



## I. Executive Summary

This paper provides the rationale for establishing a formal Airport Authority to coordinate joint County–City governance of Abernathy Field. It responds to the Public Service Committee's 6–1 vote on May 5, 2025, to establish such an Authority. The [minutes of this meeting](#) document Commission concerns with Airport oversight and accountability of public resources.

Abernathy Field is a vital regional asset—jointly owned by Giles County and the City of Pulaski—supporting general aviation and regional economic development. Current informal governance, historically led by the City Administrator and Airport Manager, has presented challenges in accountability, financial oversight, and long-term planning. Establishing a formal Airport Authority would create a structured governance framework, enhancing oversight of operations, finances, and strategic planning. It would strengthen accountability to elected officials and the public while providing clear operational guidelines for private businesses operating on airport property.

**Why this matters:** Abernathy Field is funded with public dollars, yet current operations provide no information on revenues from hangar rentals, fuel sales, and other airport activities. Public funds subsidize private operations without a clear return to taxpayers. Establishing an Airport Authority will ensure fiduciary accountability, protect public investment, and provide measurable benefit to the community.

Under TCA Title 42 and guidance from CTAS-481, the Authority would delineate roles, manage liability, and support long-term development at Abernathy Field through a transparent and durable governance structure.

## II. Background

Abernathy Field operates as a component of the City of Pulaski's general fund. Each year prior to July 1, the City adopts a budget that includes the Airport's operations—covering the manager's salary and benefits, operations and maintenance, and capital items.

Despite public investment in airport facilities, capital projects, and insurance, there is no documented information on revenues from hangar rentals, fuel sales, and other airport operations. This, together with an informal governance structure that truncates county involvement, highlights the need for greater transparency and oversight.

Currently, all Airport expenditures are reviewed by the Airport Manager and City Recorder and tracked through the City's accounting system under the State chart of accounts. Following completion of the City's annual audit, the City invoices the County for  $\frac{1}{2}$  of the Airport's annual operating expenses. The City also applies annually for a TDOT Airport Maintenance Grant, typically providing up to \$15,000 in reimbursement. After receiving State reimbursement, the City remits  $\frac{1}{2}$  of the proceeds to the County.



### III. Historical Context

A 1987 attempt to create an Airport Authority was authorized by Giles County but not acted upon by the City, leaving the Authority unformed. In practice, the County subsequently abdicated management authority to the City, and airport decisions have since been handled primarily by the City Administrator and Airport Manager.

A 1987 contract between the City and the Airport Manager granted the manager a minimal salary, with the proviso that all proceeds from fuel sales and hangar rentals would go to the manager. The County—although a co-owner—was not a party to this contract. In subsequent years, the management of these operations devolved to private LLC's owned by the Airport Manager, which continue to operate on City-County property without formal leases or revenue-sharing agreements.

### IV. Governance and Oversight Challenges

While these informal arrangements have helped sustain airport operations, they have also created persistent structural and fiduciary gaps. Among them:

- a. **Revenue transparency gaps:** Hangar and fueling revenues generated from publicly funded facilities are retained by private business entities. Public officials with fiduciary responsibilities thus have no financial data for decision making; citizens have no transparency on use of public funds.
- b. **Limited oversight access:** Advisory boards and County officials have historically been unable to obtain financial records for hangar and fueling operations, including grant-funded hangars.
- c. **Unclear grant accountability:** Airport grants and local match funds have been pursued and expended without consistent presentation to or approval by the County Commission.
- d. **Insurance and liability misalignment:** Current insurance policies held by the City and partially funded by the County extend coverage to privately operated assets, creating potential exposure for both governments.
- e. **Advisory boards without authority:** Advisory bodies, including the one reestablished in 2025, lack statutory authority or financial access to address accountability concerns.

These challenges demonstrate that, despite the dedication of individuals involved, the current informal governance structure blurs the line between public and private responsibilities, weakens fiscal transparency, and limits both the City's and County's ability to plan strategically for long-term airport development.



## V. Rationale for Establishing a Formal Airport Authority

A formal Airport Authority would provide the governance, accountability, and legal structure necessary to correct long-standing deficiencies in oversight and management. Specifically, it would provide:

- a. **Improved Oversight:**
  - Clearly defines responsibilities for airport operations, budgeting, contracting, and strategic planning.
  - Replaces informal arrangements with structured authority under TCA Title 42.
- b. **Transparency and Accountability:**
  - All revenues and expenditures—including leases, grants, and operational income—will be recorded, audited, and reported to both governments, ensuring public oversight.
  - Establishes periodic reporting and public disclosure consistent with City and County standards.
- c. **Legal and Financial Protection:**
  - Creates clear contractual and insurance frameworks that allocate risk appropriately and protect public assets.
  - Provides authority to execute and enforce leases, manage grants, and oversee private use of public facilities.
- d. **Alignment with Statutory Guidance:**
  - Follows the structure outlined in TCA Title 42 and CTAS-481, providing a tested framework for local airport governance and financial compliance.

By centralizing authority and formalizing oversight, an Airport Authority ensures that public funds are managed responsibly, private operations are properly regulated, and taxpayer dollars are protected with improved support for airport operations.

## VI. Benchmarking

Benchmarking is essential to assess Abernathy Field against industry standards and peer airports, identifying areas where improvements are needed. By providing objective comparisons, benchmarking supports informed decision-making and leverages lessons-learned from comparable organizations.

- a. **Regional Airport Benchmarks:**
  - **Abernathy Field** – Jointly owned by Giles County and Pulaski; governed by City Administrator and Airport Manager. There is no governing board.
  - **Fayetteville Municipal Airport** – Governed by Fayetteville–Lincoln County Regional Airport Authority.
  - **Maury County Regional Airport** – Governed by Maury County Airport Authority.
  - **Tullahoma Regional Airport** – Governed by Tullahoma Airport Authority.
  - **Lawrenceburg Regional Airport** – Governed by designated Airport Board.



***Abernathy Field is the only regional airport without representative board governance, and without publicized financial reporting.***

b. **County Departments and Non-Government Agency Comparisons:** Beyond airport-to-airport benchmarking, Abernathy Field was further compared to other county departments, as well as non-government organizations that receive public funding.

- The following county departments generate revenue: Clerk, Trustee, Register of Deeds, Animal Shelter, Chancery and Circuit Courts, EMS, and the Agri Park. Each submit financial records, undergo annual audits, and publicize revenues and expenditures to the County Commission. All generated revenue is returned to the County General Fund.
- Non-Profit Funding Comparison: In order to receive county funding, non-profit organizations must provide comprehensive bank and financial statements. Lack of financial transparency is grounds for rejecting funding. Every non-profit application for county funding publicized their financial records.

***Abernathy Field is the sole County asset that receives public funding, generates revenue, yet provides no reporting.***

## VII. Issues for Consideration

a. **Financial Oversight and Transparency:**

- The Authority would assume statutory responsibility for all airport revenues and expenditures, including grants, hangar rentals, fuel sales, and maintenance funds.
- Establish independent accounting and audit procedures to ensure County, City, and public visibility of airport finances.
- Require City and County approval of budgets and capital match expenditures.
- Ensure all public funds invested in airport operations, capital improvements, and grants are tracked, audited, and reported so that taxpayers understand both costs and ROI.
- Implement internal controls that prevent public funds from being used to subsidize private businesses without formal agreements or public accountability.

b. **Capital and Maintenance Funding:**

- Reaffirm the City–County commitment to jointly fund capital improvements.
- Maintain a designated capital fund managed by the Authority for state or federal matching projects.

c. **Private Enterprises and Conflict Management:**

- Implement formal lease and concession agreements for any private operations on public property.
- Adopt conflict-of-interest and disclosure policies consistent with public ethics standards.



- Clearly separate public employee duties from private business interests.

**d. Risk Management and Insurance:**

- Align liability coverage and insurance obligations so that private operators assume appropriate risk for their activities.
- Ensure public coverage protects only publicly owned assets and operations.

**e. Compliance with FAA and TDOT Standards:**

- Maintain full compliance with federal and state requirements for safety, operations, and documentation.

**f. Legal and Statutory Framework:**

- TCA Title 42 and CTAS-481 provide the authority to create a joint Airport Authority that separates public and private financial interests, delineates liability, and ensures enduring oversight.

## VIII. Conclusion

Establishing a formal Airport Authority will provide the structure and accountability that Abernathy Field has historically lacked. It will unify oversight, protect public assets, and ensure that revenues generated from publicly funded facilities are managed transparently for the benefit of both governments and the citizens they serve. With clear statutory authority, an accountable Airport Authority will position Abernathy Field for long-term sustainability as a regional hub for general aviation, economic development, emergency response, and community service.

### Acknowledgments

The preparation of this report was made possible through the contributions of Giles County Airport Advisory Board who made good-faith efforts to improve public accountability. They researched the airport's administrative history and provided comparisons with neighboring regional airports. Their research and expertise are gratefully acknowledged.

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read "G. S. Stowe".

G. S. Stowe  
Giles County Executive