

Quality of Life

Sag Harbor

October 30, 2011

Dear Editor,

The Hamptons are not immune to hard times; many families are feeling the pinch with budgets stretched to breaking point. But at East Hampton Airport it's business as usual. Some folks appear to be impervious to hard times and to the suffering of others. Transient commercial aircraft operators flying people to and from the Hamptons in commuter jets, helicopters, and seaplanes are enriching themselves at the expense of local residents' loss of quality of life.

Air traffic reports provided by East Hampton Airport for January to July 2011 registered 9,494 transient flights (77 percent) and 2,890 local flights (23 percent). If 77 percent of flights in and out of East Hampton Airport are nonlocal, who is pocketing the profits from these flights? Obviously, it's those non-locally based operators; their profits are not staying in East Hampton, but go where their companies are based — in other counties and states.

It's difficult to see the benefits to East Hampton, as claimed by Wilkinson and Stanzione, especially when we know exactly what non-local companies do leave in East Hampton — unrelenting noise throughout the season and increasing carcinogenic emissions from jet fuel over our homes, playgrounds, protected wetlands, and nature preserves.

The tranquil Hamptons are fast becoming a distant memory and will further deteriorate if Wilkinson is re-elected as supervisor because he will, as he has frequently stated, accept Federal Aviation Administration money for airport “repairs and improvements.” Urgently required “safety” work (according to Wilkinson) is deer fence installation, yet over the past 10 years, the F.A.A. recorded only five incidents of animal strikes at East Hampton Airport — two were birds (they're up in the air,

Bill, no fences there) and three were deer, two of which caused no significant damage.

How then does 1 incident in 10 years become an urgent need for “safety work” requiring F.A.A. dollars? Deer strikes are far more frequent and dangerous on roads than they are to a few aircraft whose owners likely contribute to certain campaign coffers, could probably buy and sell the entire region, and surely can afford insurance.

If East Hampton Town votes to accept new F.A.A. money, then new F.A.A. “grant assurances” that East Hampton Airport must adhere to will be in effect for 20 years. This is a fact, confirmed Oct. 26 by Sheila Jones, a nationally recognized attorney, despite claims made in ads by East Hampton Aviation Association and other Wilkinson supporters.

If air traffic continues to grow at an annual rate of 9 percent — projected annual average based on 40,878 flights for January 2010 to July 2011 (figures provided by East Hampton Airport manager) — then by 2014, when current F.A.A. assurances expire, traffic will have increased 27 percent. Ten years later, in 2024, the traffic increase will be 90 percent over current rates.

If predicted air traffic growth continues at these rates, how could East Hampton Airport cope with such whopping increases without expanding facilities? It clearly could not. Expansion would have to be considered in order to fully comply with F.A.A. grant assurances that East Hampton Airport remain open 24/7 to receive any aircraft capable of landing on any runway. So, despite what Wilkinson and cohorts say about “no expansion” and only “repairs and safety improvements,” it seems likely there exists a very different agenda behind the smoke and mirrors.

East Hampton voters must carefully consider how important quality of life issues are to them, and take action now to ensure the airport is controlled locally, not by a federal agency based in Washington, D.C. If quality of life issues are important to voters, they must vote only for

candidates who will not take F.A.A. money. There is no other option.
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