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High-Rise Sparks Debate On Montgomery Field's Fate

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KEARNY MESA, Calif. -- A legal battle over a controversial office tower in Kearny Mesa is bringing the fate of Montgomery Field into question, NBC 7/39 reported.

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Montgomery Field is among the nation's 15 busiest general aviation airports and encompasses about 500 acres owned by the city of San Diego.

That land is attractive to developers who have said they envision nearly \$1 billion worth of hotels, homes, shopping malls and office buildings.

That includes the builders of the 12-story Centra One Tower, currently under construction. It has been declared a hazard to aircraft using Montgomery's bad-weather landing pattern. It is also at the heart of a legal battle pitting the city attorney against the mayor's office and the chief of police.

Buzz Gibbs of Gibbs Flying Service is the son of the man who founded the airport. He told NBC 7/39 the tower is a sign of what may be to come.

"This airport, because of the surrounding community, can never be a full-fledged reliever to Linbergh Field that it needs to be," he said. "We can't take the corporate jets in here like Palomar or Brown Field. So we're never really going to be a viable airport for the future. Twenty years from now, it may go away."

The airports defenders have said it is an economic engine that generates upwards of \$150 million a year. They also have said it is an asset to businesses that employ 2,000 people.

According to Robert Griscom, an attorney and pilot, airports users and the FAA would strongly fight a move to close the field to aviation.

"There will be a determined fight. The FAA will oppose the closing of this airport, or modification or downsizing of it," Griscom said.

Jim Waring, real estate director for Mayor Jerry Sanders, told NBC 7/39 he would be "shocked" if Montgomery Field was still an airport 20 years from now.

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