



May 21, 2026

Dane County Regional Airport
4000 International Lane
Madison, WI 53704

To the Members of the Zoning Board of Appeals:

I appreciate the opportunity to provide clarification / comment regarding our variance request and to address several key points reflected in the staff report.

Since joining the Airport in September 2025, strengthening our working relationship with the City of Madison has been a priority. Beginning in October, our team proactively initiated discussions with Zoning staff, sharing early design concepts and meeting regularly as the parking expansion evolved. Throughout this process, we aimed for transparency, collaboration, and problem-solving across agencies.

Staff made clear that this variance would be challenging, and we understood and respected that. What was unexpected, however, was the introduction of several issues in the staff report that had not been raised during any prior discussions with the Airport or our design team. As two public agencies, we all benefit from consistent communication, and we believed we were engaged in that shared approach.

This leads to what appears to be a fundamental misunderstanding of our actual request.

Our request is narrow in scope. We are seeking relief only from Section 28.142(4) (A–C), specifically the landscape calculation and distribution requirements. A few key clarifications:

- The affected parking lot is approximately 7 acres, not the entire economy lot
- The variance applies only to new construction associated with the expansion
- It covers roughly 750 new stalls—not the 1,766 noted in the staff report
- About 1,000 existing stalls remain, with minor patch repairs to the pavement

To be clear: we are not seeking a waiver of all landscaping requirements in Section 28.142 for the project or airport. This is a targeted request tied to one defined project area, for new parking stalls.

Airport improvements are federally funded through grants, with state and airport matching dollars. Each FAA grant carries 40 grant assurances we are legally obligated to follow when agreeing to the grant terms. One of those obligations is:

Grant Assurance #20—Hazard Removal and Mitigation—is directly relevant here. It requires the Airport to prevent the creation of conditions that could interfere with instrument or visual operations, including the introduction of wildlife attractants.

Knowingly violating these requirements puts our federal eligibility at risk. Dane County Regional Airport operates without local taxpayer dollars, and loss of funding would have significant long-term consequences for both the Airport and the community.

We also must also comply with FAA Advisory Circular 150/5200-33C, which provides standards for managing hazardous wildlife attractants on or near airports. This includes a recommended 10,000-foot buffer around areas critical to aircraft operations. These requirements directly limit the types of landscaping we can safely introduce within the project footprint. We acknowledge that buffer is unpractical to achieve immediately, but this project is within 500-feet of a runway end and we should be striving to improve, not adding detrimental local requirements

To reinforce the basis for our request, we received letters from:

- USDA (2026)
- WisDOT Bureau of Aeronautics (2026)
- FAA (2017)

All three federal/state agencies confirm the same principle: within this district, wildlife-attracting landscaping poses an operational risk and must be minimized.

We fully support appropriate landscaping standards throughout the City. However, applying standard landscaping requirements in an environment governed by federal wildlife hazard regulations establishes a precedent that could compromise aviation safety.

Our request reflects not preference, but obligation—an obligation to maintain compliance, ensure operational safety, and protect the traveling public.

Thank you for the opportunity to provide clarification. We remain committed to working collaboratively with the city and welcome continued dialogue.

Sincerely,



Ryan Falch, PE, Director of Planning & Development
Dane County Regional Airport