

Fall 2021 Airport Report to Stonebridge Community Association

What has been going on for 178 months – just two short of 15 years?

What has consumed well over \$1 million in federal taxpayer dollars to get to this point?

What has yet to successfully complete not one federally required Environmental Assessment, not two federally required Environmental Assessment, (EA) and is now working on its third Environmental assessment – hoping to create one that can meet federal standards?

And what threatens the tranquility and safety of every Stonebridge resident if it is built?

Answer: The expansion of the Ann Arbor Municipal Airport.

For the uninitiated, it was in January 2007 that the Ann Arbor City Council first discussed this expansion. (Two similar proposals failed to win support in the 1980s and 1990s.) This proposed expansion would lengthen the current 3,500-foot runway to 4,300 feet and raise the weight limit of planes that could land there from 20,000 to 70,000 pounds.

Under the current plan, Ann Arbor hopes to have its newest EA completed by the end of this year, with a 30-day public comment period early in 2022.

A citizens group – the Committee to Preserve Community Quality – was formed almost 13 years ago by residents of Pittsfield – especially Stonebridge – that grew to include Lodi, Saline, Ann Arbor, and Scio Township, to oppose the runway expansion. We have joined with Pittsfield Township in a partnership to share the costs of a superb California-based aviation attorney to help in our legal efforts – an

effort, so far successful, that has benefitted enormously by contributions from SCA, numerous Stonebridge community associations, and individual residents throughout the area – including many here tonight. Thanks again to all of you!

The core of our opposition to the expansion involves safety: An expanded runway would have planes landing just 92 feet over homes in Stonebridge, an area that we all know is heavily populated much of the year by Canada geese, which do not interact well with aircraft, especially jets, more of which would be attracted to the longer runway. Since we know “if we build it they will come,” more larger and heavier jets would also be expected to land 24-7 – with the expanded runway large enough to handle transcontinental flights from the West Coast. . . flights that typically land in early-morning hours, which would create added noise around the airport. Ann Arbor has yet to make a compelling case as to why any expansion is necessary.

So far, we have been successful in stalling the expansion effort. Two previous Draft Environmental Assessments – the document required by the FAA to ensure the expansion would meet all federal regulations – have failed to win FAA approval. Now the city and MDOT are working on the third EA. Its completion was originally targeted for Summer 2020 – however, like almost all FAA-related projects across the country, this was substantially slowed by the FAA shutdown / slowdown because of the COVID pandemic. From what we have seen, this newest version of the EA – with the aid of a new contractor – is much improved. The city is, for example, conducting revised noise, wetlands, and wildlife studies required by the FAA, and is using the new required FAA assessment template that it overlooked last time.

Just as residents have done a wonderful job in sending public comment letters to MDOT on the two previous EAs, once we know the content of this new study we will be enlisting you again – probably early next year, when there will be a required 30-day public comment period – to again write to MDOT to express your views regarding the expansion. Last time this happened – in January 2017 – there were 600 pages of comments submitted, about 220 letters, 208 opposing the expansion and only 7 in favor. These included some of the most articulate, best informed, knowledgeable, and thoughtful letters that many involved in this process had ever seen. We hope to meet or exceed that performance in the next comment period.

Now that we'll be at it again, every Stonebridge residents can play a key role. So please stay tuned. Kathe Wunderlich will keep everything updated on the Committee to Preserve Community Quality at this website –And thanks for your support of this important community effort.