

(TRANSCRIPT) Real Talk with the Town Episode 69: Will Marana Regional Airport get a control tower?

My name is Terry Rozema and the Town Manager for the Town. So let's get started.

Terry Rozema

Welcome, everybody, to another episode of Real Talk with the Town. My name is Terry and I am your host. And today we're going to be talking about Marana Regional Airport. And who better to have in the studio than our very own Galen Beem to talk about, that very topic along with Fausto Burruel, the Public Works Director. Galen is our Airport Manager, and, has been out at the airport for man 16, 17 years, something like that.

Galen Beem

Yeah, somewhere right around in there. Right around in there.

Terry Rozema

Well, guys, I appreciate you, both of you, so much for being on the show with me here today. And, obviously with an incident that we had last week, we've been getting a lot of questions, and there's been a lot of attention, focused on the Marana Regional Airport as a result of the accident. So, this is a heavy topic as we kind of start out. So I'm just going to throw it to you, Galen, and ask if there's anything that you want to open with us on this, you know, really tragic incident and, difficult topic.

Galen Beem

Yes. I thank you, Terry, for that. You know, it was very hard. Hard, the community at the airport and everybody at the town, all of us are so heartbroken about what happened there and feel so bad that we go out to the families and everybody who was affected by this tragic event.

You know, even the other airplane, there were people in that that were affected, I'm sure, having a hard time. Our hearts go out to all of them. But we'd also like to thank those who responded. Marana PD was there. They were there very quickly. I was shocked they even beat me out to the airfield. Some of them, their response time was amazing and the way that they helped secure that and

all of that was just amazing to me to see a community like that pull so close together so fast. Northwest fire, they were there instantly to help put out that fire. We thank all of them for that. Excellent. Terry?

Terry Rozema

I'm sure that probably most people have heard about seen, the story about, the crash out at our airport. But just real briefly, if you can describe for our listeners what happened, because you're absolutely right. I think, first and foremost, our condolences to the families. The two people that lost their lives. You know, one of the, the most significant tragedies a community can experience. And then, of course, the other people in the plane that were involved directly with the crash but were, uninjured. So, you know, very difficult situation. And for all those who were involved as first responders. But can you just describe for our listeners, the the incident that happened out there for those who might not be aware of what we're even talking about?

Galen Beem

Yeah. So we had a crash out there mid air, two planes on the over the runway and somehow one either clipped or come close to the other one. I don't know what happened, but that one, one of the planes veered off and crashed and the other one came around and landed. And that's all we have right now. NTSB is the ones who are leading the investigation on that.

Terry Rozema

NTSB is what, for our listeners, is..

Galen Beem

That is the National Transportation Safety Board. Yeah.

Terry Rozema

Yeah, pretty big deal. Them and the FAA

Galen Beem

Yes, they supported them in that.

And they had a big group of people come out and they took care of all of that.

Terry Rozema

So, so, so Marana is not doing the investigation, you know of what happened and what went wrong and things of that nature.

Galen Beem

That is correct.

Terry Rozema

There are federal agencies that are involved in overseeing this and making sure that it's fully vetted, investigated, to make sure that we understand what went wrong, so that we can, try to prevent something like this from ever happening again.

Galen Beem

That is correct, Terry. They were out there for hours. I mean, we had that closed the airport for over 36 hours for them to do their job. And collect all of that so they could make and decide what happened in that incident. Accident.

Terry Rozema

Okay. So let's talk a little bit about airports in general. And then kind of narrow this, a little bit more to, the town of Marana and our airport, but, airports, people, you know, there's people that are afraid to fly, right? Yeah. People like, you know, my brother's one of them. Yeah. I can't get him to fly out here to see me. And, you know, we had to drive across the country to get him out here, but, so some people are afraid to fly, and, our airport's a scary place. Are you a safe place? Safest way to travel.

Galen Beem

Safest way to travel. Aviation.

Terry Rozema

That's a pretty bold statement there. It's this still right now?

Galen Beem

Yeah, it's the safest even time to travel. We have, you know, the NTSB. They have a website there where you can look things up and they show you nationally we are down from last year. There was more wrecks in the last two months, the first two months of 2024 than this first two months of 2025.

Terry Rozema

Okay. So, so perception wise with some of the recent incidents that are happening and they've been highly publicized, right? For whatever reason, there's there's a lot of attention to this topic right now. And but you're you're telling me that last year for the same period, it's less than this same period this year?

Galen Beem

Correct. Yeah.

Terry Rozema

So tell me you got rough numbers there for me.

Galen Beem

Yes I do. I have the numbers for you.

Terry Rozema

you have the numbers for me?

Galen Beem

Yes.

Terry Rozema

Okay, Galen came prepared.

Galen Beem

So in 2024, In January they had 80 crashes nationally. And then in 2020 for February there was 93. This year in 2025. In January we only had 64 nationally.

Terry Rozema

Okay. So that's a reduction of 16. I don't know what percentage that is, but oh well actually I do because that's 20%, 20% reduction. Yeah. And in February I did that all in my head. I don't know if you guys noticed that or not, but very good. Didn't use a calculator or anything.

Galen Beem

In February, we only had 46.

Terry Rozema

46? This year?

Galen Beem

Yep, Compared to last year we had 93.

Terry Rozema

Oh, wow. So I'm not going to I'm not going to do the math in my head on that one. But that's a significant reduction. So a lot of attention to this and rightfully so. Whenever an incident like this happens, it's tragic. And people, you know, want to know what happened. And, are we, more safe or less safe and things of that nature. But the Town of Marana, airport is a safe airport. You say?

Galen Beem

Yes, I would say.

Terry Rozema

Why would you say? Are you going to? tell me why? Then you would. I see your head is going up and down. And you and I could see you're, like, so eager to answer this question. And I feel like maybe it's a softball now with the eagerness I see on your face. So tell me why you believe that the Marana Regional Airport is a safe airport?

Galen Beem

Well, airports in general have a lot of guidelines and things that are they have to do for the FAA. And more. So if you are a commercial airport in the airport community we call them part 139 airports.

Terry Rozema

Part 139?

Galen Beem

Yes, Part 139 airports. Okay. They have rules and regulations that they have to meet to be a commercial. Us? We are a GA Reliever airport, but we hold ourselves to those same standards.

Terry Rozema

The same 139 standards?

Galen Beem

And we hold ourselves to those standards and use those as best practice at our airport.

Terry Rozema

So we literally hold ourselves to a higher standard?

Galen Beem

Yes, we are raising that bar.

Terry Rozema

I love it. I love it. Sounds like five star service to me.

Galen Beem

Yes.

Terry Rozema

Okay

Galen Beem

And, Terry, that what does that mean? We're out. We're doing inspections daily of our airfield. We're making sure we're maintaining the airfield, the lighting systems, the pavements, all the vegetation out there. Keeping it low, keeping it safe, keeping our safety areas clean and debris, free of everything. Checking for FOD, which is foreign object and debris, which could be anything.

Terry Rozema

Okay, FOD? I thought you said fog.

Galen Beem

No FOD

Terry Rozema

Okay, Foreign Objects and Debris, FOD. All right. So you got you got folks out there at the airport that are doing this, and we're going to give a shout out to those guys because, they're phenomenal guys.

You got Michael. You got David, you got Joseph. Yes. Of course, Linda is out there doing the admin for you. Correct?

Galen Beem

Yeah.

Terry Rozema

Great people out there, doing the the work at the airport and keeping that safe along with, yourself in, in your leadership. So, tell me a little bit more. What what additional information can you give me about, that, reassures people about the safety, of our airport and airports in general.

Galen Beem

So with that standard, there are, other things that we do that we're involved with. You know, ADOT has a program called APMS, Airport Pavement Maintenance System. We're involved in that and we work with them to make sure our pavement is good and condition. So no problems taking off, landing. We're actually getting ready to do a project with them where we're going to be doing some crack sealing seal coat repainting of our main runway and doing all that just to make sure...

Terry Rozema

So no potholes at the airport?

Galen Beem

No, none of that.

Terry Rozema

All right. Very good to know. All right. I'm going to I'm going to turn here to, Fausto and talk a little bit. You're both involved with this? But, Fausto I feel like I need to bring you into this conversation here. So I want to talk about an airport tower. Do we have an airport tower at the Town of Marana?

Fausto Burruel

So No, we currently do not Terry.

Terry Rozema

Okay. So what's the plan, man? I mean, is that? Does that make it unsafe? The fact that we don't have one?

Fausto Burruel

No, it does not make it unsafe. It is a non-towered airport. But that's not to say that it's uncontrolled. As Galen mentioned there are criteria regulations in place of how operations are to occur at the airport. And he can. He's done a great, great job. And he knows the airport inside and out and he's taught me a lot about it. But when I say how the operations go, obviously when you're doing your routine, when you're coming into the airport for a landing, things you're supposed to, you know, identify yourself, let others know what your intentions are. So, like, there's a lot of student activity, a lot of, you know, training that happens not only on our airport, but we have others that fly into our airport from other locations.

Terry Rozema

Very good. So, I'm going to jump back over, to my man Galen, because you used a term and I want Galen to, flesh this out a little bit more for us.

Fausto Burruel

That's fine.

Terry Rozema

Because I've heard this term used multiple times in the media, uncontrolled airport. Right. So, Galen, why are they wrong when they say or incorrect? That sounds so harsh when I say that. Why are they incorrect when they call it an uncontrolled airport?

Galen Beem

So there are procedures into flying into Marana. You know, they we have a flight pattern that you come into. You have to come in at a 45, go to downwind. And every time you're doing this, you're making these calls over the radio to inform people that you're coming in, where you're at, what your intentions are. If you're going to come in and come around, land the main runway there one, two, and are you going to make a complete stop, or are you going to do a touch and go, maybe a touch and go and coming back around, or if you're going to leave the airport, leave the pattern and you do that. And these are all rules.

These are all in a, advisory circular that the FAA has provided for these instructors to teach their students on how to fly into a non-towered airport.

Terry Rozema

So different, big difference here. We're talking about two separate things. Uncontrolled, non-towered.

Galen Beem

Yes.

So how many airports are there in the state of Arizona?

Galen Beem

There's over 68 airports in Arizona.

Terry Rozema

And probably most of them have a tower?

Galen Beem

No.

Terry Rozema

No?

Galen Beem

Only eight towers in the state.

Terry Rozema

8 out of? 60?

Galen Beem

Over 68.

Terry Rozema

Over 68. Yeah. So could be 69, could be 70.

Galen Beem

Yes. Well, there's some glider ports and things aren't in there.

Terry Rozema

So a very small percentage actually have towers. And we're in line to get a tower. So, tell me a little bit about that.

Galen Beem

Yes. So, you know, our operations are increasing, so we had to apply to get into the tower program, and we did that back in 2019 and got in there. As we have shown that we needed, need for a tower.

Terry Rozema

What's that need based on? Fausto, What what do we base that need on?

Fausto Burruel

It's based on your airport traffic operations. So your landings and takeoffs. How much air traffic volume you have.

Terry Rozema

Do you know what that is off the top of your head?

Fausto Burruel

Currently, we're at about. We'll call it 84 to 85,000 is our number, which is high. It's also based on the classification of...

Terry Rozema

84 85,000? a year?

Fausto Burruel

A year of how many planes are coming and leaving

Terry Rozema

That's a lot of planes.

Fausto Burruel

Correct. The other criteria is the type of classification of planes you get. We have a lot of the smaller like the Cessnas and those types. But we also have the larger, more charter type planes. Okay. Which again, I'll defer to Galen because he knows all of the types.

Terry Rozema

He knows his planes.

Fausto Burruel

Yes, but I know that there's different classifications. And yes, we met that threshold.

Terry Rozema

Yeah. All right. So talk to me a little bit more, Galen.

Galen Beem

Yeah. So we did ahead and did that benefit and checked out all that. It's almost like an intersection the last time we were here. Oh I compared that same thing. When you're going to change it, you got to see what your traffic is. What's going through there. Do you need to upgrade? Do you need to put in that turn signal. Do you need to make it instead of a two lane to a four lane? Same kind of thing that we had to do...

Terry Rozema

Do you need a stop sign vs a stop light or a yield sign.

Galen Beem

Yes. Yeah.

Terry Rozema

Or a traffic signal?

Fausto Burruel

Now you're speaking my language.

Terry Rozema

Now we're talking. Yeah traffic circles.

Galen Beem

Now we're trying to bring Fausto back in.

Terry Rozema

Yeah, we're trying to bring Fausto back in so we're going to start talking to him about streets.

Fausto Burruel

And I will jump in a little bit. So what what Galen was mentioning is yeah, they do what's called a benefit cost analysis. As part of it we have again X amount of traffic volume of airplane landings and takeoffs and also different criteria of plane doing that. So they look at that and there's formulas that they utilize this I definitely can't explain to you. But they say that okay obviously more traffic volume, probability of a potential, you know, crash event or something along those lines. And that's where they utilize for their benefit cost ratio. And they say, okay, if we give you a tower, then they come up with a cost metric, and then they, assess that as to how much it would cost to man that tower.

Terry Rozema

Okay. All right. So, we've qualified for a tower. We applied and got accepted in 2019. And I don't know if you guys knew this or not, but it's now 2025. What in the world is taking so long to get a tower?

Galen Beem

Yes. So we made it through and we actually did the siting study. Okay. Picked a site and that, you know, took a over a year.

Terry Rozema

Siting study is just determining, hey, where is this tower going to go? What's the best spot?

Galen Beem

Yes, so we actually started I think with like 15 different spots on the airport. We got experts in, we got air traffic control tower guys in, and we went through them and decided which three were the best. And then from that decided which spot would be ideal to put this tower.

Terry Rozema

And we got an ideal spot?

Galen Beem

Yes.

Terry Rozema

I've seen it. You guys had shown me actually, even the, what is that called when you get to actually go in the tower and see? Virtual?

Galen Beem & Fausto Burruel

Virtual, 3D Virtual.

Terry Rozema

Thank you. Okay so where are we at with this, tower? And what are what are we anticipating in terms of timeline? Timeframe? Fausto let's, shoot, to you for that.

Fausto Burruel

So, Terry, currently we're in the phase we call it the environmental assessment. That is when we're just we're clearing the land, saying there's no environmental impacts of putting in the tower. And that is typically about a year long process. Once the FAA gives you starts the clock, if you will. So unfortunately, they also have some requirements and some, some footwork and homework they want you to do before you get to that point. So that's taken almost a year to get to that point. The reason why they want that one year clock is they have, mandates that they need to perform, and it does need to be approved in that years' time frame. So that's kind of where our local FAA group is kind of held a little bit more, stringent criteria to make sure we have everything, all our ducks in a row to get to that point. So, we're currently about a little over midway in that process. But I will let you know that, as most people are aware, there's a new administration now at the federal level, and they've actually put a pause on all federal funds being distributed in regard to grants. And that impacts the FAA as well. We were we have been continuing to operate, business as usual. However,

we have been asked at this point to push a pause on that environmental assessment.

Terry Rozema

Any idea how long that we're going to be on pause?

Fausto Burruel

Unfortunately, no, I don't have, I don't have an idea at this point.

Terry Rozema

Okay. So, couple things here. Number one, you know, because it's been, you know, going on six years here, almost six years, since we started this process. Was there anything that that caused a delay in this, whole thing? Why? Why did we end up having to go back and reapply?

Fausto Burruel

As most people might recall, we had a, small pandemic that occurred.

Terry Rozema

Ah, yes, yes. Right at the beginning, of the process that we were entering into, the tower studies and things of that nature. Right?

Fausto Burruel

Correct, correct. So unfortunately, that caused, a slow roll into the whole effort and just, it kind of had a domino effect on a lot of the processes that occurred. When you're working on these types of programs, you have to understand too we're working with the federal level, which I hate to say government and everything, but we don't control their timeframes in the process.

Terry Rozema

We're not the only community, that's trying to put a tower in, across the United States. Right?

Fausto Burruel

Correct. We are not the only community, and we're we're not the only ones impacted by the pandemic. So, I'm not saying we're unique in that aspect, but of course, a lot of people were and it did have other residual effects.

Terry Rozema

So because of that, we had to reapply? Was that was that the deal? So we applied in 2019. We had to come back and reapply because we couldn't make the timelines due to the delays and Covid?

Fausto Burruel

Correct? Yeah. So we identified pretty early on when Galen and I stepped in our current roles working with the airport and identified that, yeah, we're just not going to make this. It's a five year clock that you get for the tower program.

Terry Rozema

Everything has to be done up and running?

Fausto Burruel

Everything operational keys handed over to the FAA because what the program, what it does is you we build the tower, we maintain the the facility, if you will, but they man it. So it's the air traffic control towers, people that are hired and operate on behalf of the FAA. So, you have to have the keys ready delivered and that thing operational and cleared off, because there's also a, you know, there has to be cleared and put into operations by the FAA. So everything has to be buttoned up and ready to go for them. So, we identified early on that we're weren't going to make that in the five year clock. That just wasn't going to happen. And we started asking you if there was any type of mechanisms to extend that and extend the tower program. There was not. So, our only choice was to reapply, which we were successful in doing that, but that was the direction we had to go.

Terry Rozema

But did we have to start all over with the site study and all of that, or do we do you get to kind of pick up where we left off?

Fausto Burruel

No. Fortunately, we were able to pick up where we left off.

Terry Rozema

Thank goodness. Yeah, and just FYI, Galen, in case you're interested, I might be able to help out with the environmental. I've seen the site, looks very safe to me, so if that counts for anything and helps speed up the process, you can let them know that the Town Manager has been there, looked at it, and highly approves of the location.

Galen Beem

We thank you, Terry. I wish that that was all that was involved in that, but I think there's a few more steps we got to go.

Terry Rozema

Well, you can't say I didn't try, Galen.

Galen Beem

Thank you.

Terry Rozema

Just trying to do my part. So, Galen, let's talk a little bit. I think we've done a good job here. Fausto kind of describing this tower that's on its way and will be here in a couple of years. What's the what's the time frame? What's the completion date?

Fausto Burruel

Currently, we're looking at having it up and operational end of 28, early 29. However, the caveat being, I don't know how long this pause that we're currently in is going to maintain.

Terry Rozema

Does the pause count against us?

Fausto Burruel

The pause could count against us. We're, we're just we're in uncharted territory. To be honest, I don't think the FAA can answer us at this point, and we can't because actually, the environmental it needs to be wrapped up...

Terry Rozema

I'm going to have to cry foul.

Fausto Burruel

I completely empathize and understand.

Terry Rozema

I'm going to have to cry foul. No. All right. So we're looking at, end of 28 early 29, depending on how long this pause takes, I don't think it's going to take long, but I don't know for certain. So, Galen, how does that affect the operations then? Once we have a tower in place versus it sounds like what you were describing before, the pilots are talking to one another, and they do that on a radio?

Galen Beem

Yes.

Terry Rozema

How do they know what channel to be on?

Galen Beem

You go in, you can look and see, look up Marana Regional Airport and, in many different areas that's published. So, every pilot should know that. And we also have it painted right on our main taxiway. So, if you don't know, just look down it's right there.

Terry Rozema

just look down, there it is, all right, I'm on the wrong channel. It's Channel two, not channel one.

Galen Beem

Yeah, it's actually 123.

Terry Rozema

123?

Galen Beem

Yeah. If you're on channel 123 you're on Marana.

Terry Rozema

Okay, All right. So how does it change then? What's, pilots are no longer talking on channel one two, three. Yeah. And they're now listening to, air traffic control staff.

Galen Beem

Yes. So, what they'll be doing is they'll be calling air traffic control on that same channel.

Terry Rozema

Same channel? Okay

Galen Beem

Same channel. And they'll be asking them what to do. Right. And then that control tower guy is going to tell them exactly where to set up, how to come in, what number they are, what runway to use and all of that. It's almost like if you're at an intersection and you have a police officer there giving you, telling you who's going, who's stopping, who's turning.

Terry Rozema

Been there, done that. A time or two. Yeah. Let me tell ya. All right. So, you excited about that? I mean, what's what's kind of the tenor of the, staff at the airport about this whole thing

Galen Beem

Yes. We are very excited for that and to help with that. With the safety of it and all of that, it's going to be, completely different for everybody there. Because you have somebody out there, even the guys that are doing stuff on the ground, they're going to have to contact it.

Terry Rozema

Do you think it's going to change, the numbers of flights we have coming in and the types of aircraft?

Galen Beem

Oh, I'm sure there will be some adjustments there. Yes, I'm sure, I'm sure we'll probably have more of the corporate jets and things like that flying in, because they're going to feel more safe doing that. And those type of operations at the airport. But with that being said, it is going to be safer. But like we were talking about the intersection. You put that light. You put that turn arrow, you put all that in. Does that mean there's never going to be an incident, an accident at that intersection? Terry?

Terry Rozema

No it doesn't no.

Galen Beem

So it ain't going to fix everything. There's still that human error part.

Terry Rozema

Like the mechanical issues? Mechanical issues. The kind of a car, the brakes fail.

Galen Beem

Correct.

Terry Rozema

All right. So I think we've we've covered a lot here. And I don't know if there's other things we need to cover that I haven't thought about. So, I want to throw it back to each of you individually to talk about, whether or not there's, anything you want to add or another element of, this important topic that we need to cover and talk about so far. So Fausto why don't we start with you, anything you can think of that we haven't covered, that we need to, give a little more consideration and discussion to?

Fausto Burruel

Just one comment that I know Galen mentioned to me as we were talking about, you know, obviously, what occurred last week. Just, want to express our thanks to all of the users of the airport and the understanding that they provided that, you know, knowing and I'll let Galen expand on this. But obviously we had to shut down the airport for a period of time, about 36 hours. And so that impacts users of our airport. And also there's businesses, active businesses out of the airport. But from what Galen tells me, it's a community. I mean, we know that and it's a very tight knit community. And I think there's been nothing but support for that. I just want to say thank you to them, and I'll let Galen add a little more on that.

Galen Beem

Yeah. Yeah, that's the one thing that really impressed me. Just the outreach and everybody, even the people in Marana, I've had text messages, phone calls from people, you know, saying how sorry they are that this has happened, that we're going through this. The support that we've all felt is just been amazing. Terry. I mean, it just shows you how great Marana is.

Terry Rozema

That's that's a great way to conclude. Unless. Galen, you got anything else?

Galen Beem

No, I think that's all I have, Terry.

Terry Rozema

All right, well, what a great way to conclude is to talk about the community, how it came together, the support and, the things that really make a community great and make Marana specifically such a wonderful community to live in. So thank you, listeners, for joining us on a very difficult topic. After a very, challenging and tragic incident that happened here in Marana, I hope that we provided a little bit more clarity and understanding relative to what goes on out at the airport, the safety of our airport. How seriously, we take the safety of, our residents and, those who are utilizing our airport as well. Please continue to send in your questions and comments. We love hearing from you. Until next time.