

Airport panel hears from residents

Noise, expansion, property values top list of concerns

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A new Watsonville Municipal Airport advisory committee got an earful last night from area residents.

Fifty people turned out to tell the Airport Land Use Technical Advisory Committee about loud planes, depressed land values and fears of more air traffic.

"We just don't want to see rapid expansion," said Tim McTighe, who lives on Manfre Road. "One of these days a plane will drop out of the sky, heaven forbid."

Joanne Turnquist said noise from planes flying over Corralitos is annoying, especially on the weekends.

"What we really have is a rich man's golf course in the sky," she charged.

Airport Manager Kim Wirht said she was already planning to send a letter to pilots to tell them of noise concerns.

Residents are getting used to public meetings. They've been turning out in force since the county and city proposed a law last year to ban or strictly limit

building near the airport.

That proposal was scrapped last week, a decision County Supervisor Robley Levy said was influenced by the objections of residents.

Under the new proposal, most homeowners will have no problem getting approval for two-story homes, but will still need variances for construction under certain conditions. Several meetings are scheduled before a law is adopted.

The proposed law sets an inner safety zone of about a quarter mile from the end of the runway, an outer safety zone ranging from 1,600 feet to more than a mile, and a noise-impact zone beyond that. The law would limit new development in the inner and outer safety zones to single-family homes, and would prohibit subdivisions.

The ordinances are being considered because of new state regulations requiring an "Airport Safety and Approach Law." Identical laws are under consideration by Watsonville, which owns the airport, and the county, where most of the airport's neighbors live.

The committee, appointed by

the City Council and the Board of Supervisors, has three pilots — Ted Gracheck, Dewey Beaudette and Dan Chauvet — and three non-pilots — Graham Bice, Celia Organista and Watsonville City Manager Steve Salomon. Committee members were deadlocked on picking a chairman and will have to wait until the one vacancy on the committee is filled.

Several residents said the airport has recently changed from a quiet little airport to a noisy one. One man said he supported the airport as is, but would fight to close it down if use expanded significantly.

City officials are considering additional hangars, which is among the issues to be addressed in the revised Airport Master Plan, now in the works.

Several speakers complained about the meeting's scheduling — 5 p.m. — and the committee set its next meeting for 7 p.m. April 30 at City Hall.

There was another stroke of bad timing — 20 minutes before the meeting began, a noisy Lear jet took off from the airport while Air-

port Manager Wirht was giving a tour of the runways to committee members and the press.

The plane, a medical transport, did not take off from the recommended runway. Even before it left the ground, Wirht said she planned to send a letter of complaint to the plane's owner in San Diego.

At the meeting, resident Kim Keller made some noise of her own about the jet.

"We thought it was going to crash. We feared for our lives," she said.

Moss Landing chamber to dedicate new digs

The Moss Landing Chamber of Commerce will conduct a ribbon-cutting ceremony tomorrow at its new building.

Located on Moss Landing Road, the 1,200-square-foot structure was built with the proceeds from two decades of flea markets.

An open house will be held from 3 p.m. to 6 p.m. with the ribbon cutting at 4 p.m.