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# Lancaster Residents Speak Out Against Airport Expansion

The debate is a long-standing and contentious one between some residents in the community and town officials

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March 04--A proposed local law could spell further expansion at the Buffalo Lancaster Airport and also lead to jets at the rural facility.

The debate is a long-standing and contentious one between some residents in the community and town officials. Quality of life and a potential negative impact on future residential development of prime undeveloped land near the airport top neighbors' concerns.

Some residents, many of them members of the Safe Aviation Coalition of Lancaster, reiterated their concerns Monday to town leaders about a proposal to amend the town's Zoning Code, which the town says would clarify permitted uses in the town's light industrial district.

The same issue came up last summer and is now refueling the debate over the airport, whose activity mostly centers on single-engine planes. Some in the town feel the airport operates under ambiguous circumstances that may not be covered by town code.

The issue -- which drew an overflow crowd to a public hearing last summer on two related resolutions -- again sparked concerns among some residents before the Town Board voted 3 to 1 Monday to refer the resolution to the Planning Board for review.

Town planners will begin addressing the matter Wednesday evening when they meet. Depending on what they ultimately decide, planners could send the matter back to the Town Board, which could again schedule another public hearing.

"If we have another public hearing on this in the Opera House, the residents that came concerned last time will come angry this time, and perhaps in even greater numbers," said resident David Hangauer, a primary opponent of any changes involving the airport.

"It is the fear of letting in helicopters and jets ..." said resident Lee Chowanec, a critic of the airport's potential expansion.

Airport officials couldn't be reached on deadline, but in March 2012, airport officials indicated they were looking to sell the facility due to mounting frustration over high taxes, strict regulations and neighborhood opposition. The airport also in 2012 sought to build a longer runway in a bid to bring in larger aircraft, but stiff opposition from residents and Supervisor Dino J. Fudoli quashed that effort.

The latest resolution was again sponsored by Councilman Mark Aquino, who faced some heat from residents Monday for sponsoring a resolution mirroring the one last summer.

Town officials said the issues need to be fully vetted to clarify what is allowed for land uses in the district. The issue was somewhat muddled when a resolution last July was tied to the town's sale of its Colecraft Building. That has since been handled separately.

Now, the town needs to revisit the zoning issue, said Fudoli, who was the sole opposing vote on Aquino's resolution Monday. Councilwoman Donna Stempniak had an excused absence from the meeting.

Hangauer insisted the clarification is not needed, and along with many others, said it could ultimately lead to expansion of the airport, located off Walden Avenue near Pavement and Ransom roads. "It's rather a new change," he said of the language of the proposed zoning amendment. "It is misleading."

Aquino disagreed. He also insisted he has not made a decision on the matter, but he also went out of his way to insist he is satisfied with the current state of the airport. "I'm not in favor of any expansion of the airport," Aquino said. "I'm fine with the way it is now. I'm in favor of clarifying the language for residents and the airport. I think it's gray."

A segment of residents has long felt the airport violates the town's zoning laws and was never given a permanent use in the town's light-industrial zone.

Aquino, however, said if the airport wants any additional improvements or expansion, that's a separate issue. "If they want that stuff, they're going to have to come back to us," he said, noting he wants the permitted use issue clarified "so we're not dealing with this junk for the next five to 10 years."

Chowanec said that both the Town and Planning boards owe a sense of responsibility to the public. "All we're asking for is a fair shake," he said.

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