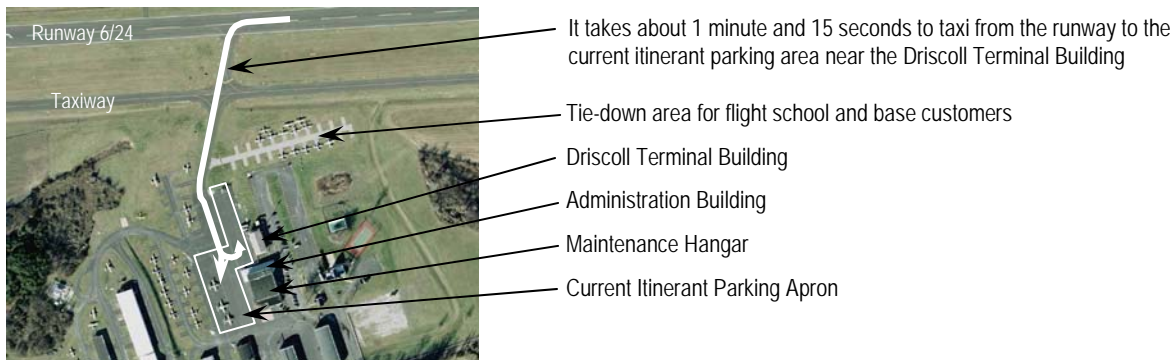


Whitpain Township’s Board of Supervisors will review and vote on the application of Wings Field for the construction of an Itinerant Aircraft Parking Apron at its next meeting on Tuesday, June 6<sup>th</sup>, at 8:00 p.m. at the Township Administration Building, 960 Wentz Road, Blue Bell. This *Issue Report* will give you an overview of the project, its history, why it is important to Wings and its neighbors, and other information.

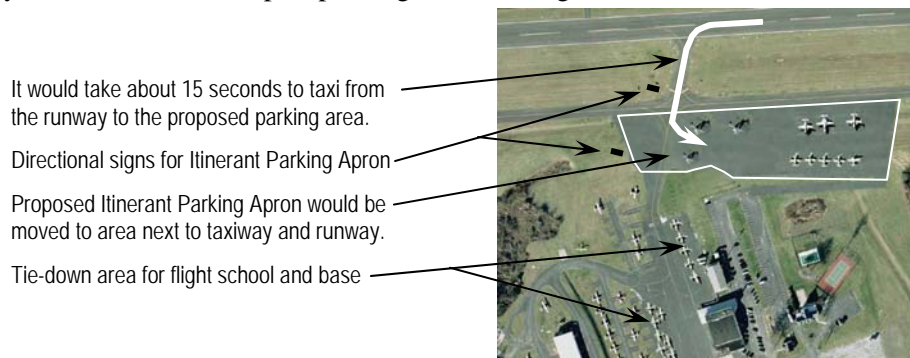
**What is an *Itinerant Aircraft Parking Apron* and why is it needed?**

The *Itinerant Aircraft Parking Apron* is nothing more than a parking area for visiting airplanes and helicopters. Every airport has one. Today at Wings the only visitor parking apron is located up the hill from the runway, in front of the Driscoll Terminal Building and the maintenance hangar. To improve quality of life for its closest neighbors, the owner of Wings Field wants to move this area of concentrated noise and engine fumes generated by visiting aircraft as far away as possible from the neighbors on Huntsman Lane, in Blue Bell Woods, and along Narcissa Road.

The current parking area consists of parking spaces for up to nine visiting aircraft (typically corporate helicopters, turboprop airplanes, and a handful of small business jets), but it is never filled. To reach the area, pilots taxi uphill from the runway for about one minute and fifteen seconds. They have to gun their engines to get up the hill, producing additional noise and fumes.



The owner of Wings Field wants to have another parking area that would allow them to restrict visiting turbine and other aircraft, including helicopters, to an area down by the runway and next to the main taxiway. After landing, visiting pilots would follow signs to this parking area and would need to taxi only about 15 seconds to reach it. Passengers and crews for these aircraft would access the proposed Itinerant Parking Apron through a gate in the security fence at the end of the airport’s automobile parking lot. Golf carts may also be used to transport passengers to waiting automobiles.



Restricting visiting turbine and other aircraft, including helicopters, to an Itinerant Parking Apron that is down the hill and far away from the neighbors on Huntsman Lane, in Blue Bell Woods, and along Narcissa Road will improve quality of life by reducing the level and duration of sound events. The proposed parking area will decrease taxi times, use the gradient of the land and buildings as sound buffers to reduce noise levels by up to 20 decibels (a difference in noise levels between normal talking and a Mack truck passing by), and move visiting helicopters and business jets more than a football field length further from neighboring homes.

The proposed apron was never intended to increase jet and helicopter traffic, as alleged by some of the airport opponents. It will have no effect on the revenue or income generated by the airport. The only return for Wings Field will be a hoped for increase in goodwill from the community when the Itinerant Aircraft Parking Apron proves its effectiveness in reducing noise and fume levels for the airport's closest neighbors.

### **What is the history of Wings Field's efforts to build an Itinerant Parking Apron?**

The idea for the Itinerant Aircraft Parking Apron actually came from a community advisory group in 1996 that saw a parking area for visiting aircraft located near the runway as a means for reducing noise and improving air quality. Another citizen advisory committee made the same recommendation in 2002. Wings agreed and included the group's idea in their airport development plan.

When Wings officials submitted a land development plan for an Itinerant Aircraft Parking Apron to Whitpain Township in 2003, airport opponents lobbied against the parking apron saying that the proposed parking area would increase the size and frequency of aircraft using the airport. In August 2003, the Whitpain Township supervisors voted against the airport's application for the Itinerant Aircraft Parking Apron. Among the chief reasons cited for the denial were technical deficiencies in the airport's application and the Township's requirement that the airport build a sidewalk around its 217 acre property. Nowhere in the denial was there any mention of the merits of the Itinerant Aircraft Parking Apron as a means for improving the quality of life of the neighbors.

The owners of Wings Field appealed the Township's decision to the Montgomery County Court of Common Pleas, but the Court denied Wings' appeal on January 18, 2005. The court's decision was affirmed on appeal.

In the meantime, Wings officials corrected the technical deficiencies in the plans and blueprints they submitted and they are working with Township officials to reach an agreement on the sidewalk issue. Early in 2006, Wings resubmitted its application for the parking apron to Whitpain Township.

### **Why resubmit the application?**

- ◆ The owner of Wings Field wants to follow-through on suggestions by two different citizen advisory groups, the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania's Bureau of Aviation, and the FAA. Wings officials, like these groups and government entities, sincerely believe that the proposed parking apron for visiting aircraft will improve the quality of life of neighbors living across Narcissa Road.
- ◆ Wings officials were told in 2003 that township supervisors denied their application because of technical deficiencies in the plans and blueprints that were submitted and a requirement for sidewalks around the airport, but not necessarily the merits of the plan. Wings officials have corrected these deficiencies.
- ◆ Wings and township officials are working on changes to the requirement for sidewalks around 217 acre property.

## **What is the township's rationale for the sidewalk?**

Chapter 129, Article V, § 129-39 (Sidewalks) of Whippain Township's municipal code says:

- A. *Where required. Sidewalks shall be provided at any location where the Board of Supervisors shall determine that sidewalks are necessary for public safety or convenience.*
- B. *Width. Sidewalks shall not be less than four feet in width in residential areas, five feet in width in all other areas.*
- C. *Location. Sidewalks shall be located in the shoulder strip and six feet from the curb to the near edge of the sidewalk. The grade and paving of the sidewalks shall be continuous across driveways.*

Applying this requirement to Wings Field's application for the Itinerant Parking Apron in 2003 meant that the owner of Wings had to build 2.9 miles of sidewalk. This 5' wide strip of asphalt or concrete would pass through extensive areas of wetlands and flood plains, over three creeks, behind and looking into the backyards of many neighbors, and at the end of a runway. Construction would require extensive excavation and the removal of numerous trees and other vegetation. The 2.9 miles of sidewalk most likely would have cost as much as – or more than – the entire parking apron project.

More revealing is that a review of township records shows that the Whippain sidewalk requirement has been waived for most commercial developments in the township in recent years. Among properties granted sidewalk waivers are: CVS Pharmacy (Skipack and Dekalb Pikes), Village Square at Blue Bell (Dekalb Pike), Meitner property (831 Skipack Pike), Blue Bell Executive Campus (460 to 470 Norristown Road), and St. Helena's Catholic Church (Dekalb Pike). Major properties such as the Office Court at Walton Point, Unisys corporate headquarters, Cedarbrook Country Club (180 Pennlyn Pike), Blue Bell Country Club (along Dekalb Pike), Montgomery County Community College (along Dekalb Pike and Morris Road), Shady Grove Elementary School, and Prophecy Creek Park do not have sidewalks around their borders.

## **Airport opponents say that the new parking area will lead to an increase in corporate jets and helicopters using the airport. Is this true?**

No. The proposed parking lot for visiting aircraft is unlikely to attract more helicopters and business jets. The corporate and charter pilots who select Wings do so because it is convenient for their clients. Location and the length of the airport's runway are the key factors for their decision-making. If they are not using the airport today, it is unlikely that they will change their minds because Wings has a new parking lot.

Because of the high operating costs of the aircraft they fly – e.g., corporate helicopters cost about \$3,500 per hour to operate; PennSTAR's medevac helicopter can cost about several thousand dollars per mission; small business jets cost between \$1,500 and \$2,500 per hour – corporate and charter pilots must have a reason for coming to Wings Field. They cannot afford to take their aircraft on "joy rides." Unless Whippain and Plymouth townships suddenly become world headquarters for two or three more Fortune 500 corporations or the area becomes an internationally known tourist destination or a number of "gazillionaires" move into the community, do not expect any major change in the volume or types of aircraft using Wings Field.

## **What are the specifications for the proposed Itinerant Aircraft Parking Apron?**

The proposed visitor parking apron will overlay and replace an existing tie down area for 28 airplanes currently based at Wings with a parking area for up to 17 visiting aircraft (up to 13 airplanes and up to four helicopters). Although an increase from the nine tie-down spots currently allocated for visiting

aircraft, it is unlikely that the extra spaces will ever be used for itinerant operations. Instead, the larger surface area will allow the aircraft to be parked farther apart and provide more room for taxiing, thereby increasing safety.

The flight school aircraft that are currently tied down on the 28 space parking area will be moved to existing but unused tie-down spots adjacent to the new apron. Other aircraft tied down in this area and owned by customers based at Wings will move up the ramp to the area where visiting aircraft are currently parked.

**For further information**

Bob Mueller  
215.803.2201  
bmueller@b2bpulse.com