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A Newark neighborhood mobilizes to lower aircraft noise



Air traffic above one Newark neighborhood has been even worse than usual lately.
(John Munson/Star-Ledger file photo)

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http://www.nj.com/news/index.ssf/2013/07/newark_teterboro_aircraft_noise.html

NEWARK — Not over their backyards.

Residents lured to Newark's Forest Hill neighborhood by stately homes at

bargain prices along Branch Brook Park say they accept aircraft noise as a fact of life since they live below some of the busiest airspace in the country.

But relative newcomers and Forest Hill natives alike say they have never experienced anything like roar from above during the past year or so, when flyovers have seemed not only louder and more frequent, but also lower in the sky.

"We have a Dalmation and the planes freak him out," said Shari Rudder, a 44-year-old mother of three. "Sometimes they're so low that he jumps up like he wants to catch them."

Adding insult to injury, they say, is that the Federal Aviation Administration has failed to explain why it's happening, or even acknowledged that it's more than just the neighborhood's collective imagination.

So Rudder, who said the jets literally shake the upstairs of her house on Delevan Avenue, was among three dozen or so members of the Forest Hill Neighborhood Association who gathered Sunday at the Georgian mansion of the group's vice president, Ken Kroll, to mobilize for a fight. Kroll and Marylou Bongiorno organized the meeting as members of the association's new air traffic committee, in an effort to gird their neighbors for battle against the noise, which they attribute to both commercial airliners in and out of Newark Liberty International Airport and private jets headed toward Teterboro Airport in Bergen County.

"Political pressure is the only way to win this fight."

The Forest Hill crowd was hardly a typical Newark civic group raging against powerful institutions with picket signs and angry shouts. Instead, the group sipped wine and dined on an elaborate buffet, then took seats in Kroll's living room for a Powerpoint presentation by a guest from Long Island, Len Schair, president of quietskies.net.

Schair is a veteran of a similar ongoing fight against what he said is a noticeable increase in air craft traffic and noise above his neighborhood in Port Washington, N.Y., not far from John F. Kennedy International Airport in Queens. Schair said he suspected the problem in Newark and Queens was related to a recent redesign of the region's busy airspace by the FAA, combined with an early component of the FAA's multiphase, multi-billion-dollar NextGen air traffic control system. Nextgen is intended to enhance air safety and increase system-wide capacity by more precisely managing air traffic using satellite navigation.

Schair said the New York State Senate and Assembly had already passed legislation backed by his group to compel the region's airport operator,

the Port Authority of New York and New Jersey, to study the environmental impact of aircraft noise. Like any Port Authority legislation, the measure would require passage by both states, and similar bill was introduced last week in the New Jersey state Senate by Sen. Teresa Ruiz (D-Essex), whose district includes Forest Hill.

Bongiorno, a documentary filmmaker, told the group the FAA had finally agreed to a meeting. She also urged her neighbors to educate themselves on the issue and to file [online noise complaints](#) set up by the Port Authority.

“Political pressure is the only way to win this fight,” Bongiorno told her neighbors.

The FAA issued a statement Sunday confirming it is working on a meeting with the local civic association and elected officials as requested in a letter to the agency earlier this year from New Jersey’s two U.S. Senators, Robert Menendez and the late Frank Lautenberg, who died June 3. No date has been set and the FAA declined to comment any further on the noise issue.

Meanwhile, Forest Hill residents say the jets keep coming, and it isn’t just the noise they’re worried about.

Carmen Sanchez, a 49-year-old teacher who was at the gathering with her son, Luis, 20, said the family was having a high school graduation party for her daughter on Saturday, when guests were literally shaken by a low-flying airliner.

“When we looked up, it was right there,” she said. “It’s scary. God forbid they lose control.”