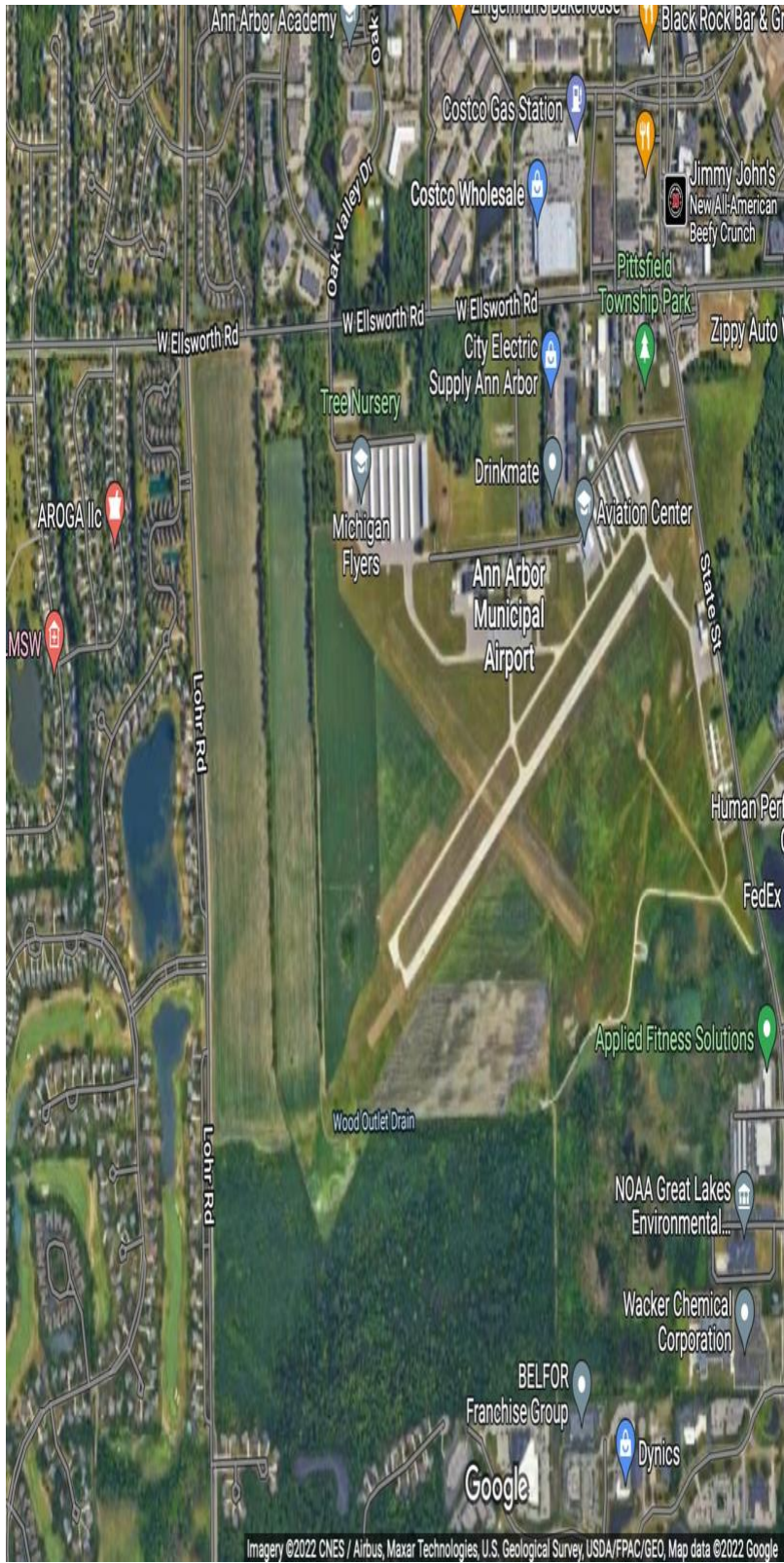


Ann Arbor's latest proposal to extend city airport runway opposed by township

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The Ann Arbor Municipal Airport along the south side of Ellsworth Road west of State Road in Pittsfield Township. Google Maps

NEW!

By

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ANN ARBOR, MI — A long-controversial proposal to expand the Ann Arbor Municipal Airport runway is [back on the city's agenda](#) and Pittsfield Township is against it.

The township remains vehemently opposed to lengthening the runway at the city-owned airport, located south of the city in the township, said Township Supervisor Mandy Grewal.

"We don't want more traffic and we don't want bigger planes traversing in such close proximity to our residents and businesses," Grewal said, calling it a matter of safety and noting the area surrounding the airport has grown denser over the years with more housing and commercial development.

City and township officials and residents have been discussing and debating the issue for well over a decade, with proponents like city airport manager Matt Kulhanek arguing a longer runway would increase safety, reducing the amount of times pilots overrun the current 3,500-foot runway.

The city also wants to shift the runway southwest — further away from State Road — to address safety concerns.

But opponents like township residents Andy McGill and Kathe Wunderlich [have expressed worries](#) that could result in bigger and heavier planes flying closer to their neighboring homes.

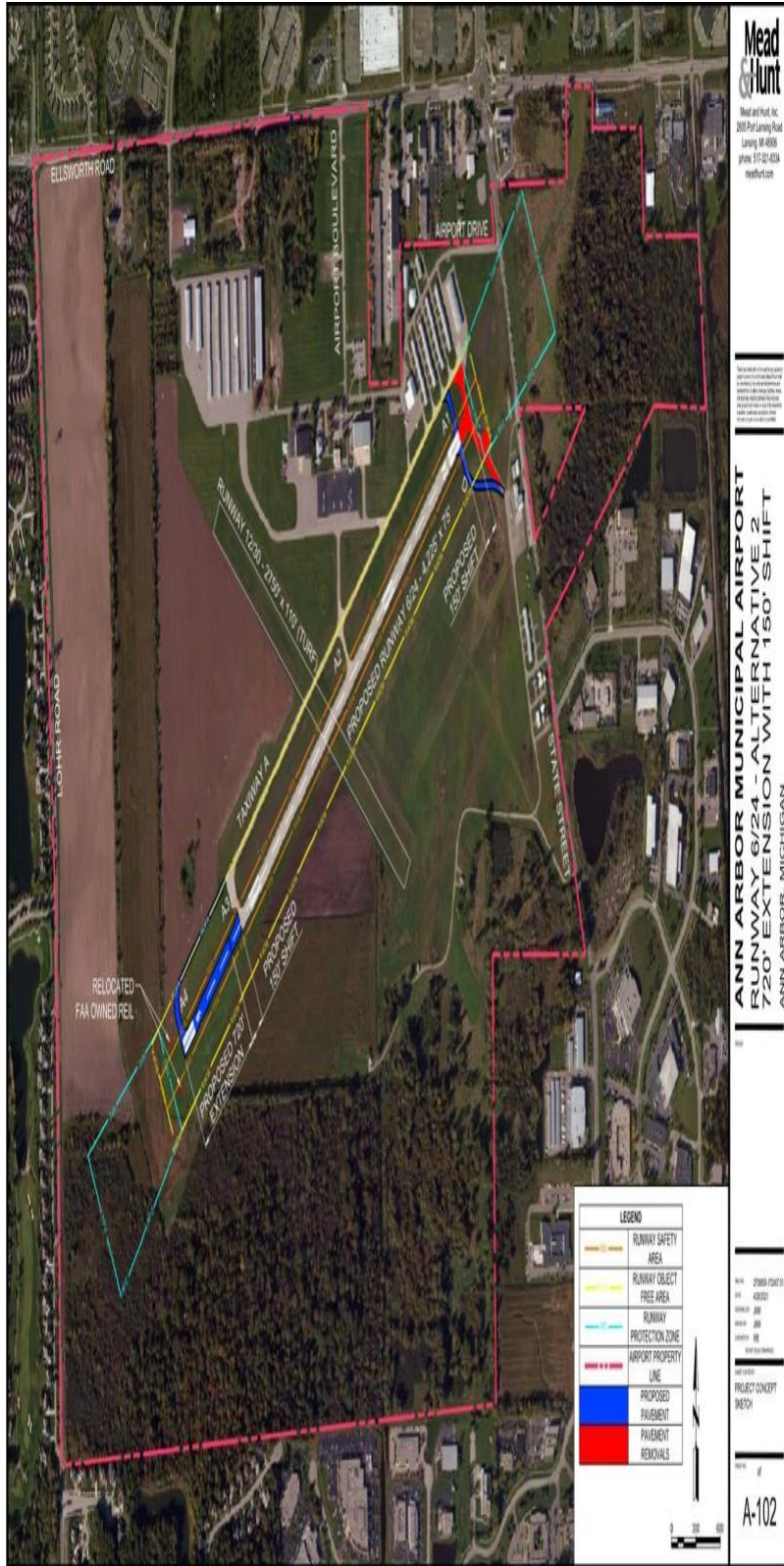
The city is now [inviting the public to weigh in](#) on a new environmental assessment report for the project during a public hearing at city hall from 5:30-8 p.m. Tuesday, Dec. 13.

['I've been there for 43 years.' Ann Arbor airport business owner upset with city](#)

A city webpage for the project retraces its long history, noting the city initiated the federally required environmental-assessment process in early 2009 to examine the impacts, including noise levels, of lengthening the primary runway at the airport.

Draft reports were completed in 2010 and 2016. But with changes to the federal process, the documents had to be revised to address newer standards, officials said, and now the updated documents are available for review.

The city has slightly reduced the project scope, scaling back the proposed runway length from 4,300 to 4,225 feet.



The preferred alternative to extend and shift the Ann Arbor Municipal Airport runway as shown in the city's November 2022 draft environmental assessment report. Mead & Hunt Inc.

A notice for Tuesday's hearing outlines the following proposed changes to the airport configuration:

- Shift runway 6/24 to the southwest by adding an additional 150 feet on runway 6 end and removing 150 feet on the end of runway 24.
- Extend the runway 720 feet at the approach end of runway 6 to provide 4,225 feet of total runway length.
- Taxiway A – extend parallel to the southwest to match the new runway 6/24 length.
- Taxiway A1 – relocate 150 feet to the southwest and reconstruct.
- Taxiway A4 – construct new connector taxiway at the runway 6 end.
- Taxiway D – relocate 150 feet to the southwest and reconstruct.
- Related on-airport infrastructure improvements and other miscellaneous connected actions.

Members of the public can submit written comments on the plan until Jan. 13 by emailing mjkulhanek@a2gov.org. “No runway changes have been approved nor can they be considered until the EA process is completed and the appropriate approvals granted,” the city website states.

That includes getting approval from City Council and the Federal Aviation Administration.

While the airport is in Pittsfield Township, the township has no authority to reject the plans, Grewal said, calling it a complicated issue.

The township plans to host its own public forum on the topic at its board meeting at 6:30 p.m. Wednesday, Dec. 14, with McGill and Wunderlich leading the discussion.

The township’s main interest is ensuring the safety and wellbeing of residents and businesses surrounding the airport, Grewal said, citing noise and safety concerns with low-flying planes, as well as crash and emergency-landing incidents over the years.

[Plane makes emergency landing shortly after takeoff near Ann Arbor](#)

It’s a busy airport with roughly 75,000 takeoffs and landings per year, but crashes or emergency landings are rare, though there are occasional runway overruns, Kulhanek said, noting the airport sees a lot of small corporate jets and twin-engine planes.

“I’ve been here for 16 years and never had a fatality at the airport,” he said. “I’m not even sure we’ve had injuries. There’s been crashes that have occurred off the airport.”

One pilot of a two-seat Cessna 152 was [forced to make an emergency landing](#) in a bean field on the airport property in September when the plane’s engine went out moments after taking off from the airport runway, police said. In a similar incident in 2009, a pilot guided his plane to a bouncy but safe landing [on the fifth-hole fairway of the Stonebridge Golf Course](#) in Pittsfield Township.



A plane crash at the Ann Arbor Municipal Airport in June 1969. Jack Stubbs | Ann Arbor News archives courtesy of OldNews.AADL.org
As far as Pittsfield's fears about a longer runway attracting more air traffic, it's hard to predict, Kulhanek said, but he doesn't expect a big change in activity.

"It's really not changing the type of airport," he said.

The airport's B2 classification would remain the same, he said. The difference would be, with a longer runway, B2-classified aircraft could properly utilize the airport, he said.

With the way it is now with a shorter runway, there are seasonal weight restrictions that limit the ability of planes to take off with full fuel loads or full passenger loads in warmer months, he said.

There also are sightline issues where the control tower can't see part of the taxiway near State Road, and that could be resolved with the 150-foot shift, Kulhanek said. That also would allow the county to potentially widen State Road in the future, which is something that's been discussed, he said.

"Right now we are too close to State Road for what the FAA would like to see," he said.



Hans Masing prepares to fly across country to deliver PPE to other hospitals to during COVID-19 Pandemic on Friday April, 3, 2020 at the Ann Arbor Municipal Airport. Nicole Hester/Mlive.com
It was originally meant to be a municipal airport and it should stay that way, Grewal said, arguing planes needing a longer runway can use the nearby Willow Run Airport.

The city has been working with Mead & Hunt Inc. on the FAA-required updates to the environmental assessment to advance the project. City Council voted in April to amend the contract, bringing the consultant's pay to over \$540,000.

The FAA required doubling the number of alternatives to be reviewed from three to six, Kulhanek told council.

If construction of the runway extension project ever goes forward, it's expected to cost several million dollars.

After years of opposition, it's a head-scratcher why the project hasn't gone away, Grewal said, expressing concerns it could negatively impact quality of life in Pittsfield Township.