

## Erin Nelson

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**From:** Erin Nelson  
**Sent:** Wednesday, May 24, 2023 10:17 AM  
**To:** Office  
**Subject:** FW: Comment about regulating aviation in Bluff

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**From:** Planning <[planningzoning@townofbluff.org](mailto:planningzoning@townofbluff.org)>  
**Sent:** Wednesday, May 24, 2023 9:42 AM  
**To:** Erin Nelson <[manager@townofbluff.org](mailto:manager@townofbluff.org)>  
**Subject:** Fw: Comment about regulating aviation in Bluff

Making sure you received this.

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**From:** Mary Gillam <[gillam@rmi.net](mailto:gillam@rmi.net)>  
**Sent:** Tuesday, May 23, 2023 1:48 PM  
**To:** Planning <[planningzoning@townofbluff.org](mailto:planningzoning@townofbluff.org)>  
**Subject:** Comment about regulating aviation in Bluff

I attended the public meeting on May 22 via Google Meets. I didn't comment orally but I want to say that Bluff definitely needs an ordinance regulating aviation in town. Bluff's ability to regulate airspace may be limited but it can regulate noise, other nuisances and public safety. Surprisingly, many residents who spoke during the meeting are unaware that the town of Bluff includes the Bluff airport and undeveloped lands as well as the central developed area. Aircraft have flown over or landed before in areas now within the town boundary, both before and after the town was formed. However regulation is needed now for two reasons: a commercial heliport is being proposed in the central part of town, and future development will likely bring an increase in all kinds of aviation.

While businesses are essential to Bluff as service providers, employers and taxpayers, a balance is needed between tourism, quiet for residents, and land management needs. This balance will be hard to find.

Based on verbal comments during the meeting and written comments already posted on the town's website, I suggest the following:

1. The Bluff airport should be zoned for aviation. This would accommodate aviation several miles from the central developed area of the town, and it would be consistent with historical use of the airport. Ideally the airport would be improved in the future but the town government is too overworked to manage that now, regardless of the funding source (someone suggested applying for an unspecified grant).
2. Aviation elsewhere within Bluff should be very limited.
  - a. Traditional, infrequent aviation services such as medical evacuations, aerial seeding, aerial weed control, and ballooning should be allowed (subject to any other applicable regulations).
  - b. In my opinion, commercial aviation should not be allowed in or near the central developed area of Bluff.
  - c. If aviation is allowed in that area, the town should require effective setbacks or other rules that would severely limit noise and dust impacts to very low levels. Bluff's commercial areas are so narrow that if aviation within them would unavoidably impact residential areas, especially if frequent. Noise would reflect from Bluff's cliffs so that the developed area would receive both direct and indirect noise. In a very quiet place like Bluff, noise levels that might not be as intrusive in urban areas would be very noticeable. Helicopter landings could also be limited to hardened surfaces so powerful airflows won't cover adjacent properties with dust (a health hazard as well as a nuisance).
  - d. Someone suggested that helicopter landings be allowed on agricultural land closer to central Bluff than the airport. If so, effective setbacks from other zoned areas and dust management should still be

required. Ironically, Planning and Zoning previously decided that kennels would not be allowed on agricultural land because of potential noise from barking dogs. Helicopters would be much noisier so if helicopters are allowed on agricultural land with setbacks, kennels should also be allowed there with setbacks. The present drawbacks mentioned for commercial aviation at the Bluff airport (such as lack of water and electricity) would also apply to new facilities developed on agricultural land.

- e. If Bluff allows commercial aviation in the central developed area or in nearby agricultural areas, it's possible that multiple operators might want to establish operations there in the future. If one operator is approved, how could others be denied? Regulations should anticipate this possibility.
3. Aviation operators in Bluff should be informed that Bluff may not be able to respond effectively to emergencies because of the limitations of its first responders and equipment.
4. The Blanding Airport was suggested as an alternative site for commercial aviation. I support that, very strongly if that's the best alternative to commercial aviation in central Bluff. Blanding is close enough that employees and tourists based in Bluff could drive there with minor inconvenience. Some tourists might stay in Blanding instead of Bluff but Bluff would avoid the impacts of commercial aviation. Also, the Blanding airport would offer more basic and emergency services. This option was presented as a loss of tourist income for Bluff but I see it as a gain in livability for Bluff.
5. I also wonder about the desirability and long-term viability of helicopter tourism. Others have noted the impacts on wildlife and popular local activities like hiking, biking and rafting (especially with a proposed flight path westward along the river). The financial and social costs of burning fossil fuels are also likely to increase in the future.

Respectfully submitted,  
Mary Gillam