

Bowman Field tree cutting could be less severe

Written by James Bruggers *The Courier-Journal*
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Tower at Bowman Field. Feb. 23, 2013

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Tower at Bowman Field. Feb. 23, 2013 / Arza Barnett/The Courier-Journal

Tree cutting around Bowman Field to improve flight safety might be less extensive than first predicted, Louisville regional airport officials are telling residents.

A new map showing areas of potential impact appears to be about 40 percent smaller than a map made public in late 2011, when the tree-cutting plan was first announced.

In letter sent to Bowman Field neighbors this week, a contractor for the Louisville Regional Airport Authority tells the residents that federal officials are allowing a change in the way protected airspace will be calculated.

Officials said Federal Aviation Administration officials have told them that they will use airport approach zones — rather than the larger departure zones — for the “primary basis of their evaluation,” according to the letter.

“This change in priority appears to reduce the size of the areas potentially impacted,” Melissa A. Jenkins, with the consulting firm Hanson Professional Services Inc., wrote in the letter.

FAA spokeswoman Kathleen Bergen would not confirm the letter’s language.

“The FAA will evaluate all information the airport authority provides to determine if there are any aeronautical impacts to Bowman Field,” she said.

The letter still identifies “200 to 250 primary areas of interest,” where the consultants found one or more trees that could be encroaching into flight safety zones, said Kelly Rubino, an engineer with Hanson.

“Until we do a ground inventory, we won’t know the exact count,” he said.

Michael Hayman, Seneca Gardens arborist, had estimated that as many as 1,000 trees could be lost or need trimming.

“Any reduction is good,” he said. “But it’s still potentially a lot of trees.”

“Our concern is homeowners will see this letter and think everything is fine,” said Angela Burton, who lives on Drayton Drive near Bowman Field and has been active with the group Plea for Trees. “We are still very wary of what this all means.”

The letter went to about 500 homes off the ends of each of the airport’s two runways, said airport spokeswoman Trish Burke.

It tells residents that Hanson completed a mapping survey that determined the height of all objects near the ends of the runways and that the findings would be sent to the FAA.

It said the FAA would determine what actions to take on any buildings, structures or trees that extend into protected airspace.

Options include lighting, trimming, removal or no action, according to the letter.

The airport authority's board of directors in February 2012 approved a \$5 million, five-year program to remove or trim all trees within FAA-expanded airspace safety zones. Airport officials have said they want to make sure business and recreational flights will be able to continue using Bowman Field without the loss of its function, including low-visibility landings and takeoffs.

The zones could extend as much as a mile from the ends of each runway, with the most likely impact within a half-mile, officials said.

Airport officials previously said they would likely need to buy airspace easements above people's homes and would replace lost trees, possibly using the authority's power of eminent domain.

Authority Executive Director Charles T. "Skip" Miller said Thursday that any decisions on purchasing airspace would come following the FAA review and completion of any necessary environmental assessments.

Officials originally said tree cutting could begin in early 2013.

But Miller said Thursday he wasn't sure when cutting or trimming might start.

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