

Hemmed in/Geography, leases leave no room to grow

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Section A-Record Chronical

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Renton Municipal Airport may not look like it's ready to burst its geographic seams, but it couldn't accommodate even one more small plane.

The city airport hemmed in by Lake Washington, the Cedar River, Rainier Avenue South and Airport Way is relatively undeveloped, but all of the buildable land already is under lease.

The Boeing Co. holds leases on 74 percent of the airport property until the year 2010, leaving only about one-quarter of the property open to private aviators and other aviation-related businesses.

Renton City Councilman Richard Stredicke, chairman of the council's aviation committee, says the city would like to make more room available for general aviation, but there's just no room to expand.

Robertson moved

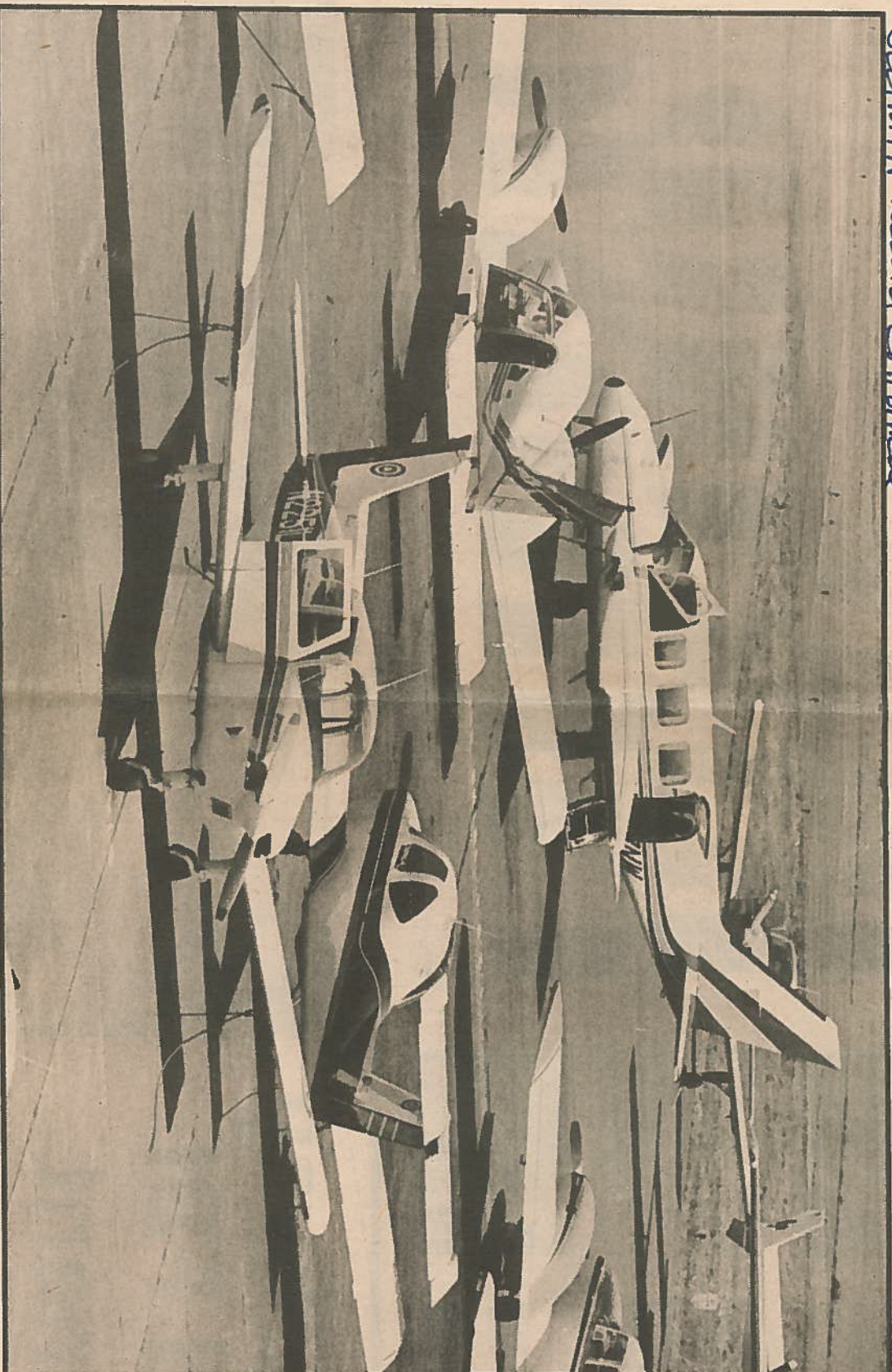
A few months ago, Robertson Aircraft Corp. was forced to move its operations to Everett because a short-term lease it made with Boeing expired and there was no where else at the Renton facility that the Robertson operation could be moved to.

"It's just criminal that Robertson had to pack up and leave," Stredicke said. "People look at this airport and say, 'Gee, there's lots of space out here,' but what they don't realize is that only about 30 percent of it is available for use now because of the long-term leases."

Stredicke says Boeing is the controlling factor since the company is reluctant to sublease the land now vacant, but adds that "you can't blame them for it." The but unused land is targeted for future expansion if and when the 757 program gets into full swing.

With only a small portion of the airport space available for private fliers, tie-downs and hangar rentals are at a premium.

Stredicke says the monthly rates



Vacancies for private plane storage are rare at Renton Municipal Airport, so hangar fees are at a premium

Staff Photo by MARK MORRIS

for hangar and tie-down rentals are probably higher at the city airport because of the tremendous demand and limited supply.

Waiting lists

Both Fancher Flyways and Renton Aviation report long waiting lists for hangar and tie-down space and the only estimate on when space will

open up is "indefinite."

Fancher did manage to expand its aircraft storage space this month through a creative trade with The Boeing Co.

Fancher wanted to construct a metal airplane hangar on property it leases near Boeing's compass rose. But since the metal building could

interfere with the accuracy of the calibrating instrument, Boeing offered Fancher a 30-year lease on property it has on the west side of the airport in trade for an agreement that Fancher wouldn't use the land near the compass rose for anything but tie-downs.

But all companies don't have that

kind of bargaining power, Stredicke noted.

Louie Gebemini, airport director, explains that much of the airport land was leased out for a 45-year term in the mid-60s because the city wanted to ensure maximum use of the facility.

But private use now has exceeded

the airport's ability to accommodate general aviation uses.

Gebemini disagrees

Gebemini disagrees that all of the buildable land available for general aviation has been developed. He said another 35-40 tie-down spaces could be provided if the city developed some of the narrow strips of land on the east side of the runway.

Stredicke says the property Gebemini talks about developing is either too close to the river or to the runway, and use of it would be restricted by the state Shorelines Management Act or the Federal Aviation Administration.

Having to turn away new businesses from the airport is unique to Renton because of its lease arrangements with The Boeing Co., but cramped quarters for private aviators is a countywide problem.

King County Airport and Bellevue Municipal Airport are just as full, and they face the same expansion problems as Renton Airport.

Stredicke says the only King County airport he knows of that could expand without great problems with geography and nearby residential neighborhoods is the Auburn airport.

Just no place to go

"There's just no place we could expand to," Stredicke said. He says there is nowhere on the outskirts of the city that would accommodate a sort of airport annex because of the predominant residential use of those areas.

"Airports are not usually a welcome neighbor to residential communities," Stredicke said. "We have been fortunate in that Renton Airport is not near residential areas, except for a part of Skyway and Bryn Mawr, and in those cases, the airport was there first."

Expanding the airport to accommodate the large number of commercial operators and private aviators looking for space in this area would be nice, Stredicke said.

"But I really can't see from a practical and geographical standpoint any increased use there," he said.