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Viewpoint

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Aviation agency's secrecy requires more scrutiny

You may remember the rather intense debate several years ago about splitting the authority overseeing the city's maritime and airport operations into two separate boards.

Out of that was born the Jacksonville Port Authority and the Jacksonville Airport Authority, which subsequently became the Jacksonville Aviation Authority — motto: "We're spreading our wings for the future."

One of the main arguments for dismantling an authority that was working perfectly well was that the split would create two lean, mean machines that could concentrate on specific areas.

Ha. Some of us had doubts about the lean, mean part. Instead we saw growing bureaucracies gobbling up more money.

To assuage that fear, the City Council ordered a study of the split after four years to see if it really had been efficient and the right thing to do.

That study should have been done last year. According to a Times-Union news story Tuesday, City Council members questioning a proposed aviation authority business deal said that study hasn't been done and that it needs to be.

Let me help.

Since the split, the Aviation Authority has spent millions of dollars on a fancy new administration building, on public art, on foreign travel for its executives to exotic locales, on staff getaways to posh resorts and on a growing payroll.

In the meantime, the Aviation Authority has

forgotten one important fact:

The authority works for the citizens of Jacksonville, and all of the airports and other authority property belong to those same citizens.

The authority keeps acting like it's a private entity. It's not.

The business deal questioned by City Council members this week is illustrative of that forgetfulness.

The Times-Union story reported that the authority had been negotiating in secret with a developer who wants to build an industrial complex on 328 acres of authority land near Jacksonville International Airport.

First of all, public agencies shouldn't negotiate deals like this for publicly owned property in secret. Instead the authority should seek proposals from all developers who might be interested in doing such a deal.

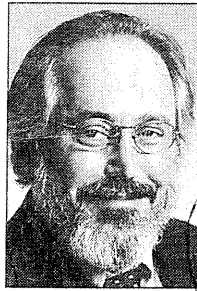
But a larger question is this: If the authority doesn't need the 328 acres, what's it doing with the tax rolls to begin with?

The same question should be asked about the entire 18,000 acres of property the authority owns that the news story said is not needed for the future expansion of the authority's four airports.

And private developers of industrial parks might be more than a little miffed if the authority gets into the development business to compete with them, as developers who lease from the authority don't have to pay property taxes while they do.

The Aviation Authority has run amok. The City Council needs to clip its wings, and not too far into the future either.

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tough on sexual predators

ring stories about the rapes and deaths of children, and about judges easy on sex offenders who prey have prompted some state legislators to change the laws and restrict the sen-

and murder cannot be made whole. The debt can never be repaid.

Sexual predators know exactly what they are doing, know that it is wrong, and either don't care or enjoy it all the more for that reason.

The illusion of being able to control sexual predators who are set loose in secrecy among families with children has taken many forms and has been couched in much soothing rhetoric.

The latest pretense of control is the global positioning satellite that can be attached to predators.



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