

**PDK AIRPORT MASTER PLAN
MAJOR RECOMMENDATIONS and DOCUMENTATION
from PDK WATCH, INC.**

INTRODUCTION:

DeKalb Peachtree Airport (PDK), a general aviation C-II facility, should be operated so that it best serves the interests both (1) of the citizens of DeKalb County and (2) of the general aviation and associated businesses in DeKalb County.

We urge that serious consideration be given to following vital homeowner concerns and recommendations and that these issues be considered and addressed substantively throughout the entire process of developing and approving a new PDK Master Plan so that an acceptable balance can be achieved between the diverse interests involved.

Toward this end, we respectfully request that the DeKalb County Board of Commissioners insist and take appropriate steps to insure that the following important issues—prepared by concerned community “stake-holders” and enumerated below—be incorporated into all the agendas and discussions for their appropriate respective meetings—throughout both the public and the committee meetings on the PDK Master Plan.

PLEASE NOTE: PDK Watch will be happy to provide further documentation for factual statements included in this document and will be happy to discuss and clarify these issues further. For your convenience, asterisks (*) have been placed next to some of the major items for which further documentation is available and most likely to be desired. In addition, supporting documentation for many of the statements below can already be found at www.pdkwatch.org

KEY ISSUES:

#1--Flight Path Changes: PDK air traffic should be routed via the least residentially-disruptive flight paths. Specifically, flights south of PDK Airport should be routed over the Buford-Clairmont corridor, banking using a GPS (“global positioning system”) point two miles down that corridor, as recommended by both the Part 150 Study (1997)* and the Williams Aviation Study (2003).*

These flight paths to the south of PDK must be mandatory for all traffic using either Instrument Flight Rules (IFR) or Visual Flight Rules (VFR).

DISCUSSION of # 1: These flight path mitigation measures—which would take PDK flights off of the residential neighborhoods and instead route them over major traffic corridors, were recommended by the Part 150 Study--the mitigation measures for which were approved a decade ago by the FAA*--as well as by the Williams Aviation Study in 2003.*

It is our understanding only five of the ten Part 150 noise mitigation measures were actually brought before the DeKalb Board of Commissioners. As a result, not all the the Part 150's recommended mitigation measures were adopted when the Commissioners approved the study.*

Most recently, the PDK Airport Administration has submitted only a single set of proposed flight path modifications on the south side of the Airport for the FAA to evaluate as part of the pending Environmental Assessment (EA). No explanation has been provided as to why other flight path options that were previously recommended by the Part 150 Study (and approved by the FAA at that time) were not included in the most recent flight paths that were sent to the FAA for their assessment.*

The result has been that the more substantial flight modifications using Buford-Clairmont corridor--which the FAA had previously approved as feasible and which we believe more effective in mitigating aircraft noise impacts on surrounding communities--were not even considered by the FAA as part of the current Environmental Assessment.

We therefore ask that the PDK Master Plan and the BOC mandate that the Buford-Clairmont corridor flight path recommendations that were put forward a decade ago by the Part 150 Study and approved as feasible by the FAA at that time be promptly re-submitted to the FAA so that they can be reviewed for feasibility.

If this new FAA review shows that the Buford-Clairmont corridor flight path still remains a feasible option, then the Commissioners should seriously consider the possibility of approving that such a flight path be implemented.

In addition, the full Williams Aviation Study should be submitted promptly to the FAA, with explicit instructions to the FAA to evaluate the feasibility of all the specific flight path and noise mitigation recommendations made by the study.

Note that although a copy of the 2003 Williams Study was sent to the FAA by one Commissioner, her letter to them did not specifically instruct the FAA to evaluate the feasibility of its recommendations,* As a result, the FAA also has made no evaluation of the noise mitigation proposals suggested by the Williams Aviation Study,*

If the FAA review of the Williams Aviation Study's noise mitigation proposals shows that additional flight path modifications are, indeed, possible and desirable, then the BOC should seriously consider instructing the airport to implement some of those additional mitigation measures, as well.

This action is important in order to provide relief for the 80,000 most-impacted DeKalb County citizens who are negatively impacted by PDK, according to the County's own 1998 PDK Cost-Benefit Study.*

#2--Noise Reduction: PDK traffic patterns, flight altitudes, and mandatory approach and departure procedures should be designed to minimize noise and other disruptive impacts over residential areas to the fullest extent possible under FAA regulations.

Significant noise reduction measures should be undertaken, using the information provided by the Airport Noise Monitoring System (ANOMS) that was purchased in the late 1990s for this purpose.*

As indicated in #1 above, the recommendations of the Part 150 should be reviewed and finally implemented by the BOC in order to help mitigate the disruption caused by PDK over flights of residential neighborhoods.

Previous recommendations that routine PDK helicopter traffic be routed over major highways rather than neighborhoods and maintain a 500 foot altitude above residential areas* should be reaffirmed by the Commissioners and implemented promptly by PDK Airport, once again.

If no current helicopter flight path protocols advise them to avoid routinely flying directly across major residential areas--as the PDK Airport Director maintained at the May 8, 2006 PDK Airport Advisory Board meeting*--then such plans should be revived and implemented as soon as possible.

PDK Airport must honor its promises not to disrupt Sunday morning church services in the neighborhood by repeated flights over church buildings.*

Action must be taken to address the incessant disruption to surrounding neighborhoods caused by touch-and-go operations at PDK Airport.* The possibility of restricting the hours when touch-and-go operations are allowed should be seriously considered.

If touch-and-go operators are unwilling to make good-faith efforts to mitigate the disruption their operations cause, then the County should consider exercising its authority to prohibit such operations at PDK Airport, and the flight schools that are unwilling to be "good neighbors" should then be relocated to airports with less residential areas surrounding them.

The PDK Airport Director should be directed by the DeKalb Chief Executive Officer to enforce all traffic patterns and altitude guidelines, as well as to hold pilots accountable for willful and repeated violations.

#3—Property Rights—No violation of property rights of homeowners will be permitted, including air space rights above their property.

DISCUSSION of #3: Because of the low altitudes and excessive noise levels associated with some PDK over flights of residential property, they may constitute an infringement upon individual property rights. We are advised that airspace of property owners extends 500 feet above the ground. In legal terms, interfering with such rights in ways that reduce property values is referred to as “taking.” Such “taking” might eventually result in a class action lawsuit to recover citizen property losses incurred as a result of the failure of the airport to significantly mitigate its negative impacts on the surrounding residential communities.*

The repeated attempts by the airport officials to convince homeowners to accept permanent legal easements--under which homeowners would permanently give up all legal rights to the air space above their property in exchange for a one-time-only noise insulation of their homes--has been, and will continue to be, viewed as unacceptable by impacted citizens.*

In addition, citizens will not give up their right to sue the County in the future for serious damages caused by PDK activities and accidents, including physical and health issues related to the significant air pollution problems caused by airports.*

#4 --Openness and Transparency: Full information about operational data at PDK Airport must be collected and maintained, and such information must be a matter of public record, readily available upon request.

In particular, full records of the flight operations at PDK—including information about numbers of take-offs and landings, types and sizes of aircraft engaged in operations at PDK, and numbers and types of aircraft fueled, serviced, or parked at the airport--must be collected, maintained, regularly updated, and made available to the public upon request.

DISCUSSION of #4: As is well-known, the refusal of the County and PDK Airport to make available the information from the Airport Noise and Monitoring System (ANOMS) to the public resulted in a long and costly lawsuit won that was won by the plaintiffs on August 8, 2005.*

Forcing the public to go to Court in order to gain access to records about the basic operations of their airport—records that are routinely made available, sometimes even in real time on-line, at other airports throughout the United States*—obviously does not contribute to building a sense of trust between the County, its airport, and its citizens.

As of March 29, 2006, only four (4) of the 37 promised reports had been produced in full.* The continuing unwillingness of DeKalb County to release the full ANOMS records in a timely fashion, as required by the August 8, 2005 court order, does not inspire public confidence that the Airport is operating in a responsible manner and is not stalling because it has something to hide.

Only in May 2006 were the full ANOMS reports finally handed over to Brandon Hornsby, the lead attorney of the Feltus v. DeKalb legal team.

#5 --Category C-II - As mandated by the DeKalb Commissioners in their policy document adopted unanimously on October 11, 2005,* PDK Airport must continue to be operated and developed as a C-II airport, with the requisite restrictions associated with such status.

Toward this end, no engineering or infrastructure changes should be allowed by the BOC that could make PDK Airport capable of being changed into a C-III airport.

To aid the BOC and the public in understanding whether proposed infrastructure changes at PDK Airport would allow eventual conversion to C-III status, a document should be prepared and made readily available, both to the Commissioners and to the public to clearly identify the factors that differentiate C-II and C-III Airports. The document should also include a chart listing the specific infrastructure or other conditions that must be in place before a move to C-III or higher classification can be contemplated. Similar documents have already been produced at other airports.*

The Runway Safety Area (RSA) and the Runway Protection Zone (RPZ) shall not be changed beyond the present category C-II specification requirements.

DISCUSSION of #5—It is essential that PDK Airport be maintained as a C-II, general aviation airport, rather than being allowed to expand gradually into a C-III Airport. Everyone from the commissioners to the airport director to the pilots to concerned community members appear to be in public agreement on this point.

Allowing PDK to become a C-III Airport would have an intensely negative impact because PDK is located in the midst of a densely settled set of residential neighborhoods, which already have more than 80,000 negatively impacted residents, according to the County's 1998 PDK Cost-Benefit Study.*

A document clearly explaining the characteristics that differentiate C-II and C-III Airports must be prepared so that the BOC will be able to determine in the future if any of the contracts involving FAA or state funds that are brought before the BOC for its approval would prepare the way for PDK Airport to secure a C-III classification.

Among these C-II restrictions are a maximum wingspan limit of 79 feet, maximum approach speed of 141 knots, and the other restrictions prescribed by the C-II designation in the FAA Airport Design Standards, FAA Advisory Circular 150/5300-13, Change 7, Airport Design (October 2002).*

Since DeKalb County’s policy is that it shall remain a C-II general aviation airport, facilities should not be developed, nor FAA airport design standards utilized, that could allow PDK to be transformed into a C-III or D-III airport in the future.

Although the Commissioners have passed resolutions that PDK Airport shall remain a C-II general aviation facility, they have--apparently unknowingly--also approved such inconsistent actions as allowing taxiway renovations to a C-III rather than a C-II standard. Specifically, the taxiway “reconstruction” was done to the higher 50-foot width required for C-III airports, rather than to the 35-foot width required for C-II airports.*

No engineering or infrastructure changes beyond those necessary for C-II capacity airports should be approved by the Commissioners.

The argument that new airport facilities must be developed to meet projected future demands, disregards the principle that new facilities themselves often largely create new demands.

#6—66,000 lb. Weight Limitation: The contractually binding “maximum gross take-off weight” (MGTOW) of 66,000 lbs must be maintained in the future at PDK Airport must remain the basis for determining the aircraft eligible to use PDK Airport, rather than any other measures such as airport pavement strength or placard weight restriction.

PDK Airport Management is responsible for enforcing the 66,000 lb. MGTOW weight limit restrictions. The PDK Airport Director—who is employed by DeKalb County and responsible to the DeKalb County CEO—must be held responsible for failure to enforce this restriction or allowing repeated or willful violations of it to go unchallenged.

DISCUSSION of #6: DeKalb County in 1987 made a contractually binding commitment to the FAA, the 11th Circuit Court, and the public that aircraft with a “maximum gross take-off weight” (MGTOW) of more than 66,000 lbs. would not be allowed to use PDK Airport in the future. This commitment was made in order to be able to extend one runway by 1,000 feet, without doing the federally-required Environmental Impact Study (EIS) first.*

DeKalb County’s public commitment to the 66,000 MGTOW was repeatedly reiterated in printed statements by PDK Airport for the next decade until the coming of present PDK Airport Director.* He has claimed, instead, that PDK is operating under the 1976 BOC ordinance limiting aircraft using PDK to a maximum weight of 75,000 lbs.* That earlier BOC ordinance, however, was superseded by the 1987 contractual agreement that the County made to the 11th Circuit Court in order to get the verdict it wanted from the Court.

******The 66,000 lb. weight limit supersedes any other method for determining the maximum size or weight of the aircraft that can use PDK, including such measures as pavement strength or placard weight that the current PDK Airport Director has tried to argue is the standard for aircraft use of PDK Airport.***

It is very important that the BOC be prepared to meet with knowledgeable representatives of the public so that they can be made fully aware of the evidence about the 66,000 lb. weight limit commitment made by the County.

Unless DeKalb Count wants to devote time and money to countering another protracted round of litigation, the County Commissioners should finally face this issue squarely, after carefully considering the clear evidence that can be presented and explained to them.*

#7--Scheduled Air Service – The DeKalb Commissioners should reinstate and require enforcement of their long-standing policy that there shall be no regularly-scheduled passenger or cargo service operating out of PDK Airport.*

DISCUSSION of #7: This policy should be clarified by defining “regularly-scheduled air service” to include air taxi service, regular parcel forwarding, scheduled charter service, helicopter shuttles, or scheduled passenger service.

Note that a provision opposing regularly scheduled passenger or cargo service at PDK was included in the PDK Airport Advisory Board policy document sent to the Board of Commissioners on June 8, 2005.* That provision, however, was omitted from the policies that the Commissioners adopted for PDK Airport on October 11, 2005.*

#8--International Flights: A domestic, general aviation, C-II, airport such as PDK must not be promoted as destination for international flights coming to the metro Atlanta area. In particular, no permanent international customs services should be established at PDK Airport.

DISCUSSION of #8: Increasing numbers of international flights at PDK can be anticipated to cause a rise in the number of disruptive daytime and nighttime operations by bringing in larger jets, more heavily loaded with fuel and requiring longer, lower take-off profiles at high power settings. All these developments are inappropriate and unacceptable at a general aviation airport that is located in the midst of a densely settled residential area.

The unacceptable proposal to introduce regular international customs services appeared in the lease renewal documents for the Mercury Air fixed base operator, presented in the fall of 2005:

"Subject to CNP approval, this new facility [including regular customs and security services] will provide the only qualifying location for receiving international flights to Atlanta other than Hartsfield." (Emphasis added.)*

At the same time that international customs service at PDK was being proposed, DeKalb County CEO Vernon Jones, as reported in the Atlanta Business Chronicle, asked that consideration be given to creating a 24-hour entertainment facility to service the projected night-time international traffic into PDK Airport.*

Such moves would clearly be incompatible with the best interests of surrounding residential communities.

#9--Night Restrictions: With the exception of Angel Flights and bona-fide emergency flights, night operations at PDK between 11 p.m. and 6 a.m. should be subject to substantial landing fees, in order to discourage unnecessary use of the airport during those hours.

DISCUSSION of #9: Airport Management must take responsibility for publishing these restrictions, as well as monitoring and enforcing them between 11 p.m. and 6 a.m. The Commissioners and the public should be fully informed about violators on a monthly basis.

#10—Security: Security at PDK Airport must be thoroughly evaluated and provided at a level adequate to protect PDK Airport and the metro Atlanta region.

DISCUSSION of #10: According to the computerized NOMS data, 25% to 40% of the aircraft using PDK Airport are recorded as "unidentified." * As a small step toward increasing the security oversight at PDK, all aircraft departing from PDK Airport (including those from flight schools) should be required to file flight plans, a process that we are informed takes less than two minutes on-line.*

Improved PDK security measures are also essential at night. Prior to September 11, 2001 there was only one, unarmed security guard patrolling the entire 800-acre airport, and one airport operator proudly advertised that one could just walk right on board one's flight at PDK without any security checks.*

What has been done to increase security at PDK since then? Especially at night, are any changes that may have been made sufficient to guard against possible use of the airport for activities such as drug smuggling or terrorism? The public has a right to know.

#11—Expansion: The PDK Master Plan for the next twenty years must be reaffirm the restriction placed in the 1992 PDK Master Plan that there shall be no expansion of PDK Airport’s “current boundaries except when: (1) the property is required for safety and can be designated as permanent greenspace, or (2) the property is acquired for noise abatement purposes and will be restricted to compatible land use which does not include the expansion of runways and taxiways.”*

DISCUSSION of #11: This important provision of 1992 Master Plan restriction is also cited in the six page policy proposal document developed by the PDK Master Plan consultants in early 2005*, and reaffirmed, in briefer form, in the October 11, 2005 PDK Master Plan policies adopted by the DeKalb Commissioners.*

#12--Helicopter Operations: Helicopters, whether owned by the police, the media, or others, media, should not be allowed to operate at low levels over residential neighborhoods, except in bona-fide hot pursuit or crime-in-progress situations.

Long-established flight recommendations that helicopters take less disruptive routes via major highways, rather than directly over densely-settled residential areas, should be reinstated and enforced by the DeKalb County administration.*

Private helicopters and routine police/media helicopter flights must observe the same minimum altitude restrictions as fixed wing aircraft.*

DISCUSSION of #12: Correction of this problem could be accomplished by the DeKalb CEO instructing DeKalb’s Chief of Police to enforce helicopter flight protocols that require them to avoid low flights directly over residential neighborhoods.

#13--Green Space – Two substantial wooded properties owned by the County on the south side of the Airport, outside the airport’s fenced perimeter and adjacent to neighborhood residences, should be designated as permanent passive green space--preferably by permanent easements--and properly maintained by the County.*

Discussion of #13: DeKalb County/PDK Airport presently owns two substantial parcels of land near and on Clairmont Avenue, that are outside the airport’s fenced perimeter and adjacent to neighborhood residences. These properties are heavily wooded and provide a vital noise buffer to the local neighborhoods. Among their many benefits: they reduce noise, cut pollution, help control water run-off, and provide natural beauty. Placing permanent

easements on these areas would insure that they would be preserved and not further developed. Routine maintenance of these areas by the County is also essential.

#14--Ad Valorem Taxes: Payment of ad valorem taxes on all aircraft based at PDK must be determined fairly, enforced fully, and subject to independent annual audit.

DISCUSSION of #14: Our best estimate--based on the ANOMS data and other records--is that more than one-half of all the aircraft based at PDK Airport are not paying their ad valorem taxes, thereby costing the County between \$2 to \$4 million annually in tax revenue that would go directly into DeKalb County's general fund (or up to \$28 million or more that is uncollected if one goes back to the seven year statute of limitations on such collection).* It is our understanding that even though this information has been provided to the DeKalb County Tax Assessors office, that follow-up actions have not yet been taken, as of the time that this document was written.*

#15—Environmental Pollution and Health: Jet engine repair facilities must not be allowed at PDK Airport because of the noise, air pollution, and related health risks that they create.

Air pollution monitors shall be strategically placed at PDK and in surrounding neighborhoods to monitor air quality. Periodic reports should be issued and made available to the public.

Unnecessary operations of fuel driven equipment shall be prohibited on the tarmac and in the holding areas. Electrical power shall be used, instead, whenever possible.

16—PDK “Fleet Mix” Data: The projections of the numbers and types of aircraft using PDK (its “fleet mix”) developed for the most recent PDK Environmental Assessment (EA) appear to be so seriously flawed that they cannot credibly be used as the basis for either the EA itself or for the PDK Master Plan.*

DISCUSSION of #16: The serious flaws in the fleet mix developed for the EA have been thoroughly investigated and demonstrated using the computerized ANOMS data to which the public received as a result of its victory in August 2005 in the Feltus v. DeKalb, et al, Open Records Lawsuit.*

Since the fleet-mix projections prepared for the EA appear to bear little resemblance to the actual numbers and mix of aircraft using PDK Airport—as shown by the more detailed and computerized ANOMS data--those fleet mix projections cannot serve as a credible basis for developing either a valid EA or a valid Master Plan for PDK Airport.

#17--Accidents and Disasters: Because PDK Airport is located in the midst of densely settled residential areas, the Airport should develop a disaster plan and make it available for public scrutiny.

CONCLUSIONS:

Legitimate public concerns must be addressed substantively. Give and take must occur on both sides. It is not in the public interest for the present dysfunctional relationship to continue between PDK Airport and concerned citizens.

We urge the County Commissioners and other public officials and planners to take seriously the views of the many dedicated and well-informed individuals who have legitimate and unresolved concerns regarding PDK Airport.

Thank you very much for your careful consideration of these important public concerns.

--Approved by the PDK Watch, Inc., Board of Directors on June 26, 2006

Please see the PDK Watch web site, www.pdkwatch.org, for fuller documentation and discussion of these and other issues.