

Airships Unlimited, Inc.

PROPOSAL
FOR THE
DEVELOPMENT
OF PART OF
FLUSHING AIRPORT
AS THE
COLLEGE POINT AIRSHIP PARK

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Airships Unlimited, Inc. seeks to develop the world's first blimp airport, to be known as the *College Point Airship Park*, on the site of the former Flushing Airport in the College Point Corporate Park.

The facility would consist of a large grass area for the operation and mooring of two to three airships; an operations building containing a crew lounge, weather and communications facilities, sightseeing flight terminal, airship museum and learning center, auditorium, theme restaurant, gift shop, mail order and e-commerce facilities and administrative offices; and parking lots and public viewing areas.

The facility would preserve what is one of the last remaining green spaces in the area, together with much of the wetlands on the site. The plan allows for the provision of an *environmental center*, and for public access to parts of the wetlands as appropriate.

The project has been endorsed by many local civic and community leaders, and has strong support within the local community. It has also been included again this year in Community Board #7's 2001 budget request.

Airships Unlimited is in the process of seeking funding or pro-bono services to conduct a full feasibility and cost study.

THE COMPANY

The *College Point Airship Park* is a project by *Airships Unlimited, Inc.*, a locally-owned company with experience in consulting, engineering, operations and marketing in the airship industry. The project is supported by blimp operating companies, by numerous community leaders and by much of the residential population of the area.

OBJECTIVE

The need for a blimp airport in New York City is becoming critical, as blimp operations are growing nationwide, in the fields of airborne advertising, sports and public events broadcasting, and public service, at the same time as the number of mooring spaces close enough to support flight operations over the New York conurbation is declining. The three blimp mooring spaces at Linden Airport and the one at Westchester Airport are no longer available, and Republic, Teterboro and Caldwell Airports are becoming more congested by regular air traffic each year. In the summer of 1999, one airship had to operate under restrictive conditions out of Gateway National Recreation Area, the site of the previous Floyd Bennett Field Naval Air Station and a location subject to high winds, and another had to move from one operating base to another because of the tightness of scheduling slots.

To eliminate much of this mooring space shortage, *Airships Unlimited* proposes to develop the triangular grass area of the former Flushing Airport into the world's first blimp airport, or *blimp port*, to be known as the *College Point Airship Park*.

The facility would consist of a large, grass take-off and landing area, mooring sites for blimps at the corners of the triangular field, and a building, parking and observation area complex along the northern edge of the property (20th Avenue). The building complex would house a ground crew lounge, weather and communications facilities to support flight operations, a passenger terminal for blimp sightseeing flights, an airship museum and learning center, an auditorium for both airship-related and public education and entertainment purposes, an airship-theme restaurant, a gift shop, mail order and e-commerce facilities, and administrative offices.

The *blimp port* would preserve the stretch of wetlands adjacent to 20th Avenue, and preserve or fully mitigate the other wetlands areas on the triangular grass site. Trees would be preserved around the edge of the field. Public access to the field would most likely be from the proposed new ancillary road along the southwest side of the site.

Airships Unlimited is NOT interested in the west side of the field, which comprises the old runway, paved areas, hangars, buildings, etc.

The possibility of redeveloping Flushing Airport as a *blimp port* is very much an environmental and community issue. The community is opposed to the loss of the last sizeable green space in the area, and support for the *blimp port* project as a means of preserving it from development is strong. The proposed blimp operating area is partially surrounded by wetlands, which are the subject of a current study by the New York Department of Environmental Conservation. The *blimp port* is intended to preserve as much of the existing wetlands areas as possible,

and to mitigate those wetlands within the blimp operating area with the development of equal areas of replacement wetlands. The wetlands would also provide a buffer zone against further commercial encroachment, and a measure of site security. The *blimp port* concept also provides for the possibility of an *environmental center*, and for public access to parts of the wetlands where appropriate.

BACKGROUND

In the last decade, at least six airships have visited New York City each summer, mostly for periods of a week or more, some making more than one visit each year, and the number of airships, and the time spent in New York, is increasing. They operate out of a number of general aviation airports in the area, conducting advertising and TV broadcasting flights around Manhattan and other areas, and providing a presence at sporting and other events.

Aviation played a major role in the development of Queens, with Flushing Airport being opened in the 1930's. There is also a long history of airships being based in Queens. A military base complete with an airship hangar was located near what is now Kennedy International Airport. Decades ago, blimps landed at North Beach Airport, now known as LaGuardia. At nearby Holmes Airport, Goodyear erected a hangar and operated a sightseeing blimp all year long. In 1964, two Goodyear blimps used Flushing Airport as a summer base for the New York World's Fair, and at least one airship returned annually until the mid-70's when Flushing Airport's future became uncertain.

Flushing Airport was finally closed in 1981. This opened nearby property to commercial development. Shopping sites were constructed on 20th Avenue, beginning with the Waldbaum's supermarket and Staples office products outlet. The New York Times printing plant was built on the east side of the Flushing Airport property where the New York City Police Department car pound was located. Within the last year, a movie complex and Toys R' Us toy store opened on the south end of the field.

In 1991, Airship International Ltd. had made an initial proposal to the New York City Economic Development Corporation to create a blimp airport on the site of the former Flushing Airport. The project met with approval of the city and community, but Airship International's financial difficulties led to the delay and eventual cancellation of the project. Alan Gross, an airship marketing executive and consultant to the original project, felt that the location of Flushing Airport is ideal for airship operations. In 1998, he rekindled community interest in a *blimp port*, and proceeded to campaign for the necessary approvals. In 1999, Mr. Gross and John Taylor, a highly experienced engineer, consultant and business owner in the airship industry, formed *Airships Unlimited, Inc.* to develop the *blimp port* and other airship projects.

Mr. Gross is a lifelong member of the community, and has spent the last two years bringing together the various elements that are needed to design and build such a complex. He is very much aware of the traffic congestion that has been increasingly worsening as more development has been taking place. The College Point Corporate Park has been both a blessing and curse to the community, and any additional construction would bring an increase in traffic and pollution. This would not be acceptable to the north Queens communities.

BENEFITS

Millions of tourists flock to New York City every year. The rich history and cultural centers attract a wide variety of visitors. While there is much to see on the ground, a view of the Big Apple from the air is a different and unusual perspective of this sprawling metropolis. Helicopter sightseeing rides are limited, and many Manhattan heliports will be closed within the next few years. At least one sightseeing airship would be based at the College Point Airship Park so that an environmentally friendly alternative can be offered.

The facility itself would become a major attraction over time. The added benefit of a comprehensive lighter-than-air museum and learning center would create an internationally known aviation facility that would be the first of its kind anywhere. A gift shop, mail order and e-commerce sales would bring additional tax revenue to New York City. The proposed theme restaurant would also bring in additional income. *Airships Unlimited* is seeking partners in this project that can develop other usable areas of the property that fit in with environmental and overcrowding concerns of the community. We are dedicated to supporting the creation of appropriate entertainment and educational facilities for children.

The College Point community would be proud to have the *blimp port* in its midst. Most of the available land would remain in its natural state, while a unique aviation use would create revenue from a previously dormant property. The children of the community have lost several summers because their ball fields need renovation. This would be an opportunity to reward the children for their patience with a facility designed to educate and entertain them. We anticipate that a companion *environmental center* would also attract visitors from the metropolitan area.

For the adults of College Point, the new ancillary road will create a much needed additional access point through the corporate park. Traffic for the *Airship Park* would exit off this roadway so that the already heavily trafficked 20th Avenue would not be impacted by the facility. Members of the community also recognize that the proposed *blimp port* would prevent excessive use of the airspace by jet traffic departing LaGuardia Airport. Blimps are relatively noiseless and pollution-free in comparison.

The *College Point Airship Park* would create jobs for members of the community. We would be seeking people for various administrative, security, and service functions. As the facility grows, the number of people that could be hired would increase dramatically. Also, younger members of the community could consider job training with airship crews, and could then be eligible for hiring to travel from city to city with the ground crews if and when these companies need to supplement their existing staffs. There are more airships flying throughout the U.S.A. than ever before, and trained personnel are a valuable commodity. The *Airship Park* could serve as a training ground and a starting-off point for those who would like to work within this growing industry.

This facility would provide the airship community with a much needed mooring area and historical site. Current blimp operators have increasingly limited space in the New York metropolitan area and they are seeking additional sites nearby. The former Flushing Airport is a centrally located site that offers great amenities for the travelling flight crews, which number up to 25 people per airship, including a proposed corporate hotel within walking

distance of the *blimp port*, restaurants and shopping facilities. Pilots and the LaGuardia flight controllers that guide airships through the crowded airspace would have better communications and create safer flight paths over the area. An additional advantage to LaGuardia is that the controllers could see the blimps land and take off from the control tower.

ENVIRONMENTAL IMPACT AND WETLANDS PRESERVATION

Airships are the greenest of all aircraft with low noise and fuel consumption. It is for this reason that blimps would make good neighbors to both the people in the community and the flora and fauna that have made the former Flushing Airport their home. Our land use proposal would develop only a small portion of the property and we would be instrumental in cleaning and maintaining the rest. We are seeking a partner specializing in environmental programs in order to establish an *environmental center* in the southern end of the park. The public would enjoy access to such a natural treasure in the heart of a thriving urban center.

The children of New York City would benefit from the site's wetlands preservation. The facility can be a living classroom to students interested in the sciences. Observations could be made at the site in order to measure the effects of pollution on the plants and animals that share the property. The standing water is a mosquito breeding ground and needs attention and care. It is important to note that when these types of properties are developed, one can never retrieve the natural beauty that once existed. The *College Point Airship Park* would be the perfect counterpoint to the commercial buildup of large tracts of previously undeveloped land.

The visiting airships would have access to fuel by truck delivery from LaGuardia. Airship aviation fuel is kept in special containers and does not impact the mooring sites. Oil from the engines is collected and recycled, and airship crews do their best to leave their landing sites as clean as when they first arrived. *Airships Unlimited* would also request that these airship operators donate flight time to city agencies and organizations such as the Audubon Society, in order to study natural environments throughout the metropolitan area.

AIR TRAFFIC INTERFACE

The site is close to LaGuardia Airport. An access corridor through LaGuardia airspace to Flushing Airport has existed since the airport was operational, and remains active. This corridor is used currently by both blimps and helicopters intending to pass overhead LaGuardia.

The *blimp port* concept has been received favorably by LaGuardia air traffic control, which envisions an improvement in the handling of blimps through the concentration of a number of operations at one site. The Flushing Airport location would also be advantageous in that controllers can see the site from the LaGuardia tower.

The site is just to the north of the Arthur Ashe U.S. Open Tennis Stadium and the Mets' Shea Stadium, both of which are long-standing sites for blimp appearances. The proximity of the *blimp port* would negate many of the current long transits through controlled airspace from distant blimp mooring locations.

An application to the FAA to reactivate the airport as a blimp port would be required. Initial discussions have been held with the FAA, which has shown a willing interest in the project

Blimps necessarily take off and land into the wind, and are maneuvered into position by human ground crews and mast trucks. The direction of take-off and landing is therefore entirely dependent on wind direction, but the flight pattern around the airport is very small, and would be contained entirely within the existing airspace corridor. The ideal surface for blimp operations is grass, and no runways are required or desired.

LOCAL INFRASTRUCTURE INTERFACE

Numerous issues exist which would impact the layout of the facility, including the road infrastructure, existing traffic congestion, site access and control of the flow of visitors to the unique facility. These, together with operational issues such as aviation fuel storage, oil waste disposal, security and local employment opportunities, were the subject of an introductory meeting with high-level federal, state and local officials. The meeting enabled the diverse agencies represented to understand the intended relationship of the blimp port to the community, alleviate numerous concerns and see how it can mesh with proposals currently in preparation for local infrastructure development.

Unfortunately, promised information from state and city agencies has not been forthcoming. Further discussions, and access to information, will be required in order to develop an infrastructure interface plan.

CURRENT STATUS

Work is proceeding on four milestones that must be accomplished for success. These are the approvals of the Queens Borough President's Office, the New York Economic Development Corporation and the Federal Aviation Administration, and obtaining a contract with a major financial partner.

Efforts have repeatedly been delayed by the unwillingness of the NYC EDC to meet with the promoters, to provide any information that has been requested (with the exception of one map several years old), or to advise on requirements and procedures for proposals and other submissions. *Airships Unlimited* will require EDC to cooperate in the future stages of this proposition.

Airships Unlimited has been in discussion with all the commercial airship operators in the USA regarding the project, and the facility would be open to all operators who wish to use it. However, a major partner for the project is being sought from outside the airship community.

PENDING EFFORTS

Future effort in the development of the project will include, but not be limited to, study and decision-making regarding the following issues. The support of the NYC EDC, NY State

Department of Environmental Conservation, and other state, city and local agencies will be required:

Definition of wetlands/usable areas	Museum
Wetlands study	Learning center
Wetlands mitigation	Gift shop
FAA application	E-commerce and mail order facilities
Zoning/land use	Sightseeing flight terminal
Property lease	Pilot/meteorological/communications facilities
Street access location	Ground crew facilities
Land clearance	Administrative facilities
Turfing and paving	Winter flight operations
Mooring circles	Staff requirements
Internal roads	Hiring regulations
Parking lots	Insurance
Fencing	Publicity
Security	Sightseeing flight noise
Lighting	Sightseeing flight franchises
Lighting	Airship operator requirements
Water supply	Landing fees
Sewage	Airship operator contracts
Storm drainage	Hotel contract
Electricity supply	Supplier contracts
Phone system	Corporate partnerships
Building complex	Contractual relationships
Restaurant franchise	

FEASIBILITY DEMONSTRATION

Airships Unlimited proposes conducting a feasibility demonstration in the summer of 2000, in conjunction with an airship operator. We would clear a limited landing space near the center of the field, with vehicular access from an existing gate on 20th Avenue. A blimp, its normal support vehicles and ground crew would then be brought in for a period of up to two weeks, to operate from the field. Touring blimp operations such as this are completely autonomous, requiring no utilities hookups or other integration with local services, they remove all waste from their operating sites, and they leave the sites undamaged and unpolluted.

This demonstration would serve to prove integration with LaGuardia air traffic control, prove the benefits of operating from a site close to the Arthur Ashe U.S. Open Tennis Stadium and the Mets' Shea Stadium, and instill confidence in the community and government agencies with the proposed *blimp port* development.

FUNDING REQUIREMENTS

Airships Unlimited may seek grants, funds or manpower support from federal, state or local agencies to facilitate some or all of the specialized work necessary to complete the above efforts.