

No one doubts that the many sincere and hardworking citizen volunteers to the ASE Vision process invested immense time and attention in that public purpose. However, many community members perceive the process differently than the [official description](#).

This elaborate public exercise was devised and overseen by County Staff. They chose its design, information sources, and assignment of citizens to working groups. Such an information monoculture is better at creating an appearance of consensus than at exposing and testing diverse framings, issues, and evidence in an open-ended, neutral process that embraces independent experts and critically assesses opposing views.

Later parts of Aspen Fly Right’s weekly postings will offer information not made available to ASE Vision participants and often inconsistent with what they were told. Naturally, their framing of issues, their deliberations, and their conclusions were shaped by the limited information provided to them by County Staff and the consultants they chose and instructed.

For more than two years, independent expert views have been repeatedly offered to the Board of County Commissioners through letters<sup>1</sup>, public comments<sup>2</sup>, and a semi-technical independent expert forum streamed on Grassroots TV<sup>3</sup>, organized to offer a public channel to communicate these important but unheard insights. These efforts received no official response. Other than one 5-minute public comment, the BoCC has not yet been formally exposed to much of the evidence to be published in this series. Apart from periods when some ASE Vision members were present as Commissioners heard three-minute comments from the general public, we know of only two occasions when ASE Vision participants or their successors on the Airport Advisory Board heard substantive input from experts *not* chosen and instructed by County Staff<sup>4</sup>.

### *Public participation and support*

The ASE Vision process suffered serious participant attrition, defection, and dissent. Of course, some people may have dropped out for personal reasons unrelated to their views of the process. However, it preceded the pandemic, and substantial evidence suggests that much of the attrition was due to dissatisfaction. That said, we’re unaware of any survey or other effort to assess causal factors, so the extent and depth of dissatisfaction cannot be quantified. Here’s what we do know:

“Nearly 160”<sup>5</sup> citizens originally volunteered and got appointed for the ASE Vision process. However, many then quit, so more recently, figures around 130 or 120 have been mentioned instead; the County’s current [description](#) says “120+,” and BoCC Resolution 105-2020 says 123. Of those, reportedly only 98 were officially assigned to the workgroups or committees<sup>6</sup>.

Even those revisions overstate the actual total by nearly twofold. Of the “nearly 160” recruits initially approved, *just two-fifths*<sup>7</sup> completed the ASE Vision process (63 out of “nearly 160”), and *only one-third*<sup>8</sup> (53) support its products. That’s hardly a ringing consensus.

In short, nearly 160 citizens signed up; almost 100 left (many dissatisfied); 63 stayed; 53 concurred; and that one-third of the original volunteers was represented as robust consensus.

Moreover, 44 citizens publicly called for a pause in the Board of County Commissioners' airside decision<sup>9</sup>. That's 83% as many as the 53 citizens who ultimately voted for the ASE Vision recommendations. The dissenters are also no less knowledgeable, including two former ASE Airport Directors (one of whom also ran the Fixed Base Operation for 26 years), distinguished local pilots, and former County Commissioners.

Whether voting with their feet or via published comments, many citizens expressed concern that their choices were being constrained or unduly influenced by restricted framings, faulty and missing information, and pressure to endorse premature airside decisions. Simply put, many citizens felt that the process's design was flawed, not as advertised, and not based on adequately broad and independent information. A concerning additional factor is that many also felt that the process wasn't neutral and disinterested: the promise of neutrality didn't match their experience.

*Was there an agenda?*

Many of the nearly 100 citizens who left the ASE Vision process or want a pause or both have complained, privately or publicly<sup>10</sup>, of an unstated, but to them obvious, ASE Vision agenda to rebuild the airside to allow bigger planes. They expressed that this apparent intention had limited and distorted their information in order to support the desired outcome, while independent and perhaps inconvenient expert views were excluded.

In October 2020, unexpectedly and unambiguously, those concerns seemed to be validated when veteran commercial pilot and aviation expert Tom Keough reported<sup>11</sup> that two employees of one of the County's main aviation consultants had clearly told him that *their mandate from the County was to enable bigger airplanes*. One, he said, specifically mentioned the private Gulfstream 650, many of which are owned by wealthy Aspenites and whose owners' group has lobbied for—and was told to expect—an airport expansion that would let them land here<sup>12</sup>.

This revelation might seem to have merited prompt investigation and public clarification, but it received none. This undermines the official view that a broad group of inquiring citizens, advised by neutral and independent experts, expressing community values, free of influence by any private interests, in an “open, inclusive and transparent forum” with all voices duly heard, explored all options and spontaneously developed a strong consensus to ground the BoCC's “thoughtful, transparent decision-making, taking into consideration all information provided.”<sup>13</sup>

That story now rests on shaky foundations. Later postings on this website note other indications consistent with concerns that some County consultants may have tailored their analyses and presentations to support the client's wishes—a common practice in the consulting world, but not consistent with true neutrality, nor likely to discover better new ideas by wide collaboration.

From the outside, ASE Vision's process could be interpreted as potentially supporting either of those pictures. County Staff selected and instructed all the consultants, designed the Vision process, assigned its members to groups without apparent regard to their desires or skills, controlled all their and Commissioners' information flows, exclusively told Commissioners what other key parties like FAA and the airlines say and think, and managed the Commissioners'

decision agenda. That structure means there's no objective way to determine whether Staff had a tacit agenda. People with different views about this can therefore disagree indefinitely, sustaining rather than healing splits in the community.

Even in the most independent and capable hands, such centralized, complete, and opaque control of every aspect of the decision process is in principle a troubling design—a recipe for error, improper influence, or at best erosion of legitimacy. It has no checks, no balances, and no transparency about whether those shaping and controlling every step are truly free of any agenda and only offering citizens a chance to evolve their own. While creating the superficial appearance of an open and unbiased process, this design may appear to be—whether or not it actually was—a vehicle for manipulating public choices in service to private interests. Such a perception is damaging, and the actual result could prove undesired and unworthy. Nobody wants that. But a substantial fraction of participants have expressed that concern.

As Amory Lovins summarized in 5-minute remarks to the BoCC's hearing on 10 November 2020<sup>14</sup>, "Your decisions can be only as unbiased as your information," so when "only experts picked and instructed by your Staff have been allowed to brief you or Vision participants," you have "no fact-checking, no second opinions. A monopolized and, we're now told, agenda-driven process can't inspire or merit public confidence."

County officials (both elected and unelected), Aspen Vision's appointed leaders, and many citizens would reject that concern as strongly as its proponents assert it. We don't propose to take sides in this irresolvable dispute. Rather, in the ads, documented essays, and other supporting materials offered on this website, we propose to fill information gaps, correct information we consider outdated or erroneous, ask different questions, explore different answers, and invite you to form your own impressions. We aim to look forward, not backward, because all of us can make choices only about the future, not about the past.

Whether the ASE Vision process was authentic or unduly influenced, two important points seem certain: its conscientious volunteer participants deserve the whole community's deep gratitude for all their hard work and sincere effort; and it is no criticism of any of those citizens to suggest that new facts unknown to them may offer new opportunities not yet considered. Those new facts and opportunities are the subject of this website and Aspen Fly Right's public-education effort.

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<sup>1</sup> Amory Lovins's letters to the BoCC dated 17 Aug 2020, 30/31 Aug 2020, 22 Nov 2020, and 19 Apr 2022 are posted [here](#). The latter two are the most current and relevant, and their themes and evidence will be further developed on this website. Many other citizens also expressed similar views to the BoCC and, as partly listed below, in the local press.

<sup>2</sup> Amory Lovins's 5-minute remarks to the 10 Nov 2020 BoCC public hearing are posted [here](#).

<sup>3</sup> Video recording (22 Oct 2020, posted 28 Oct 2020) "Timing Our Choices for the Safer and Better Airport: Proceed Now, or Pause and Learn?," with Amory Lovins, Tom Keough, and Dick Arnold, streamable at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=F-MVGaVk-k>, or by scrolling several screens to the right in the video list at [www.grassrootstv.org](http://www.grassrootstv.org), 2 hours 22 minutes. The text of Lovins's opening remarks is posted [here](#). Like Aspen Fly Right, that Forum was an independent *pro bono* effort for three experts, with no favored airside design choice and no self-interest in the outcome. It was meant to inform and support better public choices and to help our Commissioners (if they viewed the film, as we're told some did) understand when new options may shift from premature to ripe.

<sup>4</sup> (A) On 13 November 2019, an evening public forum at Doerr-Hosier, invited by County Staff and with ~200 attendees, discussed future clean-and-efficient aviation innovations with three invited expert panelists—senior FAA and Airbus/UTC representatives and Amory Lovins (<https://www.aspenairport.com/operation/planning/ase-vision-resources/>, Airport Advisory Group Presentations tab). This event was hoped to enlarge the vision of the Technical Working Group, which under ASE Vision's BoCC By-Law II.2(6) was supposed to look 30 years ahead. Unfortunately, the County's consultants offered only currently commercial aircraft, plus a short qualitative deck about RollsRoyce's electric plane concepts, so the TWG's posted input and output documents reflect no serious examination of the innovative prospects described by the panel. (B) On 21 July 2022, the Airport Advisory Board heard unscheduled 3-minute public comments from two Aspen Center for Physics and

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University of California at Davis scientists, both expert in air pollution: Distinguished Senior Lecturer Emerita Dr. Patricia Boeshaar (<https://drive.google.com/file/d/1dqYQ1OB0sw4Lgu1qoJ0fYlceAEFFMQu/view> at 18–21), and Distinguished Research Professor and National Academy of Sciences member Prof. Tony Tyson at 20:45–24:20. Both took polite but serious scientific issue with the methodology of the County’s longtime air-pollution consultant Mary Vigilante, who was briefing the AAB. When Prof Tyson was cut off, County Staff forbade immediate discussion, but AAB members questioned him further during their own discussion (32–46). They seemed very interested and surprised to hear his contrary views—which, however, were not been further pursued in subsequent AAB meetings so far (through November). Ms. Vigilante’s briefs have instead continued unchanged, focusing on inferred CO<sub>2</sub> emissions rather than measured health-relevant local air pollutants. The fact of these two experts’ unscripted intervention, but not its substance, was reported by M. Briggs, *Aspen Daily News*, “New airport advisory board weighs questions of public input,” 23 Sep 2022, [https://www.aspendailynews.com/news/new-airport-advisory-board-weighs-questions-of-public-input/article\\_795cd7a2-3aea-11ed-a81b-c7846cccdc6c.html](https://www.aspendailynews.com/news/new-airport-advisory-board-weighs-questions-of-public-input/article_795cd7a2-3aea-11ed-a81b-c7846cccdc6c.html).

If the hermetic information space built by County Staff was breached on any other occasions, we are not aware of them. Former Aspen Mayor John Bennett, who chaired the ASE Vision process, has said his inquiries did engage many independent experts not chosen by County Staff, but other than the three Doerr-Hosier panelists, we’ve been unable to find out who they were or what information they provided to whom.

<sup>5</sup> That’s the only count mentioned when introducing the BoCC’s 10 Nov 2020 public hearing (<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=jxwQsMON9Jw> at 11:30), and as of 6 December 2020, it’s still the count shown on the official website <https://pitkincounty.com/164/Airport>.

<sup>6</sup> According to Kathleen Wanatowicz (then consulting for the County on ASE Vision), quoted by Ellen Anderson in her 31 Aug 2020 comments to the BoCC.

<sup>7</sup> That is, 63 divided by “nearly 160.”

<sup>8</sup> That is, 63 voted on their respective and nonoverlapping committees’ recommendations; the other nearly 100 citizens had already abandoned the process. Of those remaining 63, 6 voted against the recommendations sent to the BoCC for consideration and revision. The 20–1 vote in the Vision Committee became 16–5 when four members recanted their votes on learning important facts they had not previously been given. Thus the recommendations that the BoCC received, and in important ways then substantially revised, were endorsed by 63 – 6 – 4 = 53 of the “nearly 160” citizens, or one-third.

<sup>9</sup> Dick Arnold, John McBride, Tom Melberg, Jackie Merrill, “Guest Commentary: An urge to pause on the Aspen airport plan,” *Aspen Times*, 20 Sep 2020, and “Commentary: World has changed since vision committee vote on Aspen airport,” *Aspen Daily News*, 21 Sep 2020. Cliff Runge’s inadvertently omitted signature was added later.

<sup>10</sup> Including from Dick Arnold (*Aspen Times*, 6 Oct 2020); John McBride (*id.*, 8 Sep 2020); Valerie Braun (*Aspen Daily News*, 25 Sep 2020); Ellen Anderson (*id.*, 7 Sep 2020) and *Aspen Times*, 21 Aug 2020; Bob Rafelson (*Aspen Times*, 6 Sep 2020); Hugh Wise (*id.*, 3 Sep 2020); Bruce Gordon (*Aspen Daily News*, 1 Sep 2020); Kate Spencer (*Aspen Times*, 2 Sep 2020); Allyn Harvey (*id.*, 22 Oct 2020); Dr. Tom Kurt, *Aspen Daily News*, 9 Nov 2020. Some letters cited to one local newspaper were published in both under various titles.

<sup>11</sup> Ref. 3 at 2.27:48: “It was made clear to me...that the guidance that they had been given to be involved here was to make the airport larger so they could accommodate larger aircraft, and specifically, the one that was told to me was the [Gulfstream] 650, so there was no doubt that there was some interest in the expansion of the airport for a specific application.” For their protection, Mr. Keough didn’t identify his informants.

<sup>12</sup> In 2012, Gulfstream began producing this jet with an Aspen-to-Paris range and a 2022 estimated \$3.35-million annual cost of ownership (<https://www.sherpareport.com/aircraft/cost-gulfstream-g650.htm>). Before it was certified for service, then Aspen Airport Director Jim Elwood interpreted the 95’ Aspen wingspan limit as not including the 100’-wingspan G650’s upward-angled winglets, making it fit, but FAA overruled him (since any protrusion could collide with a similar one as two planes passed on runway and taxiway—the hazard that the wingspan limit is meant to avoid). (C. Runge, *Aspen Times*, 30 Apr 2012, <https://www.aspentimes.com/news/airport-plan-misleads-and-confuses-public/>; J. Urquhart, *Aspen Times*, 30 Apr 2012, <https://www.aspentimes.com/news/jet-tests-size-limit-at-airport/>, and 9 May 2012, <https://www.aspentimes.com/news/faa-clarifies-wingspan-issue-after-aspen-airport-makes-request/>.) In 2013, Mr. Elwood’s successor John Kinney told the County Commissioners that 22 people with Aspen real-estate connections had ordered G650s (R. Carroll, 13 Sep 2013, <https://www.aspentimes.com/news/expanded-runway-would-mean-bigger-gulfstreams-in-aspen/>.) That 22 reportedly rose to 33 by autumn 2016 (<https://therealdeal.com/2016/01/08/jetting-to-aspen-in-style/>). Some travel and aviation magazines, partly inspired by a Gulfstream ad showing ASE on the jet’s flight display, misreported that Aspen’s expansion to allow G650s was planned by 2027, and the BoCC approved it in principle, but FAA later rejected the plan. By 2017, two G650 owners reportedly sold their planes, each losing millions of dollars, because the expansion was postponed “until around 2020” and the 10-minute helicopter or 1-hour limo ride from Rifle seemed excessive (<https://aviatrade.aero/peculiar-tale-two-recent-gulstream-g650-sales/>). By 19 Nov 2022, reported Aspen-connected G650 owners included Paul Allen (deceased), Jeff Bezos, James Dyson, Larry Ellison, Bill Gates (2), David Geffen, Dennis Gillings, Laurene Powell Jobs, Robert Kraft, Ralph Lauren, Iksander Makhmudov, Elon Musk, Adam Neumann, Joseph Papa, Ronald Perelman, Howard Schultz, James Simons, Steven Spielberg, Kenny Troutt, Nancy Walton Laurie, Oprah Winfrey, Steve Winn, and Mark Zuckerberg (<https://letpartners.aero/the-gulfstream-g650-and-the-companies-who-own-them/>, <https://www.forbes.com/sites/jimdobson/22/09/12/famous-private-jet-owners-and-the-20-year-old-student-who-tracks-theor-every-move/>, and [www.theyucatantimes.com/2019/10/from-bezos-gates-and-musk-to-ralph-lauren-billionaire-owners-and-their-private-jets/](http://www.theyucatantimes.com/2019/10/from-bezos-gates-and-musk-to-ralph-lauren-billionaire-owners-and-their-private-jets/)).

<sup>13</sup> These quotations are from typical Recitals in BoCC airport Resolutions, e.g., at <https://pitkincounty.com/DocumentCenter/View/26687/Resolution---ASE-Vision-Committee?bidId=>.

<sup>14</sup> Fourth or ninth hit on “Lovins” search at <https://pitkincounty.com/DocumentCenter/View/26724/ASE-Public-Comments-Comb-121620-Redacted>).