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Buttonville flight patterns abusive, residents complain

BY MIKE ADLER
Staff Writer

Flight patterns around Buttonville Airport may be changed to help spare the nerves of Richmond Hill and Markham residents.

Several members of the airport's community committee said they think the busy 16th Avenue facility is doing its best to keep pilots from flying too low.

But more than a year after the formation of the committee, which includes Markham and Richmond Hill householders and councillors, a few residents of both towns are still expressing anger about overhead aircraft noise.

A complaint sent from a Richmond Hill family to Transport Canada last week refers to three "low-altitude" flights in the wee hours, including one at 2:12 a.m. last Thursday "about 20 feet above house rooftops, a few houses east from ours."

The residents ask Transport Canada for

action. "How could you keep on condoning such abusive flyings, especially in the middle of the night?"

Committee chairperson Milt Farrow said the complaint will be investigated, though the estimation of 20 feet is "a little hard to believe, to say the least."

Farrow said Toronto Airways, operator of the airport, is doing what it can to minimize noise complaints and restrict night flying. The airport has also asked residents to register noise complaints by calling 477-8113.

So far, the number of complaints has been small, said David Rogers, a committee member.

Apart from flights after 11 p.m. when the airport's control tower is vacant, observers believe many of the complaints concern pilots flying a set training pattern around Buttonville, which requires them to turn and accelerate over both towns from a height of 500 feet.

A Richmond Hill noise study this summer is

the first step toward raising the minimum flight height in the town to 1,000 feet, said councillor David Cohen.

A plane gliding at 1,000 feet produces six decibels of sound — about as much as a passing car — but one accelerating produces 7.5 decibels, sounding five times as loud, he said. The height of an airplane overhead is hard to judge, especially at night, several committee members stressed. "How do you know how high the plane is flying if you can't see it?" asked Markham Councillor David Allison, who said Markham awaits results from the Richmond Hill study.

Toronto Airways met for negotiations earlier this week with board members of the Greater Toronto Airports Authority, operators of Pearson International. The talks are intended to find a way to secure the financial future of Buttonville, whose \$1.5 million-a-year provincial subsidy has expired.

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