

Federal agency faults Bowman Field tree plan

[James Bruggers](#), @jbruggers 4:19 p.m. EST November 7, 2016

Tree cutting aimed at protecting pilots would have adverse historical impact in area near Bowman Field



(Photo: Photo by Jacob Zimmer, Special t)

STORY HIGHLIGHTS

- **In May, some 108 trees additional trees were identified as needing to be cut or trimmed, airport officials said.**
 - **Now, bid documents identify 195 trees affected, 138 of them to be removed, 53 to be trimmed and four to be transplanted.**
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The federal government's go-to body on historic preservation has faulted the Federal Aviation Agency's conclusion that tree cutting near Bowman Field runways would have no adverse impacts.

The Advisory Council on Historic Preservation in a Nov. 3 letter to the FAA urges the FAA and local airport officials to develop a more robust plan to offset damage to the

historical character of neighborhoods where some tree cutting has already occurred and more is planned for this winter. The council said FAA and the Louisville Regional Airport Authority should enter into formal consultation with state and local officials and others, including the group Plea For Trees, which has been pressing for a thorough historical and environmental review of the tree-cutting plan.

"The FAA will give full consideration to the (council's) advisory opinion as well as all other pertinent facts and perspectives before reaching a final decision," said FAA spokeswoman Kathleen Bergen in a written statement.

The airport authority's spokeswoman Natalie Ciresi Chaudoin acknowledged the letter as part of an ongoing FAA review. The authority is proceeding with appraisals and other steps to prepare for acquisition of airspace easements, according to her written statement.

Attorney Leslie Barras has been working on the historic preservation aspects of what the airport authority calls its Bowman Field Area Safety Plan, and Monday she said the federal agencies normally follows the advisory council's advice, especially on transportation matters.

If followed this time, a memorandum of agreement would specify the measures that would need to be taken to mitigate the harm to the neighborhoods and Seneca Park from the cumulative removal of trees, said Barras, who represents Plea for Trees. "I expect the document would provide for additional mitigation beyond the original two-for-one tree replacement on private properties," she said.

The council's finding recognizes that airport officials have erroneously been looking at the tree cutting program as affecting isolated trees on individual properties when it is causing larger, neighborhood-scale losses.

LRAA and FAA officials did not immediately respond to a request for comment.

The council asked to be part of the consultations because the outcome could set a precedent for other airports across the country, Nelson wrote.

The historic preservation council letter noted that the objections it received were not in opposition to improved airport safety. Instead, they disagree with FAA's analysis about the effects on historic properties, wrote Reid Nelson, director of the council's Office of Federal Agency Programs.

The council is an [independent federal agency](#) that promotes the preservation, enhancement, and productive use of the nation's historic resources, and advises the president and Congress on national historic preservation policy.



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Mayor Greg Fischer and his father, George at the Bowman Field Aviation Heritage Festival in October. (Photo: Philip Scott Andrews, Special to CJ)

The Courier-Journal [in October reported](#) that Louisville airport officials reversed themselves and agreed to hold off on purchasing airspace easements near Bowman Field while they work with federal aviation officials to complete environmental and historical reviews that were halted last summer.

At the time, Chaudoin said airport officials were still hoping to stay on schedule to acquire new airspace easements and complete trimming or tree removals to make landings and approaches safer. Earlier in the year, [they said they hoped](#) to complete that work by next spring after they rejected continued federal involvement while complaining about FAA "timidness" in dealing with the tree issue.

Airport officials first announced their plan for new airspace easements and more cutting in late 2011. Pilots have faced some restrictions on airport use because of trees.

In May, some 108 trees additional trees were identified as needing to be cut or trimmed, airport officials said.

Bid documents now identify 195 trees total with 138 of them to be removed, 53 to be trimmed and four to be transplanted. That's on top of other tree removal and trimming done since 2011 under existing airspace easements. Sixty-five of the trees have trunk diameters wider than two feet, with 26 of them wider than three feet.

Some others were found to be a future safety hazard and were requested by homeowners to be removed, Chaudoin said.

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