Helicopter Community Forum
Wednesday, February 23, 2011
7:00 pm – 8:30 pm
Arlington County Board Room
Facilitator: The Honorable Mary Hynes, Arlington County Board

Summary
About 25 residents, governmental representatives, and private sector representatives from Northern Virginia, primarily from Arlington and Fairfax Counties attended the Helicopter Community Forum on February 23, 2011. This event focused on follow up to the September 22, 2010 Forum and November 2010 meeting with elected officials, and a proposed community input system for helicopter noise complaints.

Panel participants included: Honorable Mary Hynes, Arlington County and COG Aviation Policy Liaison; Honorable Penny Gross, Fairfax County; Don Simons, Air Traffic District Manager, FAA; and Bob Laser, FAA Operations Manager, Washington National Tower. The highlight of the Forum was a presentation by Robert Grotel of PlaneNoise who presented a model community input system.

Board Member Hynes opened the forum by explaining that Arlington County and surrounding communities have been concerned about helicopter noise for many years. In September 2010, a Community Forum was held that focused on military helicopter traffic – which represents just over half of the helicopter over flights in our region. We learned that there is a significant amount of non-military helicopter traffic as well – including police, Medevac, drug enforcement, and news media. Roles and relationships among FAA, military and other operators were discussed and clarified. We learned that all helicopter air operations are under the control of the FAA and not the military. We also learned about the Metropolitan Washington Area helicopter route and zone systems. As a result of the September meeting, the FAA committed to conduct a two-week snapshot analysis that would be discussed with helicopter users and elected officials. This meeting was held on November 30, 2010. Supervisor Penny Gross noted that the November meeting was truly an eye opener. The particular route that pilots fly are mission driven. The question is how to control helicopter flights in the region. The November 30 meeting revealed that there is no joy riding in the Metropolitan Washington region. Once the mission is understood, citizens will have a greater appreciation for how to voice their concern in a more construction manner.

Bob Laser, FAA operations manager for the air control tower at Reagan National Airport, added that after the elected officials' portion of the meeting, the operators talked about regular business which included availability to request higher altitudes at certain times and the concerns expressed during the elected official briefing and how operators can better address those concerns. He went on the say that after 9-11, the Metropolitan Washington Region airspace became more restrictive. He again provided a brief explanation of a system of "routes

and zones" that is used to manage both fixed wing airplanes and helicopters near the airport. Highways are used as routes for helicopters since the road noise obfuscates the additional noise from the helicopter overhead. He told the audience that military flights in the area are bona fide missions, some of which involve evacuation missions of senior government officials. For this reason, there is no feed-back because the helicopter is on a security-related mission. On occasion there might be a response to a complaint, but this is not often. Further, if a mission requires an operator to fly at a lower altitude they can do.

Chair Hynes stated that at the September 2010 Forum, it was noted that FAA supports the "Fly Neighborly" Program developed by Helicopter Association International. This guide is intended to promote helicopter noise mitigation operations for pilots, operators, and managers. She then introduced Mr. Harold Summers, Director, Flight Operations and Technical Services of the Helicopter Association International.

The key highlights of Mr. Summers presentation include:

- The Fly Neighborly Program is a voluntary noise abatement program developed by the HAI Fly Neighborly Committee.
- The program is designed to be implemented worldwide by large and small individual helicopter operators. This program applies to all types of civil, military and governmental helicopter operations.
- Fly Neighborly Noise Abatement procedures and additional pilot training information for specific helicopter models are available on the HAI Web site www.rotor.com.
- HAI has teamed up with the FAA and promotes Fly Neighborly nationwide. This effort is intended to foster better acceptance of helicopter operations and training for pilots.
- The Fly Neighborly program has been integrated into other airport noise abatement programs.

Chair Hynes reminded the attendees that helicopter noise is a fact of life in the Metropolitan Washington area. The challenge is how do we manage complaints and have a constructive dialogue on how to mitigate the impact on the quality of life in communities. Mr. Robert Grotel, President of PlaneNoise has developed a system for the New York area. A community input system for noise complaints is one of the tools that could be used in the Metropolitan Washington area to address this issue.

In his presentation, Mr. Grotel highlighted the following PlaneNoise features:

- PlaneNoise is a complete noise complaint management solution simplifying the entire complaint process from collection to GIS mapping to detailed reporting. It is intended to provide data on where, when and by whom in order to come up with solutions to noise complaints.
- Provides stakeholders with increased intelligence while reducing costs and saving valuable resources.

- Identifies where complaints are being generated, when and by whom.

- Provides critical data needed for planning, improved airport user and stakeholder interactions, and developing comprehensive noise abatement procedures programs and procedures to improve community compatibility.

- There are seven key features: 1) Automated Complaint Collection; 2) Secure, Online Database; 3) Responsive & Courteous Customer Service; 4) Verification & Investigation; 5) Anytime Analytics Dashboard; 6) GIS Mapping; and 7) Detailed Reporting.

- The system organizes the data in a way that you need to develop solutions, e.g., households, and sensitivity clusters.

- The Eastern Region Helicopter Council depends upon PlaneNoise for its entire noise complaint management function in the NYC Metro/Long Island area.

- In 2010, PlaneNoise collected, logged, analyzed, mapped and reported on 1,523 ERHC complaints. Over 4,000 complaints processed since 2007.

- Key 2010 PlaneNoise Statistics: 82 distinct households generated complaints; Top-10 generated 81% of total; one generated 780 complaints, or 51% of total. "North Shore Route" and its two transition points (North Fork and Town of North Hempstead) identified as key sensitive areas requiring additional attention.

- Information disseminated to pilots, FAA, community groups, local elected officials, interested and involved governmental entities.

In opening the dialogue, Chair Hynes emphasized the need to figure out how to have a constructive conversation about helicopters noise and how to mitigate its impact on the quality of life in communities. A community noise portal may be a tool. Concern was expressed as to whether the PlaneNoise model provided the necessary data to identify solutions given that some data may be stripped from the data base for security reasons. In response, it was noted that the PlaneNoise was designed to collect data.

Another attendee commented that the tradeoffs for security, medical and police services outweigh the short duration -- 10 to 20 seconds -- of noise impacts, noting the need to be more fiscally responsible to tax payer dollars.

Among the other comments were:

- All military branches embrace the Fly Neighborly Program and do their best to be responsive to the concerns of communities.
- PlaneNOISE was designed to address both airplane and helicopter noise.

- It may not be possible for pilots to always abide by Fly Neighborly guidelines.
- MedStar pilots are aware of sensitive areas in the Metropolitan Washington area and have tied to avoid those areas where possible.
- Advanced Navigational procedures as recommended in the Part 150 Plan are scheduled to go into effect in March. These procedures are anticipated to bring some relief.
- FAA intends to continue to look at where altitudes can be raised.
- The PlaneNOISE system would be very helpful to the Metropolitan Washington area by providing credibility to both FAA and other military operators.
- Military data seems to be the most dominate type of aircraft in the region.

In conclusion, Chair Hynes thanked all participants. She extended a special thanks to the FAA and military officials who have joined the community to address this issue over the past months. While there is consensus that a community input system would be beneficial to the region, the challenge however is how to fund such a system. She noted that such a system may cost about $50,000 over a 2 year period. Meanwhile, if anyone has ideas about where to obtain funding, you are encouraged to share those possible sources with her.

Copies of presentations and materials can be obtained at:

http://www.mwcog.org/calendar/detail.asp?EVENT_ID=7172&MONTH_CHOICE=2&DAY_CHOICE=23&YEAR_CHOICE=2011

Participants and Organizations Represented

1. Hon. Mary Hynes, Arlington County
2. Hon. Penny Gross, Fairfax County
3. Christine Morin, Supervisor Gerry Hyland's Office, Fairfax County
4. Don Simons, FAA
5. COL Scott Sandborn, Commander Air Operations Command
6. CSM Chad Cuomo, US Army Air OPS Group
7. Mike Hodson, MD State Police
8. Ray Johnson, MEDSTAR- 2
9. Aarow Adams, HMX-1, Presidential Helicopter
10. Kim O'Brien, Arlington County Citizen
11. Don MacGlashen, CAAN
12. Bob Laser, FAA
13. Harold Summers, HIA
14. Noelia MaGowan, STAT MedEvac
15. Joseph Pelton, Chain Bridge Forest Association
16. Stuart Freudberg, MWCOG
17. Clara Beschovsky, MWCOG
18. David Annoyo, AOG, DAAF
19. Doug VanWeelden, AAOG MDW
20. Jo Connell, Arlington Resident
21. George Nichols, COG Consultant
22. Kari Doyle, Arlington County
23. Ed Hilz, Fairlington Citizens Association
24. Steve Geiger, Arlington County Civic Federation
25. Rick Frisbee, Chain Bridge Forest Civic Association
26. Al Warner, Arlington Woods Civic Assoc.
27. Paul Holland, Arlington County