



Date: December 1, 2022  
To: City Council

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Through: Scott Butler, Assistant City Manager  
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Subject: Resolution Adopting the “Falcon Field Rotorcraft Land Use Compatibility Study” to serve as a guiding document for future development of land within the 831-acres of land within the study area.

**PURPOSE AND RECCOMENDATION:**

The purpose of this report is to summarize a recent study conducted by an airport and land use compatibility consultant (i.e., Coffman Associates) to examine the potential impact of helicopter activities associated with testing and training flights on the future development of land located near the Falcon Field Airport (FFZ). Specifically, the study provides recommendations to guide future land use and development that are compatible to the study area and not have negative impact on surrounding aviation activities and operations. The study area is approximately 831-acres and located one mile north of the Falcon Field Airport, between N. Val Vista Drive and N. Recker Road, on the north side of the Loop 202 Freeway (See Exhibit 1-Falcon Field Rotorcraft Land Use Compatibility Study).

Findings and recommendations of the study show the study area is extremely busy with aviation activities and consistently experience high testing and training flight activities. The air space surrounding the study area is solely controlled by the Federal Aviation Authority (FAA). The City of Mesa has no control of this airspace. Regarding land uses, the City’s General Plan character area designation on the area is Employment. Per the General Plan, the goal of the Employment character area designation is to provide a wide range of employment opportunities for industrial uses in high quality settings. This character area rarely includes any type of residential. Overall, the study recommends the City guide development that is consistent with the Employment character area designation and will not negatively impact continuous operations of airflight activities within the study area, as well as discourage noncompatible land uses such as residential.

**BACKGROUND:**

The study area has been used since the 1980’s for airflight testing and training activities. However, due to the rapid growth and development of land in the City of Mesa, it has become necessary for the City to formally examine the potential impact of helicopter activities associated with testing and training flights on future land use and development activities within the area. The goal of the study was to make recommendations to guide the City Council, staff, and stakeholders on future land use and development decisions.

**DISCUSSION:**

Currently, there are both fixed-wing aircraft and helicopters that fly frequently within the study area. There are flight paths that generally exist to maintain separation between helicopters and fixed-wing aircraft arriving and departing from Falcon Field Airport (FFZ). There is also airspace separation between fixed-wing aircraft and helicopters that fly within the study area. Typically, helicopters fly between the surface up to 2033 feet above ground (AGL) and within the space area that is classified as “Class D” airspace. Aircraft that fly above this are flying within the area classified as “Class B” airspace. This airspace is most commonly used for commercial airline traffic arriving and departing from Phoenix Sky Harbor Airport.

Even though there are general flight paths that aircraft try to follow, occasionally pilots deviate from these routes and fly different flight paths over the study area. Also, due to the high volume of helicopter activities, the FAA Air Traffic Control Tower (ATCT) at Falcon Field has implemented general flight procedures to facilitate safe and efficient flow of air traffic to maintain proper separation between aircraft. These procedures direct traffic in the study area. However, pilots may deviate from these flight paths, with FAA approval. The City of Mesa does not have any authority over or control of the airspace. With helicopters consistently flying at lower altitudes within the study area, the area experiences aircraft noise both from fixed-wing aircraft and helicopters throughout day and nighttime, and such activities will continue in the foreseeable future.

As discussed earlier in the report, the City’s General Plan character area designation is Employment. Per Chapter Seven of the General Plan, allowable zoning districts compatible within the Employment character area includes General and Light Industrial zoning districts (GI and LI). The majority of the study area is zoned GI and LI. However, there are two areas that are zoned residential (RS 43 & RS 90), and one area zoned Agriculture (AG). These areas were zoned in the 1980s and are considered grandfathered or non-conforming zoning areas within the Employment character area designations. Future rezonings or development of the property will be required to be consistent with the Employment character area designation. Also, to encourage development of those residential zoned areas to be compatible with the Employment character area designation, the proposed resolution includes allowing the City Manager, or his designee, to modify, reduce, or waive fees associated with a request to rezone any portion of the study area zoned Agricultural (AG), Residential Single Dwelling 43 (RS-43), or Residential Single Dwelling 90 (RS-90) to a zoning district compatible with the City’s Employment character area designation.

**SUMMARY:**

The findings of the study show the study area is frequently overflown by both fixed-wing aircraft and helicopters and will continue to experience noise emanating from airflight activities both now and in the foreseeable future. Also, the aircraft activities have existed since the 1980s and such operations have been central to supporting the City’s economic engine and must be protected from potential development that will have negative impact to the airflight operations. Also, the City’s General Plan character area designation within the study area is Employment. Per Chapter Seven of the General Plan, the goal of the Employment character area designation is to provide a wide range of opportunities for manufacturing and industrial uses in high quality settings. As discussed, the Employment character areas rarely include residential uses. Further, the study area is also within the City’s Airport Overflight Area 3 (AOA3) (See Exhibit 2). Per the study, future development of land within the study area should conform to requirements of the AOA3 as outlined in the City’s Zoning Ordinance.

**RECCOMENDATION:**

Staff recommend approval of the resolution to adopt the Falcon Field Rotorcraft Land Use Compatibility Study as a guiding document for future development within the study area.