

## **Increase in Traffic**

East Hampton

November 28, 2011

Dear David,

As the former chairwoman of the now-defunct town board-appointed airport noise abatement advisory committee, I feel it my unhappy duty to challenge nearly everything written by former Town Supervisor Judith Hope in last week's Star. I am unhappy because Ms. Hope's administration established East Hampton as an environmental leader on the East End by protecting community assets threatened by development. These are the very underpinnings of East Hampton's identity as a preservation leader, even as we now face serious environmental challenges created by airport noise and air pollution.

What a shame.

For the record, the airport noise committee recommended the installation of a seasonal control tower over five years ago! While some members were wary that a control tower might encourage more air traffic, the committee recommended this equipment on a trial basis to see whether it would help. But only if it could be paid for without taking F.A.A. funding and further obligation to F.A.A. grant assurances. All this was done well before Dominick Stanzione even considered running for town board, possibly even before he moved to this community full time.

Whether a seasonal control tower will help mitigate noise remains

unclear. Several variables exist that are hard to reckon. We cannot know how the F.A.A.-certified air traffic controller will direct traffic. Also, will rerouted helicopters, including over Northwest and Georgica Pond, really make our neighborhoods quieter? This is highly doubtful. Will controlled airspace attract even more traffic to East Hampton airport? It seems likely, but it's unclear.

Aircraft now operate under visual flight rules, which discourages landings on bad weather days when visibility is poor. A seasonal control tower will allow flights to land on days when, historically, landings were not possible — rainy, foggy days that local residents could count on for quiet. That brief respite disappears with a control tower. Bringing more aircraft in bad weather translates to an increase in traffic.

The F.A.A. was established to govern and promote aviation. That is its sole mission and, like industry organizations, it is anathema to its mission to inhibit flight — in any capacity. The F.A.A. is completely uninterested in regulating helicopter traffic or it would have by now after repeated requests by both local and federal officials to do so. Helicopter companies, like the East Hampton Aviation Association, have lots of money available to lobby and block any regulation that might govern their behavior.

The F.A.A. governs all airspace. To imply that East Hampton's airspace is not under F.A.A. control is misleading and false. The F.A.A. actually does control East Hampton airport, which is why the town cannot now impose a curfew or hours of operation. F.A.A. funding creates a key part of that control. Without the conditions imposed with that funding — the

grant assurances — East Hampton, as municipal proprietor, will be able to impose a curfew and limits on hours of operation.

Is it just too hard for local airport users, like Ms. Hope's husband, Tom Twomey, to concede to a curfew, reasonable hours of operation, and possible landing fees concurrent with noise emissions of the noisiest offenders? Why do they fight so passionately to protect the rights of the extremely affluent who frequent this town asset? Why do they consistently claim that folks trying to control the noise want to close the airport? How many times must we say, "We're not trying to close the airport; we just want airport users to be considerate, thoughtful neighbors?" Please don't fly in the middle of night. Please don't fly so close to our homes. Please don't fly so early in the morning on weekends. Is that really too much to ask?

Ms. Hope's assertion that airport noise diminished considerably under previous administrations is simply false. There has been a significant increase in airport noise over the last five years. And, with that percentage of growth in a poor economy, one can only guess what sort of increase can be expected in the next 5 to 10 years.

The problem with East Hampton Airport is simple: The powers that be have business interests at the airport — and they lean on the politicians to protect their investments.

Funding for airport improvements should come from airport users, not from F.A.A. monies with a huge quality-of-life price tag for everyone else. F.A.A. funds are not "free" and to say so is an attempt to manipulate public perception.

Many have devoted years to helping this airport assimilate into the community with the fewest impacts possible, but the available tools have failed and will continue to fail until we once more have local control of our airport. Accepting new F.A.A. funding will have the worst possible influence on noise abatement for our community. To assert that it's the best way to mitigate noise is just plain wrong.

I urge your readers to insist the town board not shackle our community to another 20 years of F.A.A. dictatorship. Keep the F.A.A. out of funding airport projects so we can regain local control before it's too late.

Thank you,  
KATHLEEN CUNNINGHAM