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Executive Airport traffic concerns Oakland Park

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Oakland Park

The Sept. 21 crash landing of Wilton Manors pilot Robert Robertson near a grassy patch along Interstate 95 came too close for comfort for some Oakland Park officials and residents.

At a recent commission meeting, city officials met with Fort Lauderdale Commissioner Christine Teel and Fort Lauderdale Executive Airport Manager Clara Bennett to discuss concerns about the airport's safety.

Residents and commissioners expressed uneasiness over the facility since much of the air traffic from the airport flies over parts of Oakland Park. They're worried about the airport's safety inspections and the proximity of their homes to the flight path.

"Every day I hear and see planes flying over our city," said resident Anthony Niedwicki. "The airport produces benefits to Fort Lauderdale while some of the costs are passed down to Oakland Park with a possible catastrophic event occurring in our city and in my neighborhood."

Niedwicki cited the recent accident, when Robertson, 34, had just taken off in his small cargo plane from Fort Lauderdale Executive Airport before experiencing engine trouble. Robertson managed to land the plane on the southbound lanes, then slid off the traffic-filled highway just north of the Commercial Boulevard exit.

That was just a few hundred feet from Oakland Park's North Andrews Garden neighborhood, a community accustomed to hearing the sounds of airplanes taking off and landing from Executive Airport.

Oakland Park commissioners had hoped to ask to appoint an elected official or resident from its city to the Executive Airport Advisory Board, but Teel said the board is restricted to Fort Lauderdale residents.



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"We make a point to invite people from other cities, and we welcome them to come over," Teel said.

Oakland Park City Manager John Stunson said the city "really can't impact any kind of policy at all ... since the executive airport is managed by the city of Fort Lauderdale."

"There's no mechanism [for Oakland Park] to do anything about the policy," Stunson said. "The staff has no mechanism to act on some of the concerns of our citizens."

Stunson said the city will continue to send Community Development Director Regan Yarbrough to the airport's Technical Advisory Group and will periodically send a staff member to the airport's advisory board meetings.

Teel and Clara Bennett, the airport's executive director, encouraged Oakland Park commissioners and residents to contact them or the airport directly with questions or concerns. "We certainly take very seriously our safety record and also the noise control," Teel said. "If you can encourage your citizens to write to the legislators, it would help a lot. The safety issue is of greatest concern to me right now."

For information on the airport, search for executive airport at www.oaklandparkfl.org or call the 24-hour Noise Abatement Hotline at 954-828-6666.

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