

Preserve Bowman Field trees

The last public hearing on the controversial Bowman Field Safety Program and the impact of destroying hundreds of mature trees in surrounding neighborhoods and Seneca Park will be held on Tuesday, June 28, at 5:30 p.m. at the Breckinridge Inn. The community should be concerned about the loss of these trees and the inadequate replanting plan proposed by the Louisville Regional Airport Authority (LRAA), and voice their opinion about the need for better mitigation for these community losses.

Poor planning and bureaucracy of the Federal Aviation Administration (FAA), LRAA, and their consultants over the multi-year process of this program have failed to serve pilots, Bowman Field neighbors and the community. It should also be noted that there have been 30 accidents relating to Bowman Field since 1982, including seven fatalities. None was caused by trees. All stakeholders — pilots as well as neighbors — are concerned about safety.

In 2008, FAA clarified that LRAA must show the airport meets existing standards that set a sloped height from the end of each runway that radiates out — they are lower (closer to the ground) for departing planes and higher (farther from the ground) for arriving flights. Obstructions into those slopes are surveyed to determine whether they pose a hazard to pilots. If so, then obstructions are removed or flight procedures are restricted, e.g., limits on night flights.

After three years (in 2010), FAA decided that the lower-height standard for *departing* planes needed to be followed and agreed to pay for the necessary studies, including the studies required by two federal laws, Section 106 of the National Historic Preservation Act and the environmental assessment required by the National Environmental Policy Act.

In December 2011, the LRAA announced publicly the "Bowman Field Safety Program." FAA explained to this newspaper that "Trees have obstructed the approaches to Bowman Field for years" and that "[t]here is no new rule, nor is there a compliance deadline." An FAA manager commented internally that "the requirements to cut the trees are loosely based on our regulations ... which really don't have a lot of teeth" and that "this [program] will be very controversial because of older and historic homes and neighborhoods surrounding the airport."

In 2012, Plea For The Trees and Kentucky Resources Council contacted LRAA and FAA a total of four times, telling them that the historic property and environmental studies should be started early to avoid delays in the program.

In May 2013, FAA changed its mind, now requiring the obstruction survey for *approaching* planes. In late 2013, LRAA's consultant circulated a schedule projecting the environmental assessment to take three months and failing to include the Section 106 process.

In May 2014, Plea For The Trees wrote FAA asking to participate in the Section 106 historic study as a "consulting party." FAA responded a month later saying "it is not yet known if a Section 106 consultation is needed." In July 2014, the State Historic Preservation Officer (SHPO) wrote the FAA offering to help carry out Section 106.

In January 2015, FAA notified the SHPO that it planned to start Section 106, but FAA failed to notify interested parties for another six months. Twentytwo consulting parties responded. The first meeting was held June 24, 2015, **four years** from the announcement of the Program. Consulting parties were given two weeks to submit comments. FAA scheduled a meeting for late August 2015, during which its staff remarked they had not even read the comments yet.

Eight months later, FAA responded to the consulting party comments, and then also declared the consultation complete in May 2016 despite significant unresolved issues. A legal ad in this paper this past Memorial Day weekend notified the public of the environmental assessment and June 28 hearing.

The LRAA Board has a fiduciary duty to the pilots, neighbors and public. A navigation beacon to the west of Runway 6 did not work for over four years. What fiduciary duties were discussed by the board during these decades?

Remember, June 28, 5:30 p.m., Breckinridge Inn. There is still time to demand better mitigation for the loss of 100-year-old trees and negative impacts on the community.

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GUEST CONTRIBUTOR

The last public hearing on the impact of destroying hundreds of mature trees in surrounding neighborhoods will be Tues.

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