

Helicopter Issues

“Helipads and heliports” are permitted uses in both the Employment and Industrial Zone Districts. The helicopter business operators testified at the Planning and Zoning Board hearing that they don’t want the property zoned Employment, but would rather it be zoned Industrial. We contend that since both zone districts allow heliports and helipads, **the question of compatibility between our proposed development and the existing helicopter business is not a zoning issue, but rather will need to be addressed during the development review process.** We continue to have ongoing discussions with the owners of the helicopter businesses in an attempt to work out a win-win design solution that will allow Airpark Village and the helicopters to co-exist harmoniously. The uses can be designed to be compatible, but the solutions need to be applied at the Overall Development Plan (ODP) and the Project Development Plan (PDP) stages of the development approval process, rather than at the time of zoning.

The Downtown Fort Collins Airport is adjacent to **three businesses** that have active heliports:

- **Front Range Helicopters** (404 N. Link Lane) is a helicopter pilot school primarily. They also do tourist flights around the Fort Collins area. Their hours of flights are somewhat irregular. Some days they have 4 to 6 flights, other days they don’t have any. The take offs and landings occur on a heliport, which is an approximately 100’ by 100’ square. Getting to and from the heliport, the helicopters hover slightly off the ground at slow speeds, similar to the way an airplane taxis. He explained that a normal take off is typically at about 10 degrees, but can vary between 5 and 15 degrees.
- **Century Helicopters** (2001 Airway Avenue) is a primarily a helicopter maintenance shop, and they also develop components for helicopters and some airplanes. They average 30 flights in and out a week, typically between 7 am and 5pm. There’s typically aren’t any flights on evenings and weekends. The flights typically go straight north out of the heliport, which is across Airway Avenue and a vacant lot (owned by Century Helicopters) from the Airpark property, cross the runway, and go north across the vacant property between Dry Creek Mobile Home Park and Collins Air Mobile Home Park. The flight path can also depend on the prevailing winds of any given day.
- **Geo-Seis Helicopters** (116 Racquette Drive) runs 2 huge military-type helicopters in and out of his hanger which abuts the airport. These are typically contracted out for heavy lifting and for firefighting. These helicopters land out on the runway of the airport and taxi on their wheels to his building. This size of helicopter can’t near any buildings, because the helicopters produce 130 m.p.h. winds during take-offs and landings. This business is in the same situation as any of the other airport dependent businesses in that when the airport closes, the business can no longer operate in it’s current location.

The **primary compatibility concerns** of the helicopter operators revolve around safety and noise:

- **Safety.** Physically, both Front Range Helicopters and Century Helicopters could co-exist with Airpark Village rather easily with the integration of a “helicopter clear zone” accessible to both businesses, that has no buildings, which can be used to accent and decent during the take-offs and landings. The business owners prefer a non-developed open space area for this helicopter clear zone (such as the Dry Creek flood channel), however parking lots, a street, or an alley can be within this zone, as long as there’s not too much traffic or other obstacles that would prevent a safe landing in the event of engine failure during take-off or landing. The FAA allows helicopters to fly over streets if they “could make a safe landing.”
- **Noise.** Both Front Range Helicopters and Century Helicopters are concerned about residential being integrated too close to their operations. They are worried about complaints from residents about noise. We propose to enter into an avigation covenant which is an easement document that is signed at closing for every residential purchaser, where the purchaser acknowledges that they are aware of are helicopters operating in the vicinity, that helicopters are noisy, and that they give up the right to complain about the noise. Additionally, there are noise mitigation components that are intended to be integrated into the construction of buildings.