

Climate Assessment

Office of Legislative Oversight

Bill 24-23: Airpark Community Advisory Committee - Established

SUMMARY

The Office of Legislative Oversight (OLO) anticipates Bill 24-23 will likely have little to no impact on the County's contribution to addressing climate change. While the proposed committee could recommend actions that could affect the County's contribution to addressing climate change and community resilience, such as actions addressing noise, soil, and air pollution, there is no certainty that these actions would be implemented as the committee would not have regulatory authority.

BACKGROUND AND PURPOSE OF BILL 24-23

The Montgomery County Airpark is a general aviation airport located in Gaithersburg and opened in 1959.¹ A general aviation airport serves small civilian aircraft but not aircraft operated by companies transporting passengers on regularly scheduled routes. Typically, general aviation airport users include private aircraft owners, charter services, and flight schools.² In 2022, the Office of Legislative Oversight published OLO Report 2022-2 regarding the Airpark's regulatory framework and community impacts.³

Prior to 2021, the Airpark Liaison Committee (ALC), established by the Council in 1990, served as the primary forum for communication among individuals concerned with Montgomery County Airpark operations. In 2021, the ALC was dissolved and the Montgomery County Revenue Authority (MCRA), who owns and operates the Airpark, assumed responsibility as the main agency conducting public outreach for the Airpark.⁴

The purpose of Bill 24-23 is to establish an Airpark Community Advisory Committee to advise the County Executive, County Council, and the MCRA regarding the community impacts of Montgomery County Airpark operations. The committee would be comprised of representatives from the community, the Montgomery County Economic Development Corporation, flight schools operating at the Airpark, and business owners in the County.⁵ If enacted, Bill 24-23 would:

- Establish an Airpark Community Advisory Committee, which would meet at least four times annually;
- Specify the membership, responsibilities, and staffing of the committee; and
- Generally amend the laws regarding airports within the County and regarding an advisory committee concerning airports.⁶

Bill 24-23, Airpark Community Advisory Committee – Established, was introduced by the County Council on May 2, 2023.

ANTICIPATED IMPACTS

Airport operations can lead to noise, air, and soil pollution and there is precedence for community concern about these issues.⁷ Lead pollution stemming from airport operations is of particular concern, as lead may be deposited into surrounding soils and groundwater and can impact the health of people who live near airports, especially young children.⁸ Health is a determinant of community resilience, as a decreased health status can impact a community's ability to respond and recover from traumatic events.⁹ However, it should be noted that the most recent National Emissions Inventory (NEI) reported the lead concentration level near the Montgomery County Airpark was 0.125 tons/year for 2017, which falls below the EPA requirement for state air quality agencies to monitor airports that emit at least 1.0 tons/year.¹⁰

Another issue from airport operations that has impacts both within and outside the County are greenhouse gas emissions associated with air travel. The EPA reports that commercial airplanes and large business jets contribute 10% of U.S. transportation emissions, and account for 3% of the nation's total greenhouse gas production.¹¹ Carbon dioxide, a greenhouse gas, is the largest component of aircraft emissions, as it accounts for approximately 70% of the exhaust.¹² Due to this, the Federal Aviation Administration is pursuing new and less greenhouse gas intensive aircraft and engine technologies to reach their goal of net-zero aviation greenhouse gas emissions by 2050.¹³

The combustion of jet fuel from commercial domestic and international aviation accounts for more than 97% of U.S. aviation CO₂ emissions with the remaining 3% of emissions coming from airport operations and fuel use from aviation gasoline used by piston engines.¹⁴ As the Airpark does not have regularly scheduled commercial flights but does have operations from planes with piston engines, it contributes a small amount to overall emissions associated with air travel. The Airpark also has flight schools operating out of it which trains pilots to become commercial pilots, which could also indirectly contribute to overall greenhouse gas emissions associated with air travel.

While the proposed committee could recommend actions that could affect the County's contribution to addressing climate change and community resilience, such as actions addressing noise, soil, and air pollution, there is no certainty that these actions would be implemented as the committee would not have regulatory authority. Therefore, OLO anticipates Bill 24-23 will have little to no impact on the County's contribution to addressing climate change, including the reduction and/or sequestration of greenhouse gas emissions, community resilience, and adaptive capacity.

RECOMMENDED AMENDMENTS

The Climate Assessment Act requires OLO to offer recommendations, such as amendments or other measures to mitigate any anticipated negative climate impacts.¹⁵ OLO does not offer recommendations or amendments as Bill 24-23 is likely to have little to no impact on the County's contribution to addressing climate change, including the reduction and/or sequestration of greenhouse gas emissions, community resilience, and adaptative capacity.

CAVEATS

OLO notes two caveats to this climate assessment. First, predicting the impacts of legislation upon climate change is a challenging analytical endeavor due to data limitations, uncertainty, and the broad, global nature of climate change. Second, the analysis performed here is intended to inform the legislative process, not determine whether the Council should enact legislation. Thus, any conclusion made in this statement does not represent OLO's endorsement of, or objection to, the bill under consideration.

PURPOSE OF CLIMATE ASSESSMENTS

The purpose of the Climate Assessments is to evaluate the anticipated impact of legislation on the County's contribution to addressing climate change. These climate assessments will provide the Council with a more thorough understanding of the potential climate impacts and implications of proposed legislation, at the County level. The scope of the Climate Assessments is limited to the County's contribution to addressing climate change, specifically upon the County's contribution to greenhouse gas emissions and how actions suggested by legislation could help improve the County's adaptative capacity to climate change, and therefore, increase community resilience.

While co-benefits such as health and cost savings may be discussed, the focus is on how proposed County bills may impact GHG emissions and community resilience.

CONTRIBUTIONS

OLO staffer Kaitlyn Simmons drafted this assessment.

¹ [Montgomery County Airpark Home Page, "About the Airpark", Accessed 5/8/23.](#)

² [Federal Aviation Administration, "Airport Categories", Accessed 5/8/23.](#)

³ [Office of Legislative Oversight, "The Montgomery County Airpark: Regulatory Framework and Community Impacts", January 25, 2022.](#)

⁴ Ibid.

⁵ [Montgomery County Council, "Staff Introduction Report for Expedited Bill 24-23", May 2, 2023.](#)

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- ⁶ Ibid.
- ⁷ [Office of Legislative Oversight, "The Montgomery County Airpark: Regulatory Framework and Community Impacts", January 25, 2022.](#)
- ⁸ [Center for Disease Control, "What are U.S. Standards for Lead Levels?", Accessed 5/15/23.](#)
- ⁹ [Journal of Global Health Reports, "Health: An Essential Component of National Resilience", Barnea, R., et. al., August 17, 2020.](#)
- ¹⁰ See page 68 for letter from the Maryland Department of the Environment, [Office of Legislative Oversight, "The Montgomery County Airpark: Regulatory Framework and Community Impacts", January 25, 2022.](#)
- ¹¹ [Environmental and Energy Study Institute. "Issue Brief: The Growth in Greenhouse Gas Emissions from Commercial Aviation", June 9, 2022.](#)
- ¹² Ibid.
- ¹³ [Federal Aviation Administration, "United States 2021 Aviation Climate Action Plan", 2021.](#)
- ¹⁴ Ibid.
- ¹⁵ Bill 3-22, Legislative Branch – Climate Assessments – Required, Montgomery County Council, Effective date October 24, 2022