

Public airs Bowman Field tree concerns



[James Bruggers](#), @jbruggers 7:45 p.m. EDT June 28, 2016

Crowd tells airport officials what they think of the tree plan.



Buy Photo

(Photo: JAMES BRUGGERS/THE COURIER-JOURNAL)

A few hundred people packed a Breckinridge Inn meeting room Tuesday night to let authorities know how they feel about ongoing efforts to clear more trees from Bowman Field runway approaches.

The chaotic meeting featured a long line to get into a packed meeting room with several information stations and a closed door back area where official comments on an environmental study were being taken.

"It's crazy," said Darrell Lyvers, a Louisville pilot at the end of the line. "You shouldn't have the waiting in line to get in." Still, he said, he was glad to have the chance to tell airport officials "they need to cut some of the trees. They're dangerous."

It appeared many more who attended, however, were worried about the tree-cutting, and several told a reporter they fear the small airport is trying to recruit more noisy jet traffic. This was the only public meeting on the environmental study that officials say will clear

the way for another 100 trees to be removed from near Bowman Field runways, and the purchase of additional airspace easements above people's homes.

Prepared for the Louisville Regional Airport Authority, the draft study found no significant environmental, cultural or historical consequences of removing or trimming more than 100 additional trees. Any concerns about birds or other wildlife that live in the trees or use them were dismissed with a conclusion that they could find suitable habitat nearby.

Several people said they disagreed with those findings. "There is a problem with the heat island and the loss of trees," Jean Christensen said, referring to studies that have found elevated heat in Louisville's core.

"We think they really have to pay back the community in a bigger way," said Mimi Zinniel, executive director of the Olmsted Parks Conservancy. Seneca Park is slated to lose a number of additional trees.

Cynthia Huber spoke of how she founded a memorial grove of trees for people who died of cancer, and said airport officials have told her several of those trees in Seneca Park are at risk of being chopped down, with memorial plaques left behind. "Our beautiful big trees are going to be taken out," she said. "It's all for the jets."

Airport authority Executive Director Charles T. "Skip" Miller said there a misunderstanding about the memorial trees. He said only three of those trees may be affected, and they're small enough now to be moved.

Miller said airport officials only want to restore the function Bowman had before 2012, including nighttime instrument landings. He said the authority didn't have to mitigate for any tree losses, and that its two-for-one offer was the right thing to do. If homeowners don't want some of those trees, he said the authority would make them available for planting elsewhere.

This fight has been on since late 2011. In May 31 the authority said it removed 107 trees and trimmed 13 more last winter – its most recent work to clear airspace it already controls.

Plea for Trees, a group that's closely scrutinized the proposal, estimated that more than 300 mature trees will have been removed by the authority when its so-called safety program is completed in neighborhoods known for their tall shade trees.

Reach reporter James Bruggers at (502) 582-4645 and at jbruggers@courier-journal.com.

