

Intolerable Levels

East Hampton

September 12, 2011

Dear David,

What will it take? Airport noise has reached intolerable levels, particularly that of helicopters, but other fixed-wing aircraft continue to offend, especially during nighttime hours.

Federal Aviation Administration approval of the Town of East Hampton's airport layout plan does not, as has been claimed by town officials, give East Hampton effective control of our airspace. It enables the process to allow an F.A.A. airport-traffic controller to direct traffic at our airport during hours of operation. It gives us a traffic cop, not effective control of our airspace.

An improvement? Yes, but not effective control of our airport.

A seasonal control tower, an improvement I generally support, was put forward by the now-defunct town airport noise abatement advisory committee for many years. As noise mitigation, it was never expected that a control tower would do anything more than distribute flights more evenly. Spread the wealth, so to speak. There are three routes in and out of East Hampton Airport, but two of them are used far more than the third. It was the noise committee's recommendation to try it for a season, experiment with this option.

There is no guarantee that a Federal Aviation Administration air traffic controller working from a seasonal control tower will even be compelled to distribute the traffic more evenly. Some members of our group feared such an improvement would actually increase traffic to our airport. Actual noise mitigation through use of a seasonal control tower is uncertain.

Disturbingly, F.A.A. approval is the first step for the town to begin another 20-year obligation to the F.A.A. by engaging in the grant process established to expand and maintain all airports, abandoning, yet again, its opportunity for local control.

It is important for your readers to understand that F.A.A. money is not for operational expenses at the airport. The airport pays for itself through a variety of revenues, including landing fees, fuel flow charges, and leases. The money the F.A.A. offers is for large maintenance and capital improvement projects and comes with contractual obligations that eliminate the possibility of effective control of our airspace — an important distinction.

People are angry about noise. It's changing our lives in ways we dislike. We cannot enjoy our yards, decks, and gardens without continual noise assaults from aircraft.

The only way for the Town of East Hampton to gain local control of its airport is to refuse to accept any more F.A.A. funding for improvement projects. Town board candidates, take note.

That's what it takes.

KATHLEEN CUNNINGHAM
