

Even One Cent

Sag Harbor
November 14, 2011

Dear Editor,

Although the final result of the election for East Hampton Town supervisor remains unknown at this time, the current town supervisor has rapidly pushed the agenda of his supporters to have town board accept new Federal Aviation Administration funding for East Hampton Airport and yet again relinquish local control of that facility for a further 20 years.

Under the guise of urgently needed repairs and safety improvements at the airport, Bill Wilkinson, two days after the election, inveigled the current board to hold a Dec. 1 public meeting at Town Hall to discuss repairing a deer fence at the airport. This despite records that there have been only five animal strikes at East Hampton Airport reported to the F.A.A. over the past 10 years, only one of which caused significant damage.

The town has sufficient surplus airport money, \$1.5 million, relaxing comfortably in a bank. That money was derived from airport operational income and, by law, can be expended only at the airport. If money is available, and repairs will cost less than a quarter of the dollars available to the airport, then why is the current town board pushing so vigorously to prevent local control by accepting F.A.A. money that will again put control totally in the hands of a federal agency in Washington for 20 years? That is what will happen if even one cent of F.A.A. money is accepted by East Hampton Town. And that is what the mysterious but well-funded aviation group, the airport alliance, has been advocating to residents through thousands of advertising dollars prior to the election.

The alliance is a group whose leadership apparently prefers to remain behind the scenes, has no known e-mail address, no known telephone number, no known Web site, and no known published list of principals; I attempted to find them, but failed. The only contact possibility printed on their advertisements is a post office box in Wainscott. I also found a reference to a law office in Southampton when I did an Internet search. Southampton? This is a curious situation for a "local" East Hampton group. Who are the members of this association? What could possibly be so valuable to the aviation alliance members that would motivate them to spend thousands to intentionally mislead residents with such fervor — to ask the town to pursue F.A.A. dollars, which can be had only with so many strings attached and handcuff the town completely for two decades?

The answer could be as simple as maintaining low-cost landing fees and parking rates for the alliance and Airline Owners and Pilots Association at East Hampton Airport, or it could be increased income for the very small number of businesses operating out of the airport. I

sincerely hope there is a far better reason, one that would benefit the 99 percent of residents who do not use the airport, but that reason is not apparent today.

What is apparent is that no reasonable person will argue about the importance of safety at the airport, but this “urgent” meeting to push for F.A.A. dollars is certainly not about a fence or about controlling deer.

If residents want the town to take back local control of East Hampton Airport in 2014 and not allow it to remain in the hands of the F.A.A., then they will attend the meeting at Town Hall on Dec. 1.

Thank you,
PATRICIA CURRIE