

Summary of Helicopter Noise Meeting December 16, 2015

County Board Member Libby Garvey chaired a Community Meeting regarding helicopter noise on Wednesday, December 16th from 7:00 p.m. - 9:00 p.m. in the County Board Room. Participants in the panel included representatives from the FAA Air Traffic Organization and the FAA Office of Environment and Energy, as well representatives from Joint Forces Headquarters Command who operate some of the military helicopter traffic in the region: Air Force, Army, Marines, and also the Coast Guard (which falls under the Department of Homeland Security).

FAA representative Ed Donaldson explained that the FAA sets and controls the helicopter routes in the DC area, noting that Zone 5 is the largest area in Arlington from National Airport out 5 miles (see helicopter routes in the attached insert: [Washington-Inset-HEL-09.pdf](#)). Route 1 flies all along the east side of the Potomac River. Route 3 flies from Cabin John to Tysons to I-495 in the south and then to Wilson Bridge and I-95. Route 5 flies from Springfield north over I-395 to the Pentagon, with an offshoot from Glebe Road east to the airport (Route 7). Route 6 flies from Andrews Air Force Base in Maryland west to National Airport over the northern part of Crystal City to the Pentagon. Pilots may actually fly any place in Zone 5, and this quickly became a touchy issue during the Open Forum, with attendees complaining that the helicopters do not stick to the planned routes but fly over residential areas in Zone 5. Donaldson explained that there are about 144 helicopter operations per day on average and that 75% of these are military, with the rest being law enforcement and medical evacuations. After 9/11, civilian helicopter flights disappeared. Helicopters fly by visual flight rules, so that there are fewer flights in bad weather. On each route, the maximum heights are specified (from 200-1,500 feet) but the minimum can be as low as 50 feet if necessary.

Each of the panel participants gave a brief overview of their flights. The Army flies 24 helicopters out of Ft Belvoir (Blackhawks). The Marines operate daily flights with UH60s and UH3 (green with white top) and Ospreys (the noisiest equipment and the ones that attracted the most complaints during the Open Forum). The Air Force runs about 811 operations out of Andrews AFB with 21 VH1 helicopters (Bell 212) but mostly in the Maryland area. The Coast Guard has a regular National Defense security mission called "Blackjet" stationed at National Airport, and, in addition to emergency flights to intercept planes flying illegally over the restricted P56 security zone around the White House, operates daily training flights with 2 orange helicopters daily.

During the Q and Q afterwards, most interventions were made by residents in the Fairlington area, as well as Aurora Hills and Arlington Ridge, although there were some questions and comments from residents in Shirlington, 7 Corners, and Ashton Heights as well. Although the panel participants tried to be responsive, they noted that they are limited to the FAA routes, and the FAA representatives insisted that they have no control over the military. The participants did take complaints on board and said they would "look into" possible violations and mitigation of noise. A key request from attendees was for some mechanism to provide information on flights that deviate from the routes over residential areas and create considerable noise. The FAA noise abatement number (202-267-3521) goes to voice mail, but they do listen to messages. There is a DOD Noise Working Group but no one had the phone number or email for it. Libby Garvey promised to follow up on means of communication for the public. At least one speaker referred to a meeting convened by Mary Hynes in 2000 where similar actions were promised. Many speakers insisted that noise from helicopters has gotten worse over the years, and the Osprey came in for the most criticism, including criticism of the night flights which are done for training purposes.

Crystal City specifics: For the last few years, the Coast Guard has been flying its orange helicopters from National Airport to the Pentagon, ever closer to our residential buildings in the northern part of Crystal City. The USCG representative assured us that there about 4 flights on average per day and that these are training, not transportation, flights. These flights are at 200 feet due to the airport runways. He promised to look into the flight pattern that takes the helicopters behind Water Park Towers, over the Gateway Park facing Waterford House and Crystal Gateway, and over North Tract Lofts and see if the pilots could fly slight east of there. One suggestion was to fly up the GW Parkway to Roach's Run and then over the Long Bridge Park soccer fields. As of 12/18, there has been no change in the flight pattern.