

Expands the Noise

East Hampton

September 19, 2011

To the Editor,

The propaganda campaign currently being waged against local control of East Hampton Airport noise is startling in its intensity and its misrepresentation of reality. I am referring to the East Hampton Aviation Association's full-page advertisement in *The Star's* Sept. 15 edition. That ad and related radio advertising endorse and amplify the blatant airport noise-control disinformation emanating from East Hampton Town Hall.

The obvious purpose of all this propaganda is to suppress the public's understanding that the town cannot achieve real control of airport noise if it continues to seek Federal Aviation Administration money for airport capital needs. After 2014, when key parts of the town's past cash-based obligation to the F.A.A. expire, East Hampton will be able to impose mandatory curfews and other enforceable noise-limiting rules on aircraft accessing the airport. Southampton Village has done that for years at its heliport on Meadow Lane because it never took F.A.A. money.

The smokescreen began when, in mid-2010, Town Hall began to make believe that helicopters are the only source of its aircraft-noise problem. Forget low-flying jets over East Hampton Village. Forget 2 a.m. jet takeoffs thundering through the whole area.

Now the Aviation Association's cleverly drafted but highly misleading advertising tries to thicken the fog. It is predicted that the establishment of a seasonal control tower, together with the addition of a southern helicopter route along the ocean and crossing Georgica to the airport, "will mean quieter neighborhoods for all of our residents" — a totally insupportable assertion.

Consider the rerouting of helicopters. While lessening the helicopter noise over some UpIsland communities, rerouting in the local area will only spread the noise around. It will give initial partial relief to the current noise victims under the present Northwest route, while increasing it over Georgica. And it will do nothing to prevent ever increasing future helicopter traffic over both northerly and southerly routes, much less reduce such noise generation.

Turning to the seasonal control tower, while its creation is undoubtedly a quite worthwhile safety development, its noise control effects are speculative at best. For instance, since jets and other fixed-wing aircraft can land and take off only to and from specific runways, the controller's power over their approaches and takeoff patterns and altitudes will be constrained even within the five-mile radius. And helicopters, while not restricted by runway patterns, must employ glide paths to the ground, and their controlled approaches inside the five-mile radius will be heavily affected by their self-chosen northern or southern routes outside the perimeter, thus here again constraining a controller's options to prescribe altitudes. Also, the tower is not likely to be manned 24 hours a day, and a control tower cannot impose any policy of limiting the number of, for example, evening or weekend aircraft landings and takeoffs. Only weather or other safety considerations can justify such controller restrictions.

In sum then, Town Hall and the Aviation Association's pie-in-the-sky narrative would allow a 365-day, 24-hour airport with only a seasonal and likely non-24-hour control tower, with a rerouting and rearrangement of East Hampton area helicopter noise patterns, and with only some speculative control tower noise diminishment. There are no mechanisms for nighttime or weekend curfews or limiting the endless expansion of helicopter and jet traffic, whether daytime or at 2 a.m. While it is said that there will be no further expansion of the physical airport, it is the expansion of traffic that expands the noise.

Finally, now, in light of the fairy tale that East Hampton is about to take control of airport noise, Town Hall has announced, according to *The Star's* Sept. 15 report, that it shortly will seek F.A.A.

funding to repair fencing around the airport for security and anti-deer purposes. And our officials would do this in full knowledge that doing so will prevent the town from exercising effective airport noise abatement for another 20 years.

But why should the Aviation Association so strongly endorse the town's fairy tale and who are the people behind the association and its extraordinary advertising campaign? The fact is that the association is made up of a narrow band of wealthy airplane owners and airport business interests, many of them nonresidents. At this point, it should be noted that last Thursday's full-page ad spoke one significant truth: These matters are bipartisan. The association's leadership money is contributed to both Republican and Democratic local parties.

Again, why should these people with all their wealth wish, for example, to have federal dollars subsidize the building of a fence when they know that the first dollar the town accepts from the F.A.A. will prevent local airport noise control for another 20 years?

Part of the answer is that, without F.A.A. subsidies, proper future airport maintenance of runways and other physical facilities costing much more than a fence would have to be paid for out of airport revenues, including, perhaps, a revenue bonding program. In other words, the costs would have to be covered in important part by money from airport users. These people do not want to pay for their airport.

Additionally, these people do not want local officials, answerable to local residents, empowered to impose curfews and other mandatory restrictions on the use of their airplanes. And, of course, some politicians prefer to hide behind F.A.A. rules to avoid having to choose between the interests of the general public and the interests of this narrow band of significant financial supporters.

That then brings us to the coming local election. The newly formed Quiet Skies Coalition, made up of area residents and victims of aircraft noise, is asking candidates for town supervisor and town board seats to pledge not to take any further federal aviation subsidies. But, as noted, the present town administration already has announced its plan shortly to seek such money for the fence repair project, which would make the F.A.A. issue moot before the election.

We soon shall see whether the current Town Hall occupants succeed in selling out the 20-year future quiet enjoyment rights of local residents for the price of a fence — and for the benefit of that small group of moneyed supporters.

Sincerely,

CHARLES EHREN JR.