

Airport plans still face opposition

By RILEY YATES

phillyBurbs.com

Marty Wax isn't worried about an expanded Doylestown Airport, at least not anymore.

Today, Wax lives in Doylestown, five miles from his former home by the airport.

He moved, in part because of concerns about the seeming inevitability of more flight traffic.

"I got away from it," said Wax, who served on a Buckingham committee that studied the proposed extension of the airport's runway. "I'm not optimistic about the little guy winning over the big guy."

The Bucks County Airport Authority last week released a long-awaited master plan that calls for the 800-foot-longer runway and more aircraft hangars, while projecting a more than 35 percent increase in flights by 2025.

The 295-page report drew concerns Friday from opponents of extending the runway, as they said the plan appeared to promote the growth they worry about.

"From what I can see, they're still doing more hangars, more airplanes," said Jeff Haberkern, an airport opponent who is running for supervisor. "It pretty much shows what we already thought."

But a neighbor who supports the extension said the document reduced the number of proposed hangars and also clustered them closer to the airport.

"I'm in agreement with it," said Becky Barlow, who lives on Landisville Road and is a member of Friends of Doylestown Airport. "I like it. It does show they are listening to the community."

The master plan details \$26.5 million of potential improvements, including hangars for as many as 94 more aircraft, the extended runway and the relocation of Stoney Lane, a new administrative building, continued work on storm water management and an 8,000-square-foot equipment storage building.

Federal grants would cover 95 percent of the cost, with the remainder coming from airport authority revenue.

Alan Shaw, a Buckingham resident who heads Friends of Doylestown Airport, said increased flights and small jet traffic are coming regardless of whether Doylestown Airport's runway is extended, as more people flock to the region and technology improves.

Shaw said a longer runway merely seeks to address safety concerns the Federal Aviation Administration has raised. As a byproduct, it would preserve valuable acreage of green space to the northeast, he said.

"It's kind of like saying (the state Department of Transportation) is authorizing more traffic by improving the quality of the roads," said Shaw, who is a pilot. "Having a slightly larger airport makes for a safer airport."

Shaw said all of the plans are contingent upon securing the needed funding and winning approval from the township. But he said it is unreasonable for neighbors to expect that the airport won't grow, when everything else is.

Paul Staffaroni, a neighbor who lives on Grundy Way, said he isn't saying traffic at the Doylestown Airport shouldn't increase. Residents have accepted more flights over the years, he said, but have a legitimate concern about the airport's character changing.

"I haven't heard anybody say, 'Shut down the airport,' " said Staffaroni, a former member of Buckingham's airport committee. "But you're talking about a dramatic change when you close (Stoney Lane) and you open that area up for the airport."

Haberkern also worried the airport would be remade in a negative way.

"Do they have to grow?" he asked. "No, they don't have to grow. The community has accepted a recreational airport."

Wax, who moved, said he became convinced as he studied the issue that change was coming regardless, given the increasing market for small jet planes.

"I can certainly get used to and accept small aircraft," Wax said. "But from what I read, I don't think there's any stopping those jets."

Shaw said the jets, which seat four to six passengers, aren't as much of a concern as some believe. The latest models aren't noisy at all, he said.

"They are incredibly quiet," Shaw said. "Quieter than the piston (engine) I fly, really."

Riley Yates can be reached at (215) 345-3133 or rdyates@phillyBurbs.com.