

CONNECTION

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Street artist Kelsey Montague paints "Reston Wings Mural" at International Tower at Reston Heights in Reston. Commissioned by American Real Estate Partners, the work is interactive.



Hope and Joy In 625 Square Feet of Wings

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COMMENTARY

Lifetime of Learning

BY KENNETH R. "KEN"
PLUM
STATE DELEGATE (D-36)



My mom and dad had little or no formal education which was not that unusual for children in large families growing up in rural Virginia in the 1920s.

What they lacked in schooling they made up in basic values of honesty and hard work. Their ambition for their three sons of which I was the youngest was to finish school which for them meant high school. Mom's advice to me for I had obvious interests in doing more than graduating high school and working a local job was captured in the words of the country music song of Earl Scruggs and later Ricky Skaggs, "Don't Get Above Your Raisin."

Going off to college as the first in my family to do so was a frightening experience but one that soon became a labor of love. I could not learn enough about the world around me and most especially about history and pol-

itics. I was a product of a public school system in Virginia, and even as a youngster I knew that the story of the state was much more complex and involved than the glorification of its history presented in the state-approved textbooks. My love of learning led me to fin-

ish an undergraduate degree in history and political history at the then Old Dominion College. I went on to the University of Virginia where I received a master's degree in teaching the social studies in 1967. That program had an internship experience that led to me being placed in Fairfax County Public Schools from which I retired thirty years later.

I refused to use the state-approved textbook on Virginia history in my classroom because of the distortions and misinformation it contained. My school administrator supported me, and a few years later I consulted with FCPS when it produced its own edition of a

SEE PLUM, PAGE 7

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NEWS

Fairfax County Democratic Committee Calls Virtual Unassembled Caucus

Party partisan endorsements in local nonpartisan election.

BY MERCIA HOBSON
THE CONNECTION

The issue of partisan party endorsements in a nonpartisan election appears to be one of the pending topics for discussion by candidates in the November 3, Town Council General Election in Herndon this fall. Twelve candidates in the municipality face off for seven of the seven open seats. Nine applied for endorsement by the Fairfax County Democratic Committee and the other three apparently want nothing to do with a political endorsement from any party. “I believe candidates should share their world view. These days, it is not easy to connect with all voters personally, so there is value aligning with a political party. Voters can quickly determine the foundation of a candidate’s priorities. Even at the municipal level, views impact decisions. On Council, we address land use, zoning and budget items. Priorities and views drive outcomes,” said candidate for second term on Council, Cesar A. del Aguila. Opposing the view, challenger for Council Clark A. Hedrick said, “Although I appreciate the work they do to register voters and create an outlet for residents to engage in the civic process, I will not be seeking endorsement from any political organization. My campaign is focused on bringing Herndon together, and I am gathering support from neighbors of all political stripes”

THE FAIRFAX COUNTY DEMOCRATIC COMMITTEE (FCDC) will hold a virtual Unassembled Caucus Aug. 10-28, 2020. The sole purpose of the caucus is to select the Party’s endorsees for November 3, 2020, Town Council General Election Fairfax County - Herndon, pursuant to the Virginia Democratic Party Plan. “Because these are official offices, the normal primary process is not an option,” said Brian Graham, Chair of the Fairfax County Democratic Committee. Graham’s statement indirectly referenced the Virginia Code that required all local office candidates to run as “Independents.”

“Election officials within the Commonwealth of Virginia are by law not allowed to provide party designation for local candidates on the ballot. (§ 24.2-613). The only candidates that may have a party designation on a ballot are those running for federal, statewide, or General Assembly offices,” according to the Virginia Department of Elections. Notwithstanding, one hundred and forty-seven years after an Act of Assembly incorporated the Town of Herndon, its original Charter stands with a string to limit political party interference. In part, it remains unamended to read: “Candidates for town offices shall not be identified on

the ballot by political affiliation.”

However, neither the Code of Virginia nor the Town Charter legally precludes political parties, such as the Fairfax GOP and Fairfax Democrats, from producing party-affiliated Sample Ballots like those distributed at Dranesville District precincts, Herndon No. 1, Herndon No. 2 and Herndon No. 3 during the General Election 2018. They stated, “Paid for by the Fairfax County Democratic Committee, fairfaxdemocrats.org, not authorized by any candidate or candidate’s committee.”

Competition to stand is high among the twelve Herndon candidates who must identify as “Independent” on the official ballot. Incumbent Sheila Olem, who currently serves as Vice Mayor on her fifth consecutive, two-year term on Town Council, seeks her first term as Mayor. She faces challenger Roland B. Taylor. Olem filed an FCDC Endorsement Application. Taylor did not, and he is not soliciting any political party endorsement. “Since she (Olem) was the only candidate for a single office, she received it,” said Graham.

Eight of the ten individuals vying for the six Councilmember seats also filed Democratic Endorsement Applications. They are incumbents, Cesar A. del Aguila, Pradip Dhakal and Signe V. Friedrichs along with challengers, Naila Alam, Bessie E. Denton, Syed F. Iftikhar, Sean M. Regan and Jasbinder Singh. The other two Councilmember candidates, Clark A. Hedrick and Stevan Porter said they are not seeking political endorsement.

Jack Kiraly is a member of the FCDC Steering Committee and serves as the organization’s Executive Director. This year, according to Kiraly, FCDC’s voting members approved a revised Rules and Procedures for Herndon Mayor and Town Council Endorsements. No longer will FCDC voting members, individuals from Reston, McLean, Chantilly, Clifton and such vote for candidates for the Committee to endorse for the Town of Herndon elections, unless they qualify as participants and live in the Town.



PHOTO BY MERCIA HOBSON/THE CONNECTION

(File photo) Standing with Virginia State Senator Jennifer Boysko (D-33) and Dranesville District Supervisor John Foust (D), volunteer Camila Alfonso Meza of McLean prepares to distribute an official Commonwealth of Virginia Democratic Sample Ballot to voters at a polling station in Herndon in 2019.

Graham said, “I’m excited that we are opening up the process to allow the Democratic voters of the Town of Herndon have a say in who we endorse.”

Whereas one of the Committee’s stated functions is the support and election of Democratic candidates to all public office levels, there is an under riding function that benefits the endorsed candidates. Whether they are running for office in a partisan or nonpartisan election, those endorsed are eligible and may receive party benefits, such as inclusion on the Democratic Sample Ballot, possible campaign contributions from the party, volunteers and more.

The Endorsement Application Process is clearly defined online for individuals. Among other requirements, each candidate for endorsement or “an FCDC member on their behalf,” had to submit the candidate’s Endorsement Application and a \$500 Filing Fee, payable to FCDC by the July 20, 2020 deadline. “Any candidate that does not receive the endorsement and does not with-

draw from the race will forfeit the \$500,” said Graham. According to the Committee’s website: “It (the \$500) would be applied to the operating expenses of the Caucus related to the endorsement.”

The November 2018 election process saw conflict among Town Council members, challenging candidates and the Fairfax County Democratic Committee. Incumbents Olem and Friedrichs and newcomer del Aguila ran on the “jointly endorsed” Fairfax County Democratic Committee platform. Each won a seat in 2018. Mayor Lisa C. Merkel, Councilmembers William “Bill” McKenna and Grace Wolf with newcomer Joseph Plummer stepped away from their Democrat endorsements after the party did not endorse Wolf. The day following the 2018 election, Merkel resigned from the Fairfax County Democratic Committee after seeing signs posted at a Herndon polling station about “some candidates pretending to be Democrats.” Merkel retained her uncontested seat; Wolf lost the election as did Plummer. He lost the final and sixth seat on Council to McKenna by 22 votes.

THE PARTICIPANT FORM is available online at fair-

faxdemocrats.org/herndon after 10 a.m. on Monday, Aug. 3, and before 7 p.m. on Friday, Aug. 27, 2020. Those who do not have internet access or require other accommodations may participate by calling 703-573-6811. Caucus rules are posted on the Committee’s website (www.fairfaxdemocrats.org). For questions or to request accommodations, contact the Fairfax County Democratic Committee at info@fairfaxdemocrats.org. Participants in the virtual 2020 Fairfax County Democratic Committee Unassembled Caucus may vote by an electronic ballot over the internet; mailed ballot returned via pre-paid mail or dropped off at a to-be-announced location in the Town of Herndon on Saturday, Aug. 28. Up to six candidates receiving the most votes and at least fifteen percent of the ballots cast by participants will be considered endorsed for Town Councilmember. The party endorsed Olem on July 28 since she runs uncontested.

SEE CANDIDATES, PAGE 7



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NEWS

Hope and Joy in 625 Square Feet of Wings

Step in and be part of the art commissioned by American Real Estate Partners.

BY MERCIA HOBSON
THE CONNECTION

Reston, vocalist Taylor Swift, NFL Super Bowl XIV (54) and developer Howard Hughes have something in common: a mural by internationally acclaimed street artist Kelsey Montague. American Real Estate Partners commissioned Montague to design and create a Reston-centric variation of her signature butterfly mural on the exterior wall of the parking structure for International Tower at Reston Heights, 11800 Sunrise Valley Drive. The butterfly is part of the artist's "What Lifts You" series.

Montague is a prolific artist. She is known for her hand-drawn murals and artwork, commissioned by major brands, cities and business districts, developers, and used in product design work. She is interested in the juxtaposition of public art, interactive art and social media. "I have been doing street art all over the world for about six years now... well over 300 murals," she said. "I focus on interactive art. So, whether that's a pair of angel wings (or butterfly wings), you can stand with them...appear to be part of the work... All my work usually has the hashtag, "What Lifts You," which is focused on sharing."

According to Louise Boulton-Lear, who is Vice President of Brand Communications at American Real Estate Partners, the company worked with the Reston Association Design Review Board, its architects, landscape architects and community residents on the design of the 25 by 25-foot mural. "Lisa Heath, DRB Manager, was very engaged and supportive," Boulton-Lear said.

MONTAGUE painted two different sets of graphic butterfly wings, a giant pair soaring nearly three stories high and a smaller black and white pair of wings. Boulton-Lear said, "Building customers, residents and visitors can walk up to the mural and stand between the wings for pictures. They can bring their four-legged squad too. There is a place for everyone... We hope people will share their pictures through social media and be part of the Reston Wings conversation, and in turn, our community," she said.

American Real Estate Properties wanted the mural to be part of Reston's fabric, a tribute to the inclusionary community vision of founder, Robert E. Simon. At the same time, the company wanted to incorporate its corporate values, to "Go Beyond the Expected," create an experience that would be distinct and elevated. Boulton-Lear said they encouraged Montague to include "unique connections to Reston" and American Real Estate Partners' "immense regard for the courage of healthcare professionals" in the mural's design. "As Virginia Spine Institute is an anchor medical tenant, we wanted to create an exciting and fresh experience for patients, medical staff and guests coming in and



PHOTO BY MERCIA HOBSON/THE CONNECTION

Street artist Kelsey Montague paints "Reston Wings Mural" at International Tower at Reston Heights in Reston. Commissioned by American Real Estate Partners, the work is interactive.

out of the office building and structured garage. For Reston residents and others who visit, we wanted to highlight this as a place of community and connection."

According to Montague, she has painted "well over 300 murals worldwide," and travels with her sister, Courtney, Operations Director for the Kelsey Montague Art Brand. "I pretty much live out of a suitcase. I'm on the road constantly," she said. Yet, with all the hustle and bustle, Montague's murals are all different and inspiring. "They're one of a kind, and they all are very specific to the community that I'm drawing in and for...All my work inspires people to not only step into the work and become part of the art but also to think about what lifts them, what inspires them and share that positive message with their communities."

Dressed in painter overalls and a sun hat, Montague stepped onto the platform of articulated boom lift on July 17, temperature spiking in the 90s and humidity tropic. She faced the stark white concrete walls that soared multiple levels and worked quickly in the lift, free-forming the sharp back edges of the butterflies' wings but taking artistic license to personalize the interior areas. "I have an idea of the concept and the layout, but it's always going to be a little bit different, you know, always be in the moment. And I think that's the beauty of street art, because it is so personal and it is in the moment, and it's hand-drawn. It's not going to be something that's a print. It's something that I'm working on and creating," she said.

Montague strategically incorporated specific colors and figures in the mural related to Reston but will leave it to viewers to discover them.

JAMES DOWNEY of the Virginia Spine Institute tried out the wings on Tuesday, July 28. "I notice Kelsey Montague's mural every time I walk by," he said. "I lucked out. Every single one of my windows faces this way. I notice something new every time I look at it."

#RestonWings, #BeyondTheExpected and #WhatLiftsYou

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NEWS

Harmonie Taddeo, Executive Director at Western Fairfax Christian Ministries (far right) and staff pause a moment in the organization's food pantry which serves clients at risk of hunger who reside in Oak Hill, Fairfax, Centreville, Clifton, Fairfax Station, Chantilly and Fair Oaks. (File photo dated before COVID-19.)

PHOTO COURTESY OF WESTERN FAIRFAX CHRISTIAN MINISTRIES



Community Needs in NOVA Spike

As nonprofits lose funding resources, the Dulles Regional Chamber of Commerce acts.

BY MERCIA HOBSON
THE CONNECTION

After it became clear that local Northern Virginia counties and towns could not provide nonprofits with resources at the level they did before COVID-19, business leaders in The Dulles Regional Chamber of Commerce stepped up. They leveraged the Chamber as a vehicle leading it to partner with America's Charities and established a nonprofit called The Dulles Regional Charitable Fund. Businesses and individuals can donate funds that will be directed locally to Northern Virginians in need.

According to John Boylan, President & CEO of the Dulles Regional Chamber of Commerce, the Chamber remains laser-focused on "Commerce, Community and Communication." He said, "Our community needed help as our businesses and employees struggled during the pandemic." The Dulles Chamber is a mix of organizations, both for-profit and nonprofit that stands shoulder to shoulder, helping to make the Dulles Region a better place. Two members of the Chamber, Jeff W. Dick, Chairman and CEO of MainStreet Bancshares, Inc. and MainStreet Bank with branches in Herndon, McLean and Leesburg, and Babur R. Mian, President and CEO of Terra Site Constructors, LLC in Chantilly also recognized the immediate need exacerbated



PHOTO CONTRIBUTED

(From left) Babur R. Mian, President and CEO of Terra Site Constructors, LLC and John Boylan, President & CEO of the Dulles Regional Chamber of Commerce.

by the pandemic.

The businesses gifted generous donations to help seed the new fund. "We are a community Bank and establishing this Charitable Fund for our community is very meaningful for us," said Dick. "I am confident that donations will get to people who truly need a helping hand." Babur said, "I have seen first-hand the disproportionate impact this virus has had on minorities and less fortunate populations. Fairfax County is one of the most diverse counties in the country with a significant im-



Jeff W. Dick, Chairman and CEO of MainStreet Bancshares, Inc. and MainStreet Bank.

SEE COMMUNITY, PAGE 7

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What Do Candidates, Citizens Say?

FROM PAGE 3

As the days leading to the start of the virtual Unassembled Caucus by the Fairfax County Democratic Committee neared, candidates and citizens weighed in on local political parties making endorsements for local nonpartisan elections.

“For example, do we invest in the town by increasing revenue or cut services to keep taxes low? Do we bond every dollar of every development project or invest as we go to lessen what is borrowed? I think these and other decisions tend to align with political platforms. In the spirit of transparency, I favor political parties, including other organizations, endorsing candidates for office in nonpartisan elections.” (Candidate for second term on Council, Cesar A. del Aguila)

“The problem is not so much the endorsement as it is the Sample Ballot. Many voters rely solely on that one piece of paper -- especially for local races -- without actually getting to know anything about the candidates and their positions. That is not a good way to create an effective Town government.” (Candidate for first term on Council Stevan Porter)

“In my opinion, the Democratic caucus in Herndon violates at least the spirit of the law. While winners of the caucus, those running for office are endorsed, so they appear to be nonpartisan, they are not. Each candidate who seeks the endorsement agrees to

abide by the caucus election and (if not endorsed) drop out or face a financial penalty. I am ashamed of my Party. Since all registered voters in Herndon can vote in the caucus, (if they complete the participation form), it is not merely a preference poll among party members, it is a partisan elimination primary.” (Voting citizen in the Town of Herndon and former member of the Herndon Planning Commission Les Zidel)

“Herndon’s government works on matters which almost always transcend the important discussions being led by the Democrat and Republican parties. In keeping with the spirit of Herndon’s nonpartisan elections, I believe seeking an endorsement would be a distraction from the local issues that will define our Council’s work for the next two years.” (Candidate for Council Clark A. Hedrick)

“If a person can run and win with just a party endorsement, then there is a problem with how people determine who to vote for. Forget about what the Party is doing. Herndon citizens are being treated like sheep because they are acting like sheep.” (Joseph Plummer, voting citizen and 2018 candidate for first-term Council, lost to incumbent William “Bill” McKenna by 22 votes for the sixth of six Town Councilmember seats.)

“The Democratic Party is endorsing me, as are other groups and individuals; my first commitment is to the people of the Town of Herndon.” (Candidate for Mayor and current Vice Mayor Sheila Olem)

Plum

FROM PAGE 2

more-accurate Virginia history textbook. Also about the same time, I announced my candidacy for the House of Delegates and was elected on my third try. My interest was not to change school textbooks but to help alter the course of the state’s history to remedy the many wrongs of its past and to make it a state where all people had equal opportunity. I knew about the inequality of opportunity in the state by my volunteer work with the Community Action Agency.

Setting aside challenges related to the pandemic and the craziness of the current federal administration, I feel a greater sense of hope for the Commonwealth than I believe I have ever had. I have written often about the transformative

General Assembly session this year and the passage of much-needed legislation on fairness and equality that had been debated and never passed for years. This month the General Assembly will take another important step in reforming our criminal justice system.

As my friend and historian Bent Tarter wrote recently in a column “Black Lives and Confederate Monuments,” (www.virginiaforum.org) “We all have much to learn, or we will continue to repeat the sorry sequences of violence that exacerbate rather than solve problems. Learning, one of my college teachers explained, should involve a change in behavior.” As a native Virginian I sense that now more than ever we will at long last be seeing changes in behavior in the Commonwealth.

Community Needs Spike

FROM PAGE 6

migrant and minority population employed in the types of jobs that do not allow social distancing. This has resulted in massive job losses and loss of income in these communities...our most vulnerable population.”

Kerrie Wilson, chief executive officer of Cornerstones, leads the Chamber’s Corporate Social Responsibility Committee. According to Wilson, the Charitable Fund’s

impact was not just the good that would be achieved by partnering with local nonprofits to help working families get back on their feet or feed their children. “The real story is that the Dulles Chamber and its members understand the active role they must play in building strong and enriching communities, and in signaling “we are in this together,” today, and as we rebuild our region,” she said.

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By KENNETH B. LOURIE

Whether or not I’m certain about my attitude toward being a dual cancer threat (non small cell lung and papillary thyroid, cancer), only my subconscious knows for sure. This was recently made clear to when I provided my supermarket shopping preferences to my wife, Dina, who for reasons she takes very seriously: my health, won’t let me go into stores to buy anything. Ergo, my list. And I may add, there is much adieu about those preferences. It’s like a negotiation. Though not exactly partisan, the debates rage on and I’m lucky, if I see more than a handful of requests honored from my list. In effect, Dina is my gatekeeper (you’ll note I didn’t say jailor).

There are some requests which are rarely obstructed: health and fitness, fruits and vegetables, meat and potatoes and any other non-desert/snack-type item. I’m not going to bore you readers by saying how long it’s been since I’ve had a Hostess cupcake or an Entenmann’s cake or a TastyKake anything; I wouldn’t want you to feel sorry for me. In spite of this food censorship, I’m hardly wasting away. Though I’ve lost some weight, mostly due to my low iodine diet a few months back (as part of my thyroid cancer treatment), it was weight I could certainly afford to lose.

Now that I’ve lost it, Dina doesn’t want me to gain it all back. Which I can understand and appreciate. Overweight often leads to any number of problems: hypertension, diabetes and even heart disease, to name a few possible complications. Still, I have my food requirements (OKAY, needs) and unless I get them, Kenny will become even more of a dull boy than he already is. So far, Dina is not budging. I wouldn’t quite say she’s the immovable object, but she definitely remains an obstacle to my caloric happiness.

And the ‘caloric happiness’ to which I refer are basically Kenny’s four food groups: cake, cookies, candy and ice cream, which also explains my presumptive epitaph: “He never met a carbohydrate he didn’t eat.” But when the conversation moves to other less controversial items, the conversation is much less problematic and maybe even indicative of who I am, what I’ve become and how I assess my future prospects (life expectancy).

When one receives a cancer diagnosis, your brain gets rewired (figuratively speaking) and your choices become sort of a window to your soul. Things you want/ don’t want become tells of what’s being debated in your brain. Initially, after hearing your cancer diagnosis, it’s unnatural almost to want what you used to want. It feels trivial. Your frame of reference - and context, narrow and shorten. When the future you anticipated is snatched away, it’s not only time which is taken. Hopes, dreams and normalcy are snatched away as well. And sometimes, without even realizing it, a request is made which inadvertently illuminates the route to the light at the end of the tunnel.

That moment occurred for me during last week’s supermarket list discussion. Aside from the usual stuff that likely would need to be re-ordered, I ordered something new, without it being considered in the context of cancer (basically an abbreviated timeline). I asked Dina to order me an eight-pack of soap bars, an amount of soap that would probably last a few months, at a minimum. A ‘minimum’ which you don’t necessarily anticipate. Not that a cancer diagnosis automatically shortens your life, but generally speaking, it is bad for business, if you know what I mean? A business which, apparently, I’m now willing to invest in. Maybe time is on my side after all.

Kenny Lourie is an Advertising Representative for The Potomac Almanac & The Connection Newspapers.

'To Cripple an Airport, Allow Homes to Encroach'

Debate over residential use under airport flight paths rages on.

BY BONNIE HOBBS
THE CONNECTION

Poised to approve the construction of 853 new homes directly underneath Dulles International Airport flight paths, the Fairfax County Board of Supervisors finally considered the updated, aircraft-noise contours data for that area. The Board had this information since 2019 but ignored it until now.

So – at the urging of land-use groups and the Metropolitan Washington Airports Authority (MWAA) – did the Supervisors adopt it, in accordance with their own Comprehensive Plan? Nope. At the July 21 meeting of their Land-Use Policy Committee – chaired by the Supervisor in whose district the homes would be built – they decided to keep using the data from 27 years ago.

“We ought to adopt the 2019 contours,” said Supervisor Pat Herry (R-Springfield). “To pretend they don’t exist is a mistake.” But Supervisor Kathy Smith (D-Sully) disagrees, and she has enough support from the other supervisors to do as she wishes regarding this matter.

Three developers want to build large residential communities in Chantilly’s Westfields area of the Sully District – where, until last year, homes were prohibited within noise contours 60 decibels (dba) and above. But believing the modern contours reflect airport conditions 60 years from now, Smith contends they look too far into the future.

“I support Dulles Airport, but we’re nowhere near [the number of flights] projected for the 2019 contours, so we’re going to keep the old ones,” she said. “We have to look at the full, economic development of the county. I support keeping the 1993 contours and looking at [possible development in] the 60-65 (dba) contours.”

Although the meeting was online, Michael Cooper, MWAA’s manager of state and local government relations, attended it in person, hoping to shed some light on the issue. Herry acknowledged his presence and wanted him to speak, but Smith said, “We’re not going to do that...I’m the chairman.”

So, curious about what he’d wanted to say, the Connection later contacted Cooper. “We learned in the [county’s] staff report that the county believes the [noise within] the contours wouldn’t happen for 60-90 years,” he said. “But MWAA wanted them to have more information about future airport development.”

AN IMPORTANT PART of it is the number of aircraft operations – takeoffs and landings – per year. For example, in 2006, Dulles had nearly 600,000 operations. “At that time, said Cooper, “We anticipated full buildout of the airport to generate about 740,000 operations/year. But then the recession happened, the price of oil increased and the number of airlines decreased – and we’re just now starting to come back.”

So he believes that the data used by county staff to make its report to the Supervisors didn’t accurately present the whole picture.

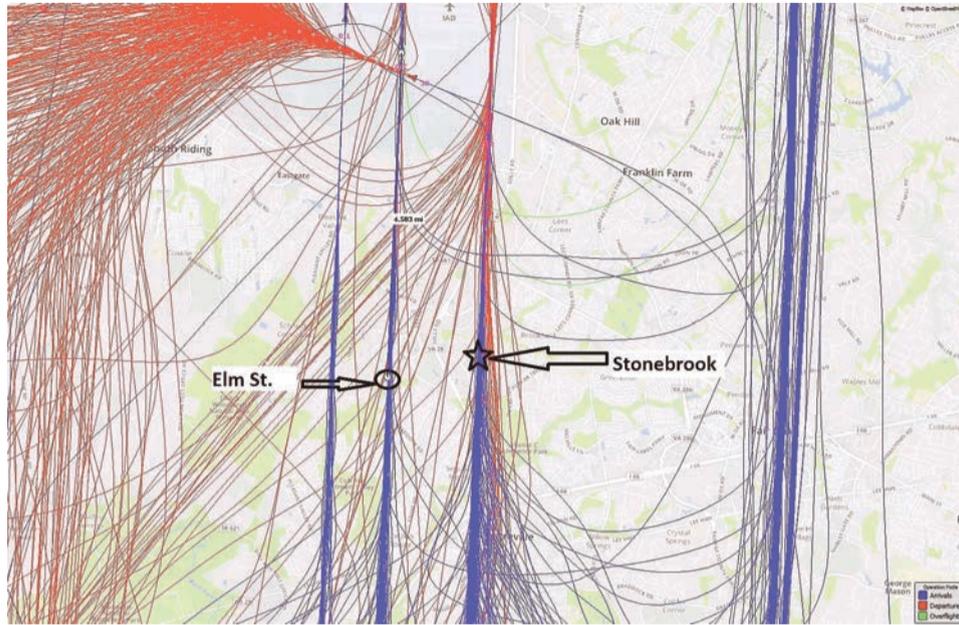


PHOTO COURTESY OF MWAA

The Supervisors already approved Elm Street’s homes. Stonebrook’s residential proposal goes before them this fall. Blue lines are arriving flights; red lines signify departures.



BONNIE HOBBS/THE CONNECTION

Michael Cooper

“I surmise that someone took 2017’s growth, and five years back, and extrapolated that – at that rate of growth – getting to 1 million operations a year wouldn’t happen for 60-90 years,” said Cooper. “But the 2019 update looks to a full buildout of the airport, not a single year.”

United Airlines and international carriers are a big part of the airport’s success, and Cooper expects that dynamic to continue. “United will bring some of its hub operations here from Newark, N.J.,” he said. “And Dulles is the only international airport on the East Coast that has the capacity to grow, because of its number of runways.”

“So it has tremendous growth potential, and how fast that happens depends on our ability to bring new flights to Dulles. Hundreds of millions of dollars in time, effort and equipment are invested, so airlines look at all facets of the community where the airport is located. We’re marketing Dulles as being in a region where the airport can continue growing – and quickly.”



BONNIE HOBBS/THE CONNECTION

Kathy Smith

Therefore, said Cooper, it’s more important than ever that county leaders have all this information and more to guide them in making future land-use decisions, and he’s eager to share it. It’s also no wonder that all the proposed new homes in Westfields concern MWAA.

“Fairfax used to discourage [residential] development there,” said Cooper. “But last year, it created a path for development in Land Unit J [where the new homes would be built]. Due to the proximity of the proposed development to the location of existing Dulles flight tracks, overhead flights occur 24 hours/daily. And as Dulles continues to grow, the hourly volume of flights will increase in frequency.”

As a result, he said, “We feel reasonably comfortable that the airport will be built out sooner than 60 years. The updated noise contours reflect full buildout at 1 million operations a year, and it would be to Fairfax County’s advantage to use them – because they’re the contours for the airport and are

the true contours. The whole point is to give Fairfax a good, scientific, data-driven tool to work from when trying to decide where land-use should occur.”

In a July 30 phone interview, Smith said most airports base their contours on “a 20-year look. I think you have to balance the needs of the county and the needs of the airport. My job is to look at the big picture of the county’s success.” Although, she added, “A big part of that is the airport.”

When Fairfax changed its Comprehensive Plan for Land Unit J in May 2019, the Board voted to consider residential in the 60-65 dba contour. “We looked at what Loudoun [County] did, requiring mitigation [reducing noise levels inside homes] and aviation easements [acknowledging aircraft flying overhead],” said Smith. “We wanted to have them all in place so [homebuyers] could make educated decisions.”

She said residential applications are what developers are proposing for Westfields, and there are already homes nearby. Asked why hearings can’t wait until people can again comment in person, she replied, “A land-use case takes years before it’s built. So if the county had just stopped, all these cases would have gotten backed up. The county’s done an excellent job of getting out information and enabling people to comment, and we have a responsibility to keep the county moving.”

When asked if she’d want to live and raise her children underneath a busy and noisy, airport flight path, Smith didn’t answer directly. Nor would she say why she thinks it’s a good idea to locate homes there.

“People choose to live in different places,” she said. “And it’s fine as long as they understand they’re near the airport and we have attenuation and other measures in place. They might travel a lot and want to be near the airport. People are going to be very aware of the choice they’re making.”

ONE OF THOSE CHOICES could be Boulevards at Westfields – 442 homes in Land Unit J. The developer says it’s in the 59 dba, but MWAA’s new contours place it between the 60-65 dba contours. So before the Planning Commission approved Boulevards on July 15, resident Clyde Miller sent a letter urging it to vote no.

“From my quarter-century experience as an engineer and senior executive at the Federal Aviation Administration, I can testify that the best way to cripple an airport is to allow residential developments to encroach,” he wrote.

When that happens, he explained, “Noise-disclosure documents are a flimsy attempt to rectify an obvious mistake, and they fail the test of time. Sooner or later, the affected residents grow weary of the noise, pressure grows for the airport to ‘do something,’ and shortsighted politicians find a way to curb airport operations.”

“The FAA has more than 70 years’ experience managing airport-noise impacts on communities. What local jurisdiction would presume superior expertise on a matter so important to the local economy and the welfare of future families who would be overloaded with noise?”