

## **The "Under 1 Percent" in Helicopters to the Hamptons Blanket Long Islanders With Raucous Noise**

By Karl Grossman

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It is the "under 1 percent" who come to the vaunted Hamptons by helicopter from Manhattan--and in the process blanket Long Islanders below with raucous noise.

The racket of helicopters heading to and returning from what has become the main aerial gateway of the Hamptons and Long Island's biggest noisemaker--East Hampton Airport--has been intense this summer.

Involved, said planner and author Peter M. Wolf at a recent East Hampton Informational Forum on Aircraft Noise, is a "small minority" under 1 percent" imposing severe noise pollution on the population of Long Island.

The well-heeled pay a high price to use choppers to come to and return from the Hamptons, a little over 100 miles from Manhattan. A full-page newspaper ad for Talon Air that is currently running declares: "Work To Weekend In 30 Minutes. Fly NYC to the Hamptons in our Sikorsky Helicopter"" A Talon Air reservations agent said the round-trip charge for the trip is \$5,800 but, it was explained, the chopper would be flying right back to the city from East Hampton, so the return flight a day or more later would cost another \$5,800, bringing the total to near \$12,000. Thus, for six people, the helicopter ride from Manhattan to East Hampton and for the return would be almost \$2,000 for each passenger.

It's a highly expensive way for the "under 1 percent" to avoid the often traffic-clogged Long Island Expressway to get to and from the Hamptons and it comes at an even a bigger cost for Long Islanders below--deprivation of their peace and quiet.

"It's constant," said Richard Ficara of Noyac, a hamlet west of Sag Harbor, of the noise from the East Hampton Airport chopper traffic. He was speaking at an "Emergency Planning Meeting" this week. "Save Our Neighborhoods From Loud Noise & Pollutants from Helicopters & Airplanes," the flier for the meeting, sponsored by the Noyac Civil Council "and Concerned Citizens," was headed. Ficara and others at the gathering told of choppers flying low and loud every several minutes over their homes.

An overflow crowd of Noyac residents--and people from elsewhere on Long Island impacted by the East Hampton helicopter din--were at the meeting Wednesday evening.

Although Noyac has been especially hard-hit, the East Hampton helicopter racket has become widespread on Long Island, said Janice LoRusso at the meeting. She spoke of a helicopter last weekend flying over her home in Jamesport on the North Fork of Long

Island that was "so low you could reach out and tickle its belly." She said that also being affected is "my boyfriend in Rocky Point," and people through the Towns of Riverhead and Southold.

Discussed at the gathering was taking legal and political action and mounting protest demonstrations at East Hampton Airport. It followed the August 9<sup>th</sup> meeting in East Hampton meeting on aircraft noise sponsored by the Village Preservation Society of East Hampton.

Wolf, a member of the panel there, said the noise of aircraft going to and leaving from East Hampton Airport "keeps getting talked about but nothing is done." Wolf, a consultant to the Village of East Hampton, said there's "a problem of courage in government."

Wolf said the noise from the aircraft going to and from East Hampton Airport is a "nuisance" in the "same way leaf blowers" and wild parties" are nuisances. The aircraft noise "just affects many more people." He said "this is not so hard" to confront--it must be "limited like any other nuisance." There should be "hours in which flights can occur" and "strict enforcement" of this and other regulations.

East Hampton Town Councilwoman Theresa Quigley at this meeting acknowledged that "people come here for the peace and tranquility" and aircraft noise "interferes with that tranquility." But, she added, so do "cars and busses." Wolf criticized the comparison because the aircraft traffic to and from town-owned East Hampton Airport involves a tiny minority making use of a transportation mode unaffordable by most and victimizing the Long Island populace with noise in the process.

A "terribly small percentage" of people use the airport to commute between Manhattan and the Hamptons but, meanwhile, a "terribly large percentage" of people on the ground are being impacted. He said the situation was ripe for a class action lawsuit.

And Barry Holden, who organized the subsequent Noyac meeting, opened it by suggesting "a class action suit against the airport and helicopter owners" be brought. "We have to do something!" declared Holden.

LoRusso said the least bothersome route for choppers flying between Manhattan and the East Hampton Airport, would be over the ocean off the south shore of Long Island which would only require a short hop overland to the airport over a strip which includes Georgica Pond. However, said LoRusso, the choppers aren't routed that way because of the wealth of the people who live in this, among the toniest of East Hampton areas. "They contribute to politicians' campaigns. We're fighting against rich people!"

Larry Tullio agreed: "The simple solution is going over the ocean," he said. But the "people who have the most money" live in Georgica "and they evidently know somebody on the East Hampton Town Board."

Ed Jablonsky of Noyac added that "most of the people who use the helicopters are down there" "We have been sort of dumped on here."

John LaSala, a leader on Shelter Island in battling East Hampton Airport chopper noise, told the meeting that in efforts to press for this southern route "we were told it would upset the people in Georgica." He said it was important that "everybody get together" for this route.

Indeed, a "Master Plan Report" for the East Hampton Airport done for the town in 2008 by the consulting firm of Savik & Murray of Ronkonkoma pointed to the route as the best way to diminish chopper noise--but raised concern about the wealth of those then affected.

In a section in the report devoted to "Noise Abatement," the report acknowledged that helicopters "are a disproportionate source of annoyance." And it stated: "One approach and departure corridor was found to be substantially better than the existing routes" in terms of noise abatement. This "approach/departure path" would "branch off" from over the ocean and "on approach helicopters would over-fly Georgica Pond and thence over the currently undeveloped land adjacent to the Runway 34 threshold and then land in the terminal area. This is the minimum sound track, avoids overflight areas in Southampton, and adds little if any flying distance and flight time."

But, the report went on: "It would, however, expose residents in this area of high value real estate to much greater noise levels than currently exist."

At the meeting in Noyac, Chip Duyck said "we have to put fire under" public officials and send them the message that "you won't be elected if you don't solve the problem." People should make it clear: "I'm angry and I vote." Of East Hampton town officials, Duyck, of Noyac, said that "people who are pro-airport basically got elected."

John Kirrane, also of Noyac, called for protest demonstrations to be held regularly at East Hampton Airport. He spoke of protesters carrying placards declaring "Stop the Helicopter Noise" and "embarrassing the hell out of the 300 who use" helicopter service to and from the Hamptons.

At the Noyac meeting, too, Councilwoman Quigley said the East Hampton Town Board was "trying to figure out things to do to stop the noise complaints." Only recently, she said, the board learned that "we have the ability to control helicopters" through curfews and other restrictions.

A leading group fighting the noise connected with East Hampton Airport is the Quiet Skies Coalition. It declares on its website-- <http://quietskiescoalition.org> -- " We are committed to regaining control of what was once a small, rural airport supporting local recreational pilots. The increased number of flights to East Hampton Airport, particularly

those of helicopters, sea planes and jets, disrupts and disturbs the peaceful enjoyment of our homes, properties and recreational areas and damages our protected natural habitats."

But it has been an uphill fight considering the clout of the "under 1 percent."

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