

FCWC's Position on Westchester County Airport Expansion

Over its 50 years, among the many environmental issues Federated Conservationists of Westchester County (FCWC) has educated about and advocated action for, none has loomed larger than Westchester County Airport's ongoing pollution and potential future impacts on our quality of life.

A legal agreement between the County and the airlines put controls on the expansion of commercial aviation at the airport in the form of 4 gates at the terminal, 4 flights per half hour, and 240 passengers per half hour (either leaving or coming). These controls on commercial flights have been in existence since the mid 1980s and were put into the county code in 2004.

Although Westchester County has benefited greatly from this control, it is now under threat because of a recent development: in 2015, County Executive Astorino proposed changes to the current commercial passenger limitations at the airport to the Board of Legislators (BOL). An attempt to change any one of the three controls is risky and dangerous. These controls are almost unique in the country and predate a federal law that does not permit local controls on access to airports anymore. The BOL must be very sure, with confirmation in writing, that FAA does not consider any attempt to change the passenger cap to be an invalidation of the entire control.

There are serious concerns associated with any change to the current terminal use regulation (TUR). One is the airport's proximity to the Kensico Reservoir, which provides drinking water for millions of people in NYC and Westchester. The County has invested much money to try to prevent the water pollution of the Reservoir from the fuel spills, and deicing fluids from operating airports. This location right next to a significant source of drinking water would not be permitted today.

Other concerns include many quality of life issues, including air and noise pollution, and the impacts on our property values. It is not hard to convince people that they would not like to live near LaGuardia or JFK, but it is harder to make Westchester residents understand that they must give up some convenience - and travel to the larger existing airports - or experience the impacts on our quality of life that come with living near a large airport.

FCWC believes residents should remind the County Executive and their legislators that any change to our control on the size of the airport needs assurances in writing that we are not giving up the controls. We also advocate for a thorough environmental review, more discussion from all parties as to whether the proposed change is necessary, and a review of what other less disruptive alternatives may be.