

MWAA: 'Warn New Residents about Airplane Noise'

New homes in Westfields are proposed for high-decibel areas.

BY BONNIE HOBBS
THE CONNECTION

Elm Street Communities, a development proposed for Westfields, would build 157 residential units directly under a Dulles International Airport flight path. Concerned about the loud airplane noise the homeowners would face, the Sully District Council and the West Fairfax County Citizens Assn. (WFCCA) voted in January to recommend the county Planning Commission disapprove the proposal.

And troubled that the county Board of Supervisors would eventually be deciding this case based on a map of the airport's noise contours from 1997 – when this map was updated in 2019 – the land-use committees invited representatives of the Metropolitan Washington Airports Authority (MWAA) to address their joint meeting, last Monday, Feb. 10.

That way, they could hear directly from the experts exactly what types of development should be prohibited in certain noise-decibel area, as well as the impact that airplane noise could have on anyone allowed to live there. Speaking first was Michael Cooper, MWAA's manager of state and local government relations.

Showing a large map of the updated noise contours around Dulles Airport, he said, "Contours are lines on a map. Dulles currently has four runways [three going north to south, and one going east to west], with a fifth runway, going east to west, planned for the future."

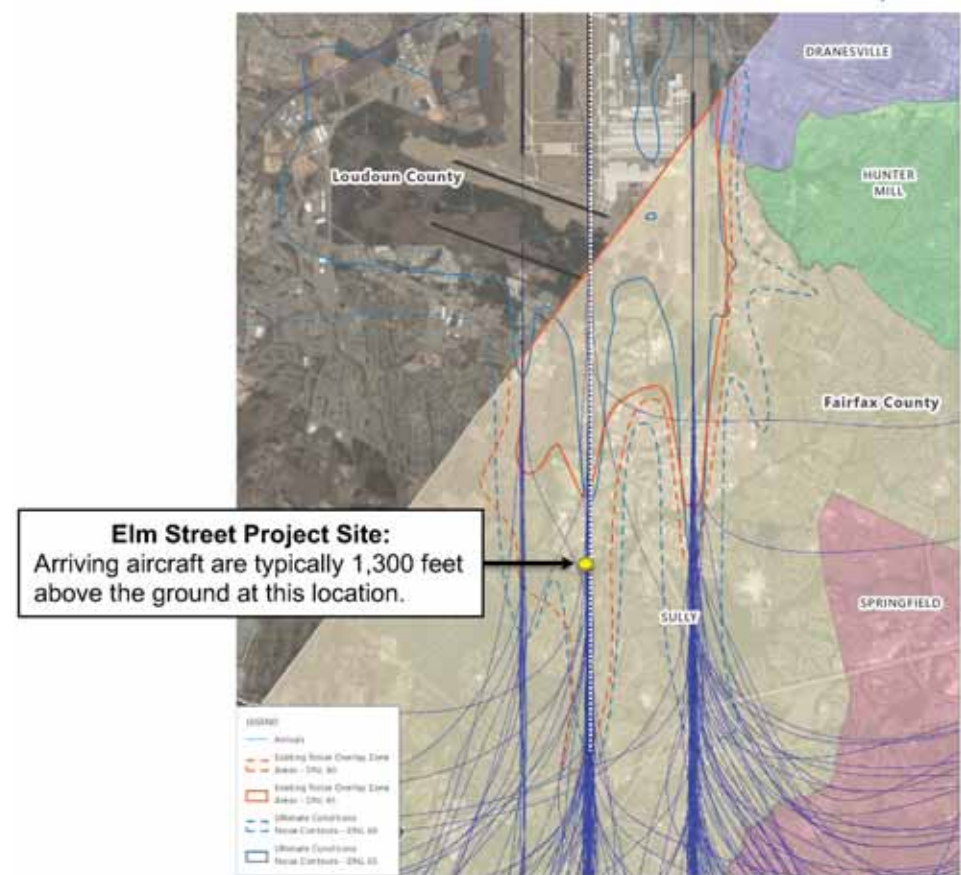
The area in white was designated 65 DNL, meaning it has a day/night average decibel noise level of 65 decibels and above. "The FAA terms it 'highly annoying,'" said Cooper. "So we don't want to put residents there."

The area in gray is designated 60 DNL – and it's where the Elm Street development would go, if approved. "There's a national discussion about whether the 65 should be dropped down to 60 or 55 because the FAA has received so many complaints from residents throughout the country about airport noise," said Cooper.

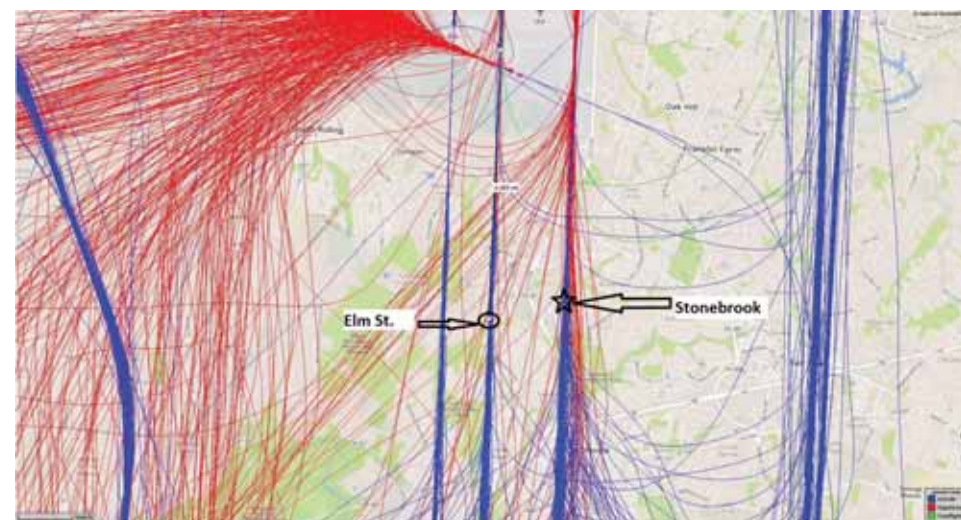
The dark-green perimeter showed the one-mile-wide buffer between the contour areas and the residents, so people can see how close they are to the airport.

"Up until last year, Fairfax County protected [people] up to the 60, without a one-mile buffer," said Cooper. "Last year, when Land Unit J [in Westfields] was being discussed, the county said it would allow development in the 60, provided there was disclosure, insulation and [other protective measures for residents]. But every single application in that area would come back to the Planning Commission and Supervisors before being approved."

Washington Dulles International Airport
60 & 65 DNL Contours with Arrival Paths
in Relation to Elm Street Communities, Inc.



COURTESY OF MWAA
Arriving flights at Dulles International Airport would fly just 1300 feet above the Elm Street homes (yellow dot on map).



COURTESY OF MWAA
Both Elm Street and Stonebrook residents would be directly underneath flights arriving at Dulles. (Purple: arrivals; red: departures).

THE PROBLEM, he said, is that the Elm Street homes would be located "directly underneath the main, center runway of Dulles for [flight] arrivals. Their frequency is generally 30-60 seconds apart – and this flightpath is just 1,300 feet above [residents'] heads."

In addition, according to a report done by the Federal Aviation Administration

(FAA), aircraft operations at Dulles between 2020-2045 are projected to grow by 27 percent. And that number translates to an increase of 240 flights/day.

"We don't object to many developments in Fairfax and Loudoun counties," said Cooper. "The Airports Authority rarely comes forward and says, 'Houston, you've got a problem.' But in this case, there is a prob-



BONNIE HOBBS/THE CONNECTION
Standing beside a map of Dulles Airport's updated noise contours, MWAA's Michael Cooper listens to comments from the land-use committees.

lem. So we're saying to Fairfax County, "You really shouldn't do it. But if you do, at least be transparent about it to the citizens."

He then showed two maps – one depicting both the old and new noise contours, and the other illustrating where the runways are and Elm Street's proximity to the center runway. He also displayed a map showing the paths of arriving and departing flights crisscrossing the area where several applicants are currently proposing residential projects.

As it stands now, said Cooper, "Prospective homeowners aren't going to be shown the map showing all the flight paths going over their heads. The Airports Authority thinks Elm Street shouldn't be built there. If it is, then its residents will complain to us and to the state and county about the noise. And there's no such thing as a sound wall for overhead noise."

Former At-Large Planning Commissioner Jim Hart said, "The Planning Commission told the Supervisors [by an overwhelming majority] to adopt the new contour map. But the Supervisors decided to go with the old, outdated, 1997 map until all the new applications are decided – and I find that absolutely appalling. If they're showing a map from 23 years ago to let these developments be approved, then they're shutting out the residents."

However, Amber-Lee Leslie, Sully District Supervisor Kathy Smith's land-use aide, said, "The county is studying the new contours and feels it's their legal obligation to do it, case by case, and review cases under the contour policies existing at the time they applied. The county won't adopt the new contours until they've been reviewed."

Hart asked why the county is "rushing to approve all these new cases." But Leslie said each application goes through a 9- 12-month process.

Nonetheless, stressed Cooper, "The issue is not just the contours. The issue at the Elm Street site is that it's got arrivals flying overhead at 1,300 feet. And the applicant hasn't agreed to put all the flightpath lines on the map [for the potential homebuyers]."

He also noted that Fairfax County has

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NEWS

Transparency Demanded on Airplane Noise

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been aware of the new, updated contours since November 2019. “That previous fall, a citizens group was reviewing Land Unit J, and we wanted it to have the information about the new contours before the [proposed], new developments in Westfields were approved,” explained Cooper. “And whether or not Fairfax County adopts them, they’re in the public realm.”

Mark Rutyna, with MWAA’s Planning and Engineering Office, said the county hired an independent noise expert who “reviewed MWAA’s study and agreed with it” and will report back to Fairfax County within two weeks.

Cooper said MWAA will work with the Supervisors; but he also told Hart he’s correct that the county should be using the most current, noise-contour map. “There are six land-use cases coming forward now in this area, including Elm Street,” said Cooper. “And a proposal [called Stonebrook] by [developer] Stanley Martin is in the 65 DNL.”

WFCCA Land-Use Chairman John Litzenberger – a former pilot, himself – also noted that the DNL decibel levels are averages and could actually be higher. “On takeoffs, when planes are at full power, that’s noisy, as well,” he said. “So the decibels on takeoffs will be significantly higher than on arrivals and could be as high as 70-80 decibels.”

Cooper said Stonebrook – being proposed for con-

struction of 142 residential units, just east of Elm Street – will be even closer to the aircraft. “Planes will only be 950 feet above,” he said. “And we’ll suggest that the arrivals information be included in the marketing materials.”

FURTHERMORE, MWAA wasn’t even notified by the county about the Elm Street proposal until a week or two before it came before the land-use committees. So David Mould, MWAA vice president of Communications and Government Affairs, said, “We’ve now requested information [from Fairfax County’s Department of Planning and Development] when anything is proposed within the existing or updated contours.”

Rutyna said aircraft noise for Elm Street and Stonebrook residents could also be amplified because “Dulles has three north-south runways, and is able to have three, simultaneous arrivals in all weather.” These runways lie directly between Elm Street and Stonebrook; and, said Rutyna, the two closest to Stonebrook “are used the most.”

“We created a presentation for the Fairfax County Supervisors so they could see in 3-D what it looks and feels like when planes get to this level over Elm Street,” said Cooper. “But they didn’t want it presented in public because it contained information about a land-use case that would later come before

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BULLETIN

Submit civic/community announcements at ConnectionNewspapers.com/Calendar. Photos and artwork welcome. Deadline is Thursday at noon, at least two weeks before event.

WEDNESDAY/FEB. 19

Possible Zoning Changes Meeting. 7:30 p.m. At Clifton Town Hall, 12641 Chapel Road, Clifton. The purpose of the meeting is to inform residents and obtain feedback on the County's proposed Agritourism Zoning Ordinance Amendment, the addition of a Rural Resort use, and changes to the requirements for ADUs. This is a meeting regarding possible zoning changes to the Fairfax County zoning rules which will impact the entire Clifton area. For details on the watershed: <https://www.fairfaxcounty.gov/publicworks/stormwater/watersheds>

MONDAY/FEB. 24

NARFE Dulles Chapter 1241 Luncheon. 11:30 a.m. At Amphora Diner, 1151 Elden Street, Herndon. Featuring speaker Pete Kirby, Retired Fire Chief, Centreville Fire Department, who will speak on fire prevention and response. The cost of the luncheon is \$18.15 which includes tax and a small gratuity.

WEDNESDAY/FEB. 26

The Fairfax County Department of Transportation will hold community meetings in every district of the county this spring with the Virginia Department of Transportation (VDOT) to discuss proposed 2020 paving and restriping projects. The first meetings will be held in the Hunter Mill and Springfield Districts in February.

❖ The Springfield District meeting will be held on Wednesday, Feb. 26, 6:30 p.m., in the cafeteria of Liberty Middle School, 6801 Union Mill Road, Clifton.

The meetings will begin at 6:30 p.m., with a formal presentation beginning at 6:45 p.m., followed by time for questions, feedback and comments. For residents who cannot attend the meetings in person, the meeting presentation will be available on the District paving and restriping webpages, and feedback may be submitted online for two weeks following the meeting. Visit the Fairfax County 2020 Paving and Restriping Program: <https://www.fairfaxcounty.gov/transportation/2020-paving-and-restriping>.

Noise

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them." However, he added, "These new neighbors at least need to know where the planes fly. That's all we ask is disclosure."

The land-use committees then voted jointly, and unanimously, that Elm Street not be approved as it is now, and that both the updated contour map and the map showing Elm Street's proximity to the runways, plus the flight paths of arriving planes, be included in the developer's latest proffer (number eight) so prospective homebuyers would have this information. The committees also voted in favor of MWAA's notification request in cases where homes, schools, childcare or eldercare uses are proposed in contours of 60 decibels and above.

On Feb. 12, the Planning Commission approved Elm Street's application. Now, said Cooper, "MWAA will make the 3-D model available to county staff." The application goes to the Supervisors on March 24.

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One Step Forward, Hopefully Not Two Steps Backward



By KENNETH B. LOURIE

And so, what happens next? There's calm and then there's an eventual storm. The storm to which I refer is what will happen after the March 2nd meeting with my endocrinologist when she will assess and determine the next step in my post-thyroidectomy treatment. Presumably, in conjunction with my oncologist, a coordinated plan will be implemented for treating my two cancers. I can't imagine however, that being treated for two cancers, simultaneously, will be easier than being treated for one. And I doubt, although I don't know, that one medicine will be recommended for the treatment of both my non-small cell lung cancer and my thyroid cancer. We'll know soon enough.

In the interim, I intend to acknowledge and appreciate how easy these next few weeks will be. No appointments with doctors, no diagnostic scans, no procedures, no medicine - and no side effects, and no lab work other than as needed, to measure my calcium and magnesium levels and any other thyroid-related effects. Moreover, I am free to come and go as I please. And it does please me. Because I've earned it. I deserve it and I'm going to bask in it. You think being a cancer patient under constant treatment - for nearly 11 years is in any way amusing? Hardly. I make fun of it to make light of it. Otherwise, the weight of it would crush me. And even though my father always said I had broad shoulders, I'm always fearful that the next result will be the straw that finally breaks this camel's back. After all, I'm only human.

But for now, February 9, as I sit and write, I am three weeks and one day to my next reckoning. And since it's early days yet to know what life will be like after that March 2nd appointment (radiation and/or chemotherapy possibly), I will try to be blissfully ignorant and not think too much how easy and unencumbered my life is at the present. As a cancer patient, ceding control where you can and securing it where you thought you couldn't are keys to managing expectations and minimizing aggravation. Unfortunately, there is no one key that unlocks all doors. And there are plenty of doors, and plenty of doctors too, and plenty of fear waiting for one of your doctors to walk through any of these doors to deliver the results from your most recent cancer-related whatever.

None of which concerns me right now, or rather it shouldn't. And if there's any port in this storm where I can offload some anxiety and get in a little R&R, literally, figuratively, hypothetically, magically, unexpectedly, I should jump at the chance. I am reminded of a conversation I had with my oncologist years ago when I experienced a similar interval between treatment. The medicine I was on had stopped working so we needed to start another, another with unknown benefits and side effects. My oncologist suggested that since I felt good, perhaps we should delay the beginning of the next infusion and that I should take that trip I had always dreamed of because I might never feel this good again. I didn't then and I won't now. When I jump however, I can barely get off the ground.

I haven't exactly been presented this time, with this kind of do-before-you-die opportunity, but there is an eerie familiarity to my circumstances. And though I've been down this road trying-to-find out before, I can't be at all certain to what kind of twists and turns await. The last thing a cancer diagnosis provides is a guarantee. Actually, that's wrong. A cancer diagnosis does provide a guarantee: that there are no guarantees. And so, as I prepare for the next phase of my life, the one that begins 11 years after being diagnosed with non-small cell lung cancer, stage IV and being given a 13 month to two-year prognosis to boot, I will quote the late, great Satchel Paige: "Don't look back. Something might be gaining on you."

Kenny Lourie is an Advertising Representative for The Potomac Almanac & The Connection Newspapers.

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