

PDK GREENSPACE NOISE BUFFER SAVED – FOR NOW!

By Larry Foster, Communications Director, PDK Watch, Inc.

Background – Much of the NBCA/Hawthorne community is located about two miles as the jet flies from DeKalb Peachtree Airport (PDK), the second busiest airport in Georgia after Hartsfield-Jackson, based on the number of flights per year. PDK is larger than New York City's LaGuardia Airport. Its 6,000 foot runway is used by both small and relatively large, as well as sometimes highly disruptive, jet traffic. The ongoing impact of its noise, safety and pollution issues concerns those who care about our neighborhood's quality of life.

In the spring of 2012, a controversy developed when a land-use change for a 15-acre area outside the southern fenced perimeter of PDK was proposed. This area had been used as a passive greenspace noise buffer to protect surrounding residential neighborhoods from damaging PDK noise since 2000. The proposed land-use change would have reversed this long-standing county policy regarding the use of the area, and called for eventual rezoning and sale of the area for "airport-compatible" uses, which were never specified.

Between March and May 2012, an outpouring of neighborhood concern about the loss of this noise buffer and its potential for damaging airport-related expansion convinced the County Commission to defer and eventually withdraw the proposal "without prejudice". *What this means is that the proposal can be brought back for consideration at any time. This article is to alert our residents that this issue may reappear in the future*, especially in view of the uncertainties connected with a vote about the annexation of the area in question by the City of Chamblee this fall.

Why Residents Should Be Concerned – As PDK Airport noise levels increased during the 1990's, homes adjacent to the southern boundary of the airport were rendered "unfit for human habitation", requiring the county to buy these homes and tear them down. In March 2000, civic leaders of 21 neighborhood organizations, representing over 9,000 households, petitioned the County Commission to preserve this area as a permanent greenspace noise buffer against damaging airport noise. **In July 2000, the DeKalb County Commission voted unanimously to rezone the area and some adjacent property as R-200 "Suburban", the closest available designation to greenspace. The Commission promised the public this change would be "permanent."**

Yet, in February 2012, a proposal quietly surfaced to change the land-use designation of the total area to "light industrial" and to rezone and sell the property for unspecified airport-related uses. Proponents of the plan claimed that Federal Aviation Administration (FAA) money that was used to buy the noise-impacted property in the 1990's must be repaid; this was NOT true, so long as the area continued to be used as a noise buffer. If the citizen-action group, PDK Watch, Inc. had not alerted the public about the situation, and if the public had not responded with overwhelming expressions of concern, the proposal might well have passed in March or May 2012. The way things stand today it is possible that this issue could resurface at any time.



PDK greenspace proposed buyout area is 9 acres of mature trees. Photo by Tom Swendiman



Top of PDK greenspace buffer area with nearby runways in background. Photo by Tom Swendiman

Current Status of PDK Buffer – For over 25 years, PDK Airport, the second busiest airport in Georgia has continued to pose serious problems for the neighborhoods which surround it. In the 1990's, a wide range of questionable proposals, including a plan to build jet repair facilities outside the PDK's fenced perimeter and a plan to expand the airport's fenced perimeter area to build two T-hangar clusters, were continually raised, much to the distress of surrounding neighborhoods. There is a very real fear that if the R-200 "Suburban"

zoning designation is removed, projects like those mentioned above, which could have a negative noise, safety and pollution impact in our community, would be seriously reconsidered regardless of their impact on citizens.

Thus, we all must monitor developments closely and respond quickly if the need arises. If you would like more information about this or other PDK-related matters, please e-mail Larry Foster at larry.foster@earthlink.net.