

Draft PIAC Recommendation — Browning Hangar Public Access and Governance

Robert Mueller Municipal Airport Plan Implementation Advisory Commission

Community-proposed draft for PIAC consideration — not adopted by PIAC or City Council

Revised September 28, 2026

WHEREAS, the Browning Hangar is a historic structure of the former Robert Mueller Municipal Airport and a long-standing civic gathering place whose free, informal public use is an important part of its value to Mueller and the broader community; and [1]

WHEREAS, PIAC Recommendation 20240813-004, approved August 13, 2024, recommended that Council consider ensuring public accessibility to the Hangar by way of a restrictive covenant, pedestrian access easement, or similar means, together with the provision of food, beverages, and public restrooms and a partnership with a community-based nonprofit organization; and [1]

WHEREAS, PIAC Recommendation 20241112-005, approved November 12, 2024, recommended amending Mueller’s covenants to establish permanent public access to landmark sites including the Browning Hangar, even if commercially owned; and [2]

WHEREAS, the August 11, 2026 PIAC agenda included an Austin Financial Services staff briefing on the process for Mueller covenant changes; and [3]

WHEREAS, PIAC’s draft annual review for July 2025 through June 2026 identifies December 31, 2027 as the Master Development Agreement termination date and identifies a mechanism for Browning Hangar disposition among the matters to resolve; and [4]

WHEREAS, the same draft annual review anticipates that PIAC will advise Council regarding “interim management, maintenance and protection of the historic Mueller Hangar until it is sold”; and [4]

WHEREAS, a proposal to remodel the Browning Hangar for adaptive reuse was presented to the Historic Landmark Commission’s Architectural Review Committee on August 12, 2026, indicating that plans for the Hangar’s future are advancing; and [5]

WHEREAS, a pedestrian access easement or similar instrument, if drafted narrowly, could preserve passage through the Hangar without preserving its use as a public gathering place, and giving practical meaning to PIAC’s earlier recommendations therefore requires protection of meaningful hours, usable public space, and ordinary use without a purchase, membership, or reservation; and

WHEREAS, public access depends on both physical design and the authority exercised through ownership, master leases, operating agreements, management agreements, tenant leases, and security rules; and

WHEREAS, the Hangar’s long-term preservation will require ongoing maintenance and may require substantial rehabilitation investment, and compatible commercial activity, together with reasonable safety, maintenance, event, and operating rules, can help support the Hangar while preserving its primary status as free public civic space;

NOW, THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED that PIAC recommends that Austin City Council require that any disposition, sale, lease, easement, restrictive covenant, or other controlling instrument for the Browning Hangar at 4550 Mueller Blvd protect its public character through the following requirements, and that any master lease, operating agreement, management agreement, tenant lease, or other subordinate agreement be made subject to and consistent with those protections:

1. Protected public area and ordinary use. Preserve the overwhelming majority of the covered historic Hangar floor as genuinely usable public space, with the protected area shown on a map exhibit to the controlling instruments. The map must implement this public-space requirement and state the protected square footage and its percentage of the existing covered historic floor, identifying permanent commercial allocations separately. Guarantee meaningful minimum public hours and ordinary use for informal gathering and recreation without requiring a purchase, membership, reservation, or commercial relationship. A passageway alone does not satisfy this protection. The controlling instruments should state whether and how these protections apply to the surrounding site.

2. Compatible commercial uses and events. Allow limited compatible tenant uses and temporary programmed events while tightly limiting permanent commercial encroachment. Map licensed alcohol-service areas and other tenant areas and count them within the limited commercial area. Set clear limits on the frequency, duration, and area of private, ticketed, or otherwise exclusive events so they do not become routine privatization; recurring events that remain free and open to the public may be treated differently. Common-area furnishings should ordinarily be publicly usable. Provide public access to restrooms and other amenities where feasible, without a purchase requirement. All programmed uses, including free recurring events, must be evaluated for their cumulative effect on the space and time available for ordinary informal public use.

3. Governance subordinate to public use. Require every owner, master lessee, operator, property manager, tenant, and security provider to exercise authority over the common Hangar floor consistently with its primary status as free public civic space. No owner, lessee, operator, or tenant may regulate, exclude, or displace ordinary public use of the protected area except under published rules consistent with the recorded protections and subject to City enforcement. No commercial tenant may receive unilateral authority to set common-area policy or determine ordinary public access. Authorized personnel may enforce established rules consistent with these protections.

4. Clear authority and reasonable rules. Identify who controls hours, temporary closures, events, patios, furniture, barriers, alcohol-service areas, security, and removal of users. Operational rules should be reasonable, narrowly tailored, transparent, and consistent with protected public use. Restrictions on individual users should be based on conduct and applied consistently regardless of patronage. Closures and exclusions should be limited to their justified scope and duration; commercial preference alone should not justify removing ordinary public users. Publish rules, public hours, an event calendar, and a responsible management contact.

5. Construction and interim periods. Permit temporary closures needed for rehabilitation, repair, and maintenance, with defined duration, phasing that preserves partial public access where feasible, and restoration of full public use on completion. Review the site plan and design, including floor surfaces and fixed installations, for consistency with these protections.

6. Durability, amendment, and enforcement. Secure these protections in durable legal instruments, recorded where appropriate, that bind successors and survive changes in ownership, tenants, operators, and management. Prevent their reduction through subordinate agreements or management rules. Council approval after public notice should be required for any amendment, release, or waiver that reduces the protected area, guaranteed public hours, permitted ordinary public uses, or enforceability of the protections. Routine administration within those protections should remain possible. All amendments, releases, and waivers should be posted publicly. Specify enforcement responsibility, cure periods and remedies for violations, periodic compliance reporting, and an accessible public complaint process.

7. Sustainable maintenance and funding. Require a sustainable maintenance and operating plan with clearly assigned funding responsibilities. These protections should not impose new financial obligations on the Mueller Property Owners Association or its members without their agreement.

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED that PIAC recommends that Council direct City staff, working with the master declarant as applicable, to implement Recommendation 20241112-005 and these requirements through Mueller covenant changes where applicable, together with any additional property and contractual instruments needed to secure the protections before disposition and the end of the Master Development Agreement. Implementation shall not depend solely on the availability or timing of a particular covenant amendment process; and

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED that PIAC recommends that Council direct City staff to translate these requirements into specific, enforceable provisions and to publish the proposed public-access provisions and provide an opportunity for public review, and for review by PIAC or a Council-designated successor body, before approval of the applicable controlling instruments; and

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED that PIAC recommends that Council direct City staff to brief the commission, at its next available meeting, on the status of Browning Hangar disposition and on implementation of Recommendations 20240813-004 and 20241112-005.

Sources

[1] PIAC Recommendation 20240813-004, August 13, 2024. <https://services.austintexas.gov/edims/document.cfm?id=434273>

[2] PIAC Recommendation 20241112-005, November 12, 2024. <https://services.austintexas.gov/edims/document.cfm?id=441089>

[3] PIAC agenda, August 11, 2026, item 2. <https://services.austintexas.gov/edims/document.cfm?id=478411>

[4] Draft Annual Internal Review, July 2025–June 2026, pp. 1, 4–5. <https://services.austintexas.gov/edims/document.cfm?id=474961>

[5] Architectural Review Committee approved minutes, August 12, 2026, item 2. <https://services.austintexas.gov/edims/document.cfm?id=481224>