

Editorial: On Lambert's privatization, no one knows what goes on behind closed doors

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The St. Louis County Council was poised to consider a resolution Tuesday urging St. Louis city to be more transparent in its deliberations regarding the proposed privatization of St. Louis Lambert International Airport. Action was postponed, however, after privatization activist Adolphus Pruitt told the council, “if you go to fly314.com, everything about the airport and the working group is posted online.” The council should keep that resolution handy before taking Pruitt at his word.

Council members and airport users absolutely should visit that private website and judge the transparency of this privatization process for themselves. What visitors will find in the “transparency portal” of fly314.com is a website jam-packed with hyperlinks to impressive-looking meeting schedules, videos, press releases and publicly available research reports.

What they won’t find is useful information about all the substantive deliberations occurring behind closed doors, where this process actually is being driven. Hyperlinks and press releases do not equate with transparency.

Mayor Lyda Krewson's administration, working in tandem with private consultants, has constructed a process designed to be opaque and unfathomable. The lack of transparency is evident in the links on fly314.com to the meetings convened so far by the Airport Advisory Working Group. This group, which includes one elected official along with six appointees, is the primary body conducting the nitty-gritty details of agreements with lawyers, airlines, consultants and other stakeholders.

This very, very busy working group has met 26 times this year and spent an average of 17.4 minutes per meeting in open session, where the public could watch and learn. The total time spent in open session was just under eight hours. But the working group, which must abide by state open-meetings law, has spent more than 41 hours behind closed doors. That’s five hours of secret meetings for every one hour open to the public.

In all these hours behind closed doors, the group’s members would have us believe that they complied 100% percent of the time with Missouri’s Sunshine Law — never once discussing business in private that the law says should be discussed in public. That’s sure a lot of secret talking for a process supposedly dedicated to transparency.

What’s discussed in public can often be inscrutable. During the 15-minute working group session on Oct. 4, Deputy Mayor Linda Martinez announced that the city has reached a preliminary framework agreement with major airlines and cargo carriers that represent 80% of airport traffic and 85% of weighted cargo. That’s great, but agreement on what? The working group’s minutes don’t elaborate, and no documents in the “transparency portal” explain what she was talking about.

The reasons to distrust this process are mounting by the day. Millions of airport customers from around the region have every reason to be concerned, which is why the County Council — and the Board of Aldermen — are justified in demanding real transparency.

- *Index terms: commentary;st. louis lambert international airport;sunshine law;mayor lyda krewson’s administration;transparency portal;behind closed doors;airport advisory working group;adolphus pruit;local-government;local-politics;Linda Martinez;fly314.com; EDITORIAL*
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