

# Residents in flight path rail against proposed Ann Arbor airport runway expansion

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Ann Arbor Municipal Airport

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WASHTENAW COUNTY, MI - Roofers joked they needed to put tiles reading “pull up” on top of Rosemarie Simon’s home when she bought property in 1997 to build a house on Lohr Road south of Ann Arbor.

That’s because if you extended a straight line from the end of the runway at the Ann Arbor Municipal Airport, it would hit her home.

And now, [a long-debated runway expansion proposal](#) is again rearing its head, promising to bring the runway within 900 feet of her front door if it advances, she said in a public forum in Pittsfield Township on Wednesday, Dec. 14.

Simon joined almost 20 residents in railing against the latest iteration of the runway lengthening, citing noise and safety concerns and meeting a friendly audience in the township board of trustees, which has formally opposed the project for more than a decade.

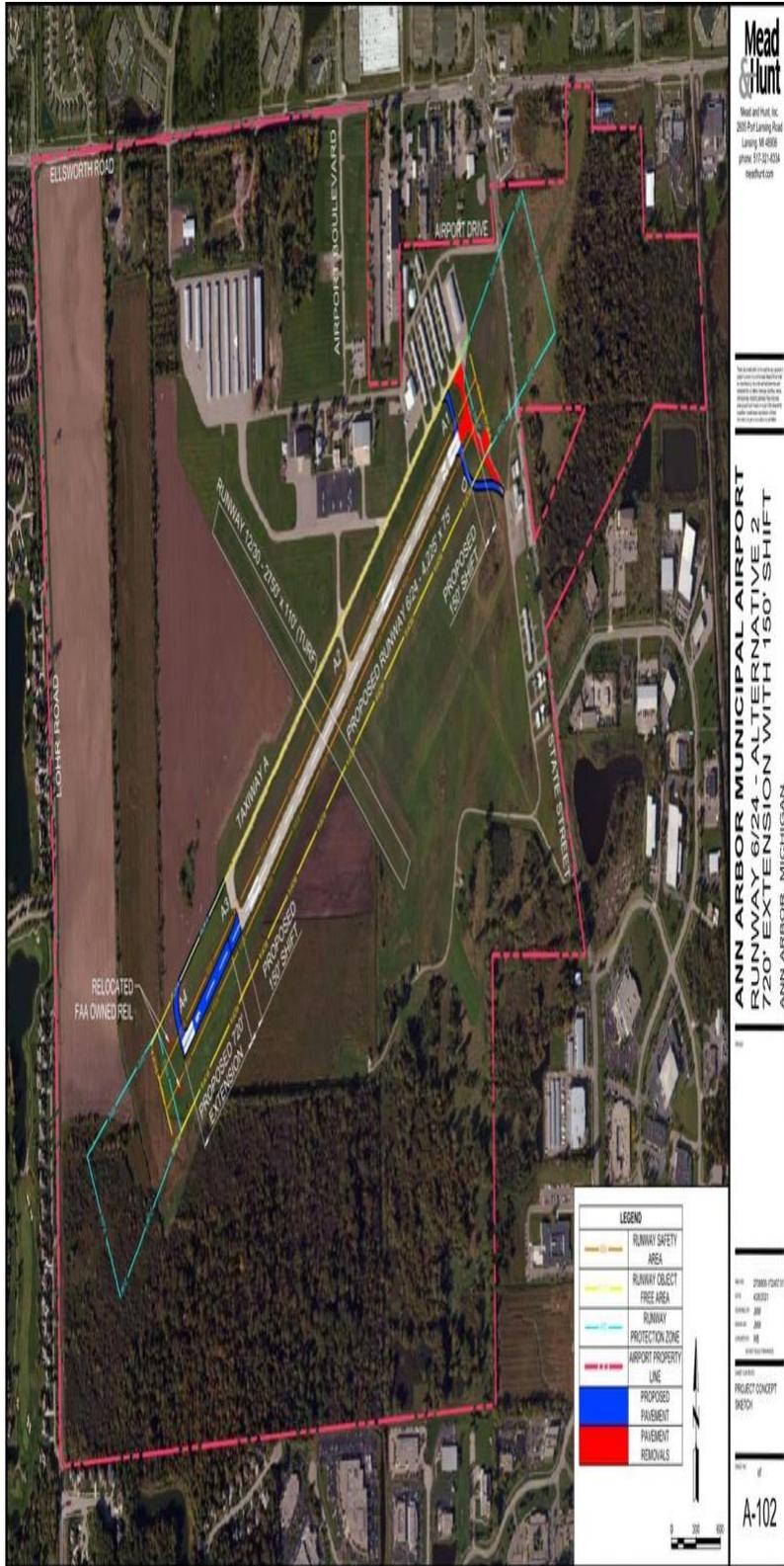
**Read more:** [Ann Arbor’s latest proposal to extend city airport runway opposed by township](#)

“They don’t care about Pittsfield Township, they want to do what they want to do,” Simon said, recounting a crack in her home she said she’s repaired four times due to vibrations caused by passing aircraft. Her common refrain when talking on the phone with friends? “Incoming!” she said.

The runway proposal is back on the table thanks to the public release of [a new environmental assessment report](#) for the project, a sprawling document that fills a three-ring binder and is currently up for public feedback and review.

Airport officials argue a longer runway would increase safety, reducing the amount of times pilots overrun the current 3,500-foot runway and shifting it southwest, further from State Road, to address safety concerns.

The current proposal, reduced slightly from previous iterations, is for a 720-foot runway extension toward Simon's home, alongside tweaks to taxiways and other changes.



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.

The city of Ann Arbor, which operates the airport, began the federally-required environmental assessment process in 2009, completing draft reports in 2010 and 2016 and now revising them to address newer standards, officials said.

Many in the Pittsfield Township audience on Wednesday cast doubt on noise evaluations included in the report, pointing to modeling that doesn't include real-world data from around the airport.

"I know for a fact because I live under runway six flight path. If I'm out on my deck having coffee with my wife, we have to stop talking because there's an airplane going by, and that's an estimate of 70 decibels. If I'm at a pool party with my neighbors, (we) stop talking when an airplane goes by and then it comes back seven minutes later because they're doing touch-and-gos," said Phil Hemenway, president of the Maple Creek subdivision homeowners' association.

"That's diminished quality of life. Pittsfield Township in the (environmental assessment) is totally invisible."

Another resident, Waterways subdivision resident Mike Lee, said he had measured sound levels of up to 85 decibels within his home with the windows closed, urging other residents to log noise levels.

Others recounted what they described as close calls with low-flying aircraft.

One plane nearly clipped a tree in Don Deatruck's backyard, he said.

"I hit the floor, literally went to the floor because I thought there was going to be a crash," Deatruck said, adding he reported the incident to the police and the airport. "That's not right, I should not have to dive to my floor of my house. I should not have to think my neighbor is going to be killed the next day. We're not at war."

Other residents worry the expansion could lead to an increase in private jets using the airport, which they said was already a common occurrence during University of Michigan football home games.

"Turning this airport into a jetport is a nonstarter, very dangerous," said Andy McGill, a leader in a committee of residents that has opposed the project, now and in the past.

As for safety and traffic at the airport, its manager Matt Kulhanek said this week crashes or emergency landings are rare, without a fatality at the airport in 16 years. The runway expansion wouldn't change the airport's classification, and while it's hard to predict he doesn't predict a big change in flight activity with the project.

Now there are seasonal weight restrictions that limit the ability of planes to take off with full fuel or passenger loads, as well as sightline issues where the control tower can't see part of the taxiway near State Road, problems that would be addressed with the project, he said.

Still, that's unlikely to soothe opponents to the project, who cast doubt on the justification for the expansion on Wednesday and pledged to flood officials with comments opposed to the project. Comments [can be submitted](#) to Kulhanek at [mjkulhanek@a2gov.org](mailto:mjkulhanek@a2gov.org), according to city officials.

That feedback will be incorporated into the report, which will then be finalized and sent to the Michigan Department of Transportation for evaluation, which could result in the project going before Ann Arbor City Council for consideration if officials don't find significant environmental impact, McGill said.

Pittsfield township has submitted remarks and a report of resident feedback through a specialized attorney for previous environmental assessments and plans to do the same again, Supervisor Mandy Grewal said on Wednesday.

The township board has passed two resolutions against the project, one in 2009 and one in 2017, she said. "Our opposition has not changed on that front."