

FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

PROPOSED AIRPORT HAZARD AREA REGULATIONS

Why is the city considering these regulations?

Houston's economic growth and prosperity depend greatly on the three major airports serving the metropolitan area. If unabated, the rapid development around these airports could encroach on airport operations and future expansion, and pose threats to the public's quality of life and safety.

To address these concerns, the City of Houston adopted new regulations in December 2008, which took effect February 1, 2009, aimed at preventing incompatible land uses and development around the three major airports—George Bush Intercontinental Airport (IAH), William P. Hobby Airport (HOU) and Ellington Field (EFD). However, preventing incompatible land uses on the ground is only part of the federal requirements the city must meet.

Under federal law, as a recipient of Federal Aviation Administration (FAA) airport development grants, the City of Houston is required to prevent the creation of air hazards. Compliance is, therefore, a matter of federal law and necessary to protect the capacity and efficiency of airport operations, as well as ensure the safety of air travelers and Houston citizens.

What is the authority for Houston to regulate airspace?

The City of Houston is using existing state law as a basis for addressing the issues. Chapter 241 of the Texas Local Government Code allows cities with public airports to adopt regulations to restrict the height of natural or manmade objects, and to prevent the development of other hazards such as uses that might attract birds, use bright lights that would interfere with aviation.

Federal regulations prescribe airspace surfaces that are necessary for safe air travel, and where tall structures or objects, or other hazards, must be prevented. These federally defined surfaces are generally referred to as "imaginary surfaces" and are calculated by various slopes and distances. A representative map, as well as maps of each airport, will be available on the website.

How will areas outside the Houston city limits be affected?

Some areas in the areas covered by the federally defined surfaces are within other political jurisdictions, and the City is working with those jurisdictions to determine how to integrate the goals of these proposed regulations with their local rules and processes, or how best the City can fulfill its federal obligations within these areas. The goal is to provide a seamless, simple permit process no matter where the land is located.

What if I have a building already in one of these regulated areas?

All existing buildings, if left unchanged, will not be affected. Existing buildings may be affected if they are rebuilt, renovated or undergo other structural improvements.

WHAT ABOUT EXISTING HAZARDS? E.g., water areas—is there anything that exists now which we might need to go mitigate or amortize?

Will the regulations limit development in the areas around the airports?

The height of new or renovated buildings and natural elements will be limited to fit under the federally defined surfaces. We do not expect this to greatly impact general commercial or residential development.

How high can I go?

The allowable heights will vary, depending on the precise location of the property in relation to the airport. Airplanes take off at an angle, so the closer in to an airport runway or flight path, the lower the surface level. In all but one instance, surfaces are above 100' (Mean Sea Level). This means for most building, a structure even as high as 8 stories can be built; this increases as you go away from the airport and flight paths. (CAN WE STATE AN APPROX OR EXAMPLES?) Again, the maps that will be/are available on the website will enable a property owner to search the height limitation above his specific tract. (WILL THIS BE TRUE?)

Will this delay the time the City takes to review my permits?

No.

How will I or the City know I need this review?

The regulated areas would be integrated into the City's Geographic Information System (GIS) that links Public Works and Engineering, Planning, and the Houston Airport System offices. When a property owner applies for any kind of development or building permit, the system will indicate the property is located within one of the airport tiers.

Any structure 200 feet or more already requires federal review and a finding of "NO HAZARD." This review is known as a 7460 review, and should already be a part of due diligence in the airport area. This will be required to be completed prior to submitting any city approvals.

*All other applicable and relevant city, state and federal regulations will continue to apply to construction, reconstruction or other development projects.

What are the federally defined surfaces?

START WITH DEFS FROM PPT, AND LINK THEM TO A MORE DETAILED LIST FOR FURTHER INFO? AND THE SLIDE/VISUAL IN THE PPT?

Will this create noise over my home?

These are not new surfaces, and will not cause airplanes to fly lower. It also does not

create new flight paths. If you live under a flight path now, you should not notice any changes.