

Airpark Community Advisory Committee (ACAC)

January 29, 2025

7 – 8:30 PM

Montgomery County Upper County Community Center
8201 Emory Grove Road
Gaithersburg, MD 20877



Attendees:

Members:

Bobbi Besley
Justin Bollum, non-voting
H Michael Brown
Councilmember Dawn Luedtke, non-voting
William “Skip” Reindollar
Jake Adler representing Ruben Rosario, non-voting
Lynne Stein Benzion
Dale Tuttle
Rony Ledany
Karen Kodjanian

MCDOT Staff Liaison:

Joe Pospisil

Guests:

Alex Gertsen	Harold Maldonado
Rebecca Trupp	Ron Newman
Marcela Aguilar	Catherine Wallenmeyer
Jeanie Bayer	Jocelyn Copeland
Mollie Hilty	Slava Mordehaev
Lorraine Lennon	Doreen Kaufmann
John Mietus	Lee Babcock
Esther Wells	Fernando Campoamor
Piotr Kulczakowicz	Barguv Murali
Tom Wisner	Marc Foelsch
Vicki Malick	Lucy Seifert

Action Items

December 17th Meeting Minutes Approval

Prior to a vote on the December 17th meeting minutes, committee members were provided with an edit to text that more accurately described information about industrial tenants surrounding the Airpark. The committee approved this new language and unanimously approved the minutes, which were posted on the [ACAC Webpage](#).

Reports and Announcements

Updates from Data Subcommittee

The Data Subcommittee continues to meet with the vendor, FlightAware, who provides the Airpark with its flight operations data. As of the January meeting, modifications to the data had not been implemented; however, FlightAware continues to work to improve the accuracy of operations data, like Touch and Goes, it provides the Airpark.

Updates from Community and Facilities Subcommittee

The Community and Facilities Subcommittee members again discussed the idea of a FAQ page on the Airpark website to address common concerns and complaints and provide the same information to everyone. It was pointed out that the Airpark does have a FAQ section but would be open to providing more information. Committee members were encouraged to think of questions that could be addressed in a FAQ for the next meeting.

The following motion was made after committee discussion:

The committee will work with the Airpark to expand upon the information it provides in its FAQ. On a quarterly basis the committee will examine the FAQs to determine if additional questions raised by the committee or by members of the Airpark community should be addressed and to update existing FAQ explanations when necessary.

This motion was unanimously approved.

The goal of improving compliance with the noise abatement procedures was again discussed. It was noted that following this discussion at the December meeting the Airpark went ahead and added the noise abatement procedures to the Automated Surface Observing System (ASOS) provided to pilots for Runway 32.

New Business

Building on previous discussion, the committee talked about possible recommendations to improve noise abatement compliance. If FlightAware can establish a geofence for Runway 32, could the flight information for those who do not comply with the noise abatement procedures be posted? Could coverage of the noise abatement procedures be codified as part of a pilot's training? Committee members were encouraged to think of additional recommendations for future discussion.

Community Input/Feedback

Beginning at 7:00 pm the meeting was turned over for community input. The list of speakers is provided below. Those speakers who provided written statements are identified and their statements are attached.

Speakers

Harold Maldonado, Resident

(Speakers continued)

Mollie Hilty, Resident

Statement Attached

Ron Newman, Resident

Alex Gertsen, National Business Aviation Association

Catherine Wallenmeyer, Resident

Marcela Aguilar, Resident

Statement Attached

Jocelyn Copeland, Resident

Statement Attached

Slava Mordehaev, Pilot in Training Flight Academy

Doreen Kaufmann, Resident

Statement Attached

Lee Babcock, Coast Guard Auxiliary Flotilla

Statement Attached

Fernando Campoamor, Resident

Barguv Murali, Resident

Provided Statements

Marc Foelsch, Resident

Steve Lefferts, Business Owner

Following a unanimous committee vote the meeting was adjourned at 7:39 pm.

Airpark Community Advisory Committee (ACAC)

Wednesday, January 29, 2025

Marc Foelsch Resident

My family and I have been residents of Montgomery Village since 2003, living just 2–3 miles from the Montgomery County Airpark (GAI). Over the years, I have observed a steady and significant increase in aircraft activity at the airpark. Unfortunately, this rise in flights has been accompanied by a concerning decline in safe flying practices over our community.

In December 2023, I began documenting instances of unsafe aircraft operations, capturing over 175 videos and images to date—an average of more than four incidents per day. These recordings reveal alarming safety issues, including aircraft deviating from their designated flight paths to avoid mid-air conflicts, congested airspace with three or more planes operating in close proximity, extremely low-flying aircraft, and what appear to be stalling exercises conducted directly over residential neighborhoods.

The increasing number of unsafe flight incidents poses a serious risk to public safety and raises urgent concerns about operations at Montgomery County Airpark. Unfortunately, these risks are not hypothetical—over the years, two high-profile accidents at the airpark have drawn international attention, underscoring the dangers posed by unsafe aviation practices in this area.

On December 8, 2014, a Phenom 100 jet (Embraer EMB-500), registered to Sage Aviation LLC, crashed into residential homes while on approach to Runway 14 at Montgomery County Airpark (see attachments). The tragic accident claimed six lives: all three occupants of the plane and three innocent residents—Marie Gemmell, 36, and her two young sons, 3-year-old Cole and 6-week-old Devon—who were simply starting their day at home.

More recently, on November 27, 2022, a Mooney M20J-201 (N201RF) struck a powerline tower while on approach to the same runway, leaving the aircraft precariously suspended in the structure (see attachment). This incident not only endangered the two occupants—who had to be rescued from the plane dangling high above the ground—but also created a massive disruption for the community. Approximately 120,000 Montgomery County residents lost power, forcing Montgomery County Public Schools to cancel classes. The crash triggered extensive and hazardous repairs to the damaged power infrastructure, lasting until February 3,

2025. For months, a low-flying helicopter had to be used to lift repair crews to and from the affected towers as they worked to replace the damaged power lines.

These tragic events, along with the increasing frequency of unsafe flight operations, highlight an urgent need for greater oversight and stricter safety measures at Montgomery County Airpark before another disaster occurs.

On Wednesday, January 29th, I attended the Airpark Community Advisory Committee (ACAC) meeting, a forum established by the Montgomery County Council to bring together residents, airpark users, and key stakeholders to discuss facility operations, as well as noise and safety concerns.

The meeting began with brief introductions of the committee members, followed by two-minute testimonies from residents, airpark users, and stakeholders. However, to my knowledge, these testimonies are not recorded—only the names of those who speak are included in the meeting minutes. This lack of documentation means that if you were not present at the meeting, you have no way of knowing what was said. The absence of an official record effectively erases these testimonies, which is a significant issue in maintaining transparency and accountability. I believe it is also important to highlight that after each resident's testimony, a brief round of applause followed. However, during this time, an individual affiliated with the airpark audibly booed the applause. Such behavior is inappropriate and should not be tolerated. In my opinion, this individual should not be permitted to attend future meetings if they cannot engage respectfully. These meetings are intended to foster productive dialogue, collaboration, and the pursuit of common ground to address the concerns brought before the ACAC. Disruptive and disrespectful behavior only undermines that purpose.

Before attending, I reviewed the minutes from previous ACAC meetings. While observing this session, I noticed that several key items—such as action items, informational data categories, and sub-committee updates—were listed in the meeting minutes but were not discussed or given status updates. For the sake of full transparency, it is essential that every item listed in the meeting minutes is addressed during ACAC meetings to ensure progress is tracked and any challenges in resolving issues are properly documented.

I appreciate the Airpark Community Advisory Committees time and attention addressing the safety concerns of the Montgomery County Airpark. I am happy to provide all the video data evidence I've captured since December of 2023 to the board upon their request.

Sincerely,

Marc Foelsch

ATTACHMENTS RELATED TO THE PLANE CRASHES:



1/29/25

Community Input/Testimony to the Airport Community Advisory Committee Meeting of January 29, 2025. Mollie Hilty, Hadley Farms Community, Gaithersburg, MD.

This is the 8th Meeting of the Airport Community Advisory Committee (ACAC). It is now time for this Committee to take Action.

If this Committee is serious to the concerns about the safety and noise to residents living within 3 to 6 miles of the Airport they should work with the Revenue Authority, Federal Aviation Administration, and Airport Management to establish New Flight Patterns for Flight Training Schools Aircraft away from Residential Communities surrounding the Airport.

It is frustrating to wake up every day to aircraft noise overhead. Some days these low flying planes are heard or seen every 5 to 15 minutes all day long. Some days I am blessed with overcast, windy or rainy days for I know they will be quiet days.

To better serve the Community please post on the Committee website the Updated Master Plan for the Airport, the Facilities Improvement Plans or recommended changes to the Airport Layout Plan.

At the 9th Meeting of the ACAC I hope to hear your plan for changing the Flight Patterns of these aircraft.

1/29/25

**Testimony of Marcela Aguilar Before the Montgomery County Airpark Committee
January 29, 2025**

Honored committee members and members of the public, good evening.

My name is Marcela Aguilar, and I am a resident of Montgomery Village. My spouse and I purchased our home in 2020, fully aware of the presence of the Montgomery County Airpark. However, we did not anticipate the sharp increase in flight training schools and air traffic over our home these past five years.

I have been a world traveler for over 50 years; in the past 15 years, I have flown around the world at least 16 times. I deeply respect and value the need to train pilots because every time I step onto a plane, I put my life in their hands. However, this necessary training must be balanced with the well-being of the communities near the Airpark.

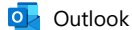
My experience with the Airpark is stark. Some evenings, there are so many planes flying by my home, that I cannot keep up with reporting them on the Airpark's noise complaint system. On April 16, 2024, I submitted 15 complaints in less than 45 minutes¹ due to Airpark pilots conducting repetitive touch-and-go maneuvers. And these weren't even all the flights.

The droning and buzzing are incessant. They invade my home and my backyard. They affect my ability to concentrate on my job and to entertain friends at home. The solution to resident concerns with Airpark noise cannot be to tell us to move because "the Airpark was here first." That argument ignores the fundamental right of residents to enjoy peace and quiet in our own homes. Noise pollution is not just an inconvenience—it is a well-documented public health issue. As a public health professional, I know that prolonged exposure to excessive noise can lead to stress, sleep disturbances, cardiovascular issues, and a diminished quality of life.

I respectfully ask this committee to advocate for the residents of Montgomery Village. I urge to find a way to balance pilot training and commercial and recreational flights with community well-being.

Thank you for your time and consideration.

¹ Complaints submitted through the Airpark Noise Complaint online system at 5:16 p.m., 5:17 p.m., 5:19 p.m., 5:21 p.m., 5:22 p.m., 5:23 p.m., 5:25 p.m., 5:29 p.m., 5:31 p.m., 5:39 p.m., 5:40 p.m., 5:43 p.m., 5:44 p.m., 5:47 p.m., and 5:52 p.m.



Community Testimony: ACAC Community Engagement Meeting 1/29/25 (J. Copeland, Hunter Woods 1)

From Jocelyn Copeland <xxxxxxx.com>
 Date Sat 1/18/2025 8:39 AM
 To Pospisil, Joseph <Joseph.Pospisil@montgomerycountymd.gov>
 Cc Jocelyn Copeland <xxxxxxx.com>

[EXTERNAL EMAIL]

Addressed to: ACAC

From: Jocelyn Copeland, Hunter Woods 1

I am writing to submit my concerns for expansion of runway at the Airpark. I imagine the reason is to expand the type and Count per day of planes/jets which can make use of the Airpark.

On behalf of my family and neighbors who reside within Hunters Woods 1: we support the statements and research documented by Nancy Shenk in her letter of 11/19/24.

1. All plans for changes at the Airpark which are required to be included in the County Master Plan and which impact the environment should be paused until those actions are conducted and successfully completed.

I am requesting that this committee ask the county executive to put a hold on ALL further expansion of the airpark (to include hangars and runway) until such time as the airport master plan can be revised, a complete environmental study to be completed to include noise and operational impact , and a public meeting (as required by the development of a master plan) to allow testimony from the community in regards to this expansion....

2. The Committee should seek and publish response from MDOT MAA as to the basis of their "finding" that the runway needs to be extended to 5,000 ft.

Why does it need to be extended? It is already bigger than it should be as it is so near residential areas.

The Maryland Department of Transportation – Maryland Aviation Administration (MDOT MAA) published its Aviation System Plan 2023. The purpose of this document is to evaluate the airports in the state. The Montgomery County Airpark passed all but four of the Facility Requirement Objectives with the understanding that these four items will be remediated to meet the State's objective. In addition the airpark is out of compliance with the Master Plan. The Facility items out of compliance are.... 1. lighting on the runway, 2. the approach capability, 3. the Airpark Reference Code....and

4. The length of the runway. The report indicates that the runway needs to be extended by 798 feet, which would make the runway 5,000 ft. Obviously this is in complete opposition to the recommendations made many years ago that the runway not be extended (and this was before the majority of the residential development had not taken place) And in opposition to the "promise" made by the County to the community years ago.

There is no question that a longer runway will guarantee increased traffic and larger jet traffic. (most jets... especially corporate jets require a runway of 5,000 ft)

This letter should be documented within the "Community Testimony" record and given due attention. A response to this and all Community Testimony collected would be appropriate and professional demonstration of transparency on the part of this Committee.

All efforts are appreciated,
 Jocelyn Copeland

Chesley Knoll Drive

NOTE Page 1 of 2. Second page removed as it was just a copy of the January Flyer.



Re: ACAC 1/29/25 meeting - written statement

From Doreen Kaufmann <xxxxxxx.com>

Date Tue 1/7/2025 1:07 PM

To Pospisil, Joseph <Joseph.Pospisil@montgomerycountymd.gov>

[EXTERNAL EMAIL]

Hello Mr. Pospisil,

Please accept this as my written statement to the ACAC for the January 29, 2025 meeting.

I have lived in my home in the Hoover Farm community for 25 years. Over those years, but especially in the past several months, since at least last summer, the amount of noise from planes over my neighborhood has increased, and has become increasingly constant.

There is too much noise from planes flying out of the Airpark. On many days, the noise is constant and there is no break. We see the same planes circling over us. Often there are multiple planes over us at the same time. There have been times when a plane flying over us actually shook our house.

I have lost the "quiet enjoyment" of my property. I can no longer enjoy sitting out on my deck. It's now too noisy. My husband and I like listening to birds, but we can no longer enjoy doing that because of all the overhead noise of planes.

This impacts my property value. The increase in loud and constant noise of planes over my neighborhood will deter potential buyers and negatively impact my property value. I didn't buy into this. The amount of aircraft noise wasn't like this when I moved in 25 years ago, but it is now.

The frequent and often constant noise from planes affects me personally. I find myself becoming anxious and angry over little things because of the effect of the constant noise. It is grating on my nerves. The constant noise is unbearable. It is tortuous. It is too much.

This is not fair, and it's not right that a handful of people who like to fly get to bother so many of us on the ground. The Airpark should be moved to a less populated area, or at least greatly reduce the activity there, starting with moving the flight schools.

I have questions for this Committee:

1. What can the Committee actually do for the residents/constituents who are affected by the noise and increased activity from the Airpark?
2. Can the flight schools be forced to move to a location that is not near our residential area?

3. Do you have any power with the FAA, or is any change totally within FAA purview?

Thank you for your time.
Doreen Kaufmann



Written testimony - Coast Guard Auxiliary Flotilla 054-24-04

From Lee Babcock <xxxxxxx.com>

Date Sun 2/9/2025 7:04 PM

To Pospisil, Joseph <Joseph.Pospisil@montgomerycountymd.gov>

[EXTERNAL EMAIL]

Dear members of the Airpark Community Advisory Committee:

Thank you for providing us as members of the Coast Guard Auxiliary Flotilla 054-24-04 the opportunity to speak at your last meeting on 29 Jan 2025. Following up on our verbal presentation to the Committee, we wanted to emphasize again the importance of the Montgomery County Airpark to our operations. As we highlighted on the 29th, our Flotilla provides support to the active duty Coast Guard in four key areas:

- Routine Maritime Observation Mission patrols, which monitor marine traffic on the Chesapeake Bay and patrol for possible mariners in distress, pollution emissions and hazards to marine navigation.
- First-light search missions, which can be launched to support search and rescue operations anywhere in the Chesapeake Bay waterways in Maryland.
- Familiarization flights, which give the active duty Coast Guard personnel assigned to our sector a unique opportunity to view their areas of responsibility from the air.
- Rotary Wing Air Intercept missions, which allow the active duty helicopter crews stationed at Reagan National Airport and Air Station Atlantic City an opportunity to practice their Air Defense Identification Zone intercept missions against live "bogey" aircraft.

All of these missions would be impossible for the Coast Guard to mount with their own resources, as they do not have general aviation aircraft or the personnel to crew them. Our Flotilla provides the capability for lower-altitude sustained flight operations that are vital to the safety of the boating public and directly support the defense of our nation.

We count on Montgomery County Airpark's central location and ease of access for almost all of our aviation missions. As a volunteer force in service to the Coast Guard, we appreciate the support that the Airpark and its staff provides us. We also very much appreciate the physical presence of our modular facility at the Airpark.

We were glad to be able to have a dialog with the Airpark community at large on the 29th and look forward to many more years of cooperation with our neighbors.

Very respectfully,

Lee Babcock
Flotilla Commander

John Mietus
Immediate Past Flotilla Commander

Bob Quackenbush
Flotilla Staff Officer - Member Training

1/29/2025

To Whom it May Concern

RE Montgomery County Airport (KGAI)

My name is Steve Lefferts. I am a Montgomery County resident and have an aviation business at Montgomery County Airport (known by it's aviation designation as KGAI), as well as a non-aviation related business in the Industrial Park two blocks from the airport. My airport based business includes serving clients from outside Montgomery County that brings their dollars to be spent at the airport as well as elsewhere in Montgomery County.

I would like to elucidate areas in which the economic benefit of Montgomery County Airport is blunted due to current operating conditions.

The mix of traffic is heavily biased toward small piston engine aircraft and away from larger turbine powered business aircraft. This is counter to the economic base of the area, given that the airport would be a natural magnet for business traffic (and the economic impact it brings) if there were less factors discouraging it.

It is important to note that generally turbine powered aircraft (turboprops and jets) are less noisy than small piston aircraft – especially ones that have a heavy concentration of time spent in the traffic pattern (such as student pattern practice). Turbine airplanes are governed at the manufacturing certification level and have to comply with noise standards that small pistons are not governed by.

While it is important that flight schools and recreational pilots have access to airspace and facilities, KGAI is not able to be nearly as strong an economic benefit to the county as it should be because the business traffic is choked out due to the concentration of small piston traffic. This is like operating a driving school on Rockville Pike – it is a necessary thing but that wouldn't be the best place to do it.

The reasons a corporate flight department might choose away from KGAI and toward competing airports include the congestion of training traffic, tight airspace, and short runway.

Suggested Considerations

- Air Traffic Control Tower
- Runway Length Mitigation

Control Tower

KGAI is an “uncontrolled” airport, which means that traffic self-regulates in the traffic pattern (take-offs, landings, departures, arrivals). If an aircraft is arriving or departing under “instrument flight rules”, the Air Traffic Control facility that handles this is Potomac Terminal Radar Control (TRACON). Because they have no control facility at the airport (such as a control tower), they have to block out the entire airport approach & departure area for a single inbound or outbound aircraft.

When the airport is busy, especially with low-experience students who are not good at using this system quickly & efficiently, significant delays happen.

In addition to this, during good weather (visual meteorological conditions) the traffic pattern and runway get so clogged with student traffic that faster moving turboprops and jets have a hard time getting into the traffic pattern in a manner they consider safe.

A Control Tower would be the single most significant factor in improving the traffic flow and safety of the airport. Due to a list of factors, which include being in tightly limited airspace (SFRA, Class B Airspace), and a heavy concentration of resident flight school traffic (which clogs the airspace with traffic that “wedges out” business traffic and makes Air Traffic Control clearances very cumbersome.

Runway Length Mitigation

IMPORTANT NOTE -IN NO WAY does what I am about to suggest mean that heavy commercial jets would be able to use KGAI. This is about enabling modern, quiet airplanes. Small business jets and modern turboprops are manufactured to “Stage 5” international noise standards and are flown by professional crews. Noise Standards certifications and descriptions of the Stages can be found in FAA websites, but anything earlier than Stage 3 is now prohibited in the US.

The runway at KGAI is 4,200 ft. This is below the threshold that many business jet operators While the ideal solution is lengthening the runway to 5,000 ft, this would require substantial effort and time to accomplish. There are some options to consider that might have a similar effect.

Turbine powered airplanes have performance criteria they must meet to be able to use a given runway in given conditions, which assures safe outcomes in terms of take off and landing performance.

Extending pavement for Runway 14 as far as possible toward the airport perimeter, but designating the additional pavement as displaced threshold for landing on Runway 32 and overrun for braking on Runway 14.

An Engineered Material Arresting System (EMAS) or similar restraining technology at the departure end of Runway 14 to allow for wet braking distance and accelerate / stop performance calculations to fit more jet traffic into KGAI.

Noise Abatement

Unrelated to safety, a more stringent approach to noise abatement procedures would alleviate the consistent noise concerns on the north end of the airport.

Thank you for the opportunity to comment. I would be enthusiastically available for any follow up desired.

Steven Lefferts

Avione LLC