



Supervisor

Matt Letourneau

Dulles District



I know many of you in the Dulles South area recently received a letter from Loudoun County's Department of Planning & Zoning regarding proposed amendments to the Airport Impact Overlay District (AIOD) map for Dulles Airport. The letter satisfies the legal requirements associated with noticing a public hearing for a zoning item, but it did not do a good job explaining what exactly these changes mean or give any context for the changes.

Since the letter began to arrive I've seen a lot of questions, so my goal today is to explain what all of this is about and what it means for you. If you have any questions or comments, please feel free to follow up via [email](#) or reach out to project manager Joshua Peters by [email](#).

Let's start with the basics - what is an Airport Impact Overlay District?

An Airport Impact Overlay District (AIOD) is a type of zoning designation that delineates boundaries of noise impact on the ground from aircraft. Loudoun County has had AIODs in place around Washington Dulles International Airport and Leesburg Airport for decades. The Dulles AIOD is based on studies conducted by the Washington Metropolitan Airports Authority (MWAA) in concert with the Federal Aviation Administration (FAA), measuring current and

Matthew F. Letourneau

Dulles District Supervisor,
Loudoun County Board of
Supervisors

Member

[Finance, Government
Operations and Economic
Development Committee](#)

Principal Director

[Washington Metropolitan
Area Transit Authority Board
of Directors](#)

Member

[Rt. 28 Transportation
Improvement District
Commission](#)

Member

[Northern Virginia
Transportation Commission](#)

Member

[Transportation Planning
Board](#)

Member

future noise from aircraft. The studies take into account expected future traffic patterns, additions to the airport, and other relevant factors.

The AIOD is purely a zoning designation - it does not affect flight paths or have any weight with the FAA, which determines traffic patterns. The AIOD designates contours based on the level of noise, from 75 DNL down to a 1-mile buffer around the 60 DNL. Consistent with the recommendations of the FAA and widespread practice across the country, Loudoun County prohibits residential development in the 65 DNL or greater noise corridors. Over the years, as Loudoun developed, the Dulles AIOD has been a crucial tool to ensure that residential development has not occurred in the most heavily impacted areas.

What about the recent higher intensity noise we've been experiencing?

This update has nothing to do with the recent unusually loud noise that some residents have been experiencing over the last few months. As I reported in my May newsletter and on Facebook, Runway 12/30 at Dulles was closed for maintenance. Many departing flights use Runway 30 to take off to the west, but instead were using a southern departure which took them over South Riding. That was a temporary situation which ended last Friday when 12/30 opened back up.

Why is the County updating the AIOD?

In 2019, MWAA undertook a new study on the Dulles Airport noise contours - the first new study in nearly 30 years. As a result, the County is now updating the AIOD to reflect the latest data and information. As I mentioned, the study breaks noise into several different designations, ranging from the 75 DNL (most severe noise) to the one-mile buffer around the 60 DNL. These numbers aren't strict decibel readings but are based on a formula that takes into account a number of factors related to

[Dulles Area Transportation Association](#)

Contact Me

Mailing Address

1 Harrison St. SE,
5th Floor
P.O. Box 7000
Leesburg, VA 20177-7000

Email

matt.letourneau@loudoun.gov

Office Phone

(703) 771-5069

Legislative Aide

[Tom Parker](#)

Staff Aide

[Jared Midwood](#)



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noise, including the time of day that flights are taking place. The FAA recommends that no residential dwellings be built in areas with noise levels higher than the 65 DNL. Loudoun County has affirmed this principle in our recently approved 2019 General Plan, so no new residential can be built in these contour areas. The airport has installed noise monitoring devices throughout the community and publishes the data that was used in development of the new noise contours.

What requirements exist for homes in the AIOD?

As mentioned, no new homes can be approved in the 65 DNL. New homes in the 60-65 DNL will be required to have noise attenuation to reduce noise. In the one-mile buffer, realtors for new homes are required to notify buyers of airplane noise at the time of closing.

For existing homes in any of these areas, the only requirement is notification. I should note that this is an existing requirement under the current AIOD. Virtually all of the homes that received a notification letter are currently in one of the contours of the existing AIOD, in which notification is already required. The notification ensures that residents are aware they are likely to encounter significant airplane noise in the home they are purchasing.

It is my understanding that this notification has not always taken place as it should have. Failure to disclose the AIOD is a zoning violation, but the zoning ordinance is complaint based, so if the County does not receive a complaint, no action is taken. As part of the AIOD update process, the County will be conducting outreach to realtors to ensure they know about the notice requirements and are giving them for every property. In my experience, new development has been more likely to follow the requirement, as developers are more familiar with this process. However, at closing,

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buyers are asked to sign dozens of papers, so it can be overwhelming.

What is changing in the new AIOD?

The updated noise contours have some changes, but they won't be dramatically different. Some areas are being moved from the 65+ DNL to the 60 DNL, which removes the restriction on residential development. This includes the Arcola area along StoneSprings Boulevard, which was set to develop as mostly industrial but now has residential alternatives. There is an area south of Route 50 that starts west of Elk Lick Road and extends west until Tall Cedars Parkway before moving north and the eastern portion of Arcola Center that is being moved into the 65 DNL, which will restrict future residential. The recently approved Avonlea development that I have been writing about in my monthly newsletters will be the last residential approved within this area if future Boards follow these contours, which includes Dulles Landing and the parcels between Walmart and Arcola Center. As part of the discussion, the Board retained notification requirements in the one-mile buffer surrounding the 60 DNL noise contour. I was happy with this decision, since I think full transparency with potential homeowners is always the best policy. The AIOD update is processing as a Comprehensive Plan Amendment and is expected to be finalized this September.

Will the changes affect air traffic at Dulles?

No. The changes impact on-the-ground zoning. They are intended to update our Zoning Ordinance requirements to match MWAA's 2019 noise study. As I mentioned before, flight patterns are set by the FAA on a federal level and are not affected by the County's AIOD.

Will the changes affect already approved development?

No. As I mentioned above in the context of Avonlea, already approved developments will be allowed to build with the proper notice requirements. However, parcels that are moved to stricter DNL designations will not be eligible for further residential development in the future.

Will the changes affect my home?

If you are living in a house in one of the noise designations that is being amended, there is no change to the zoning of your property. If it is being added to the AIOD, there is now a notification requirement when the property is sold in the future. Surrounding properties may now be allowed to develop residential or vice versa, but your home will remain unaffected. Since flight patterns are not changing, there will be no difference in airplane noise that you experience either. The noise contours were created to reflect the actual flight patterns in use today as well as accommodate future planned growth of airport operations in the future.

What about home values?

There is no evidence that being in an AIOD decreases home values. Loudoun County has seen significant growth in the value of homes, especially in southern Loudoun, where most of the homes are already in the Dulles AIOD. My own home is changing from the one-mile buffer to the 60-65 DNL contour, and I am not concerned about the value.

Why did I receive the letter?

You received the letter if your home is in the current or future Dulles AIOD. The Loudoun County Planning Commission will hold a Public Hearing to consider the AIOD amendments on Tuesday, June 28 at 6:00 p.m. in the Board Room at the Government Center, located at 1 Harrison St. SE in Leesburg. You are encouraged to come listen to the meeting and sign up to speak on the proposed

changes if you would like to do so. If you wish to sign-up to speak at the hearing in advance, please call 703-777-0246 (option 5) prior to noon on the day of the hearing. Written comments may be sent to the Loudoun County Planning Commission, 1 Harrison Street SE, PO Box 7000, Leesburg, Virginia 20177-7000, or by e-mail to loudounpc@loudoun.gov. Following action by the Planning Commission, the Board of Supervisors will take up the amendments this fall.

Where can I learn more?

Complete copies of the amendments and related documents can be perused at your leisure in the Department of Planning & Zoning Offices, located on the third floor of the Government Center (1 Harrison St. SE in Leesburg) from 8:30 a.m. to 5:00 p.m., Monday through Friday. They are also available electronically [here](#). Click on "searchable list" and search for "ZMAP-2021-0011."

Documents for the Planning Commission Public Hearing can be viewed and downloaded [here](#).

If you would like to see a map with an overlay of the current AIOD boundaries as well as the new proposed boundaries on your specific parcel, the County's GIS Department has created an interactive tool which can be accessed [here](#).

Did someone forward this to you? Click below to sign up to receive future updates directly.

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Supervisor Matt Letourneau | 1 Harrison Street, S.E., 5th Floor, P.O. Box 7000, Leesburg, VA 20177-7000

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