airports and consider AHN rates and charges increase where applicable
- Diversify on and off-airport revenue sources



# IMPLEMENTATION PLAN

## Performance Measures

---

The following performance measures are designed for regular review by staff and Authority members and to track progress toward Priorities and Goals.

### 1- DEVELOP A COMPREHENSIVE DEVELOPMENT PLAN

---

Monthly Progress

---

### 2- ESTABLISH SCHEDULED AND INCREASE NON-SCHEDULED PASSENGER SERVICE

---

% Increase of Scheduled Enplanements

---

% Increase of Non-Scheduled Enplanements

---

### 3- EXPAND THE GENERAL AVIATION EXPERIENCE

---

% Of Customer Satisfaction Surveys Greater Than 4 Out of 5 Rating

---

### 4- INFORM AND CONNECT COMMUNITY, BUSINESSES AND CUSTOMERS

---

Monthly/Quarterly Progress

---

### 5- ACHIEVE AND MAINTAIN FINANCIAL SELF-SUFFICIENCY

---

Monthly/Quarterly Key Performance Measures (KPMs) – To Be Established

---

## Action Plan

Primary responsibility for implementing this Strategic Plan rests with AHN staff in coordination with Airport Authority members. Athens-Clarke County leadership and Mayor and Council will receive reports and be consulted for oversight, particularly with respect to policy updates and certain funding requests. A more detailed Action Plan to support each Strategic Initiative is documented separately for reference and guidance. Given the ambitious and dynamic nature of this Strategic Plan, it should be reviewed annually and modified as goals are implemented and as conditions warrant.



*prepared by*





1010 Ben Epps Drive | Athens, Georgia 30605  
706.613.3420 | [airport@accgov.com](mailto:airport@accgov.com) | [www.accgov.com/airport](http://www.accgov.com/airport)