

The Sag Harbor Express.

WITHOUT A MANDATE

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In 2009, East Hampton Town Supervisor Bill Wilkinson won his first election to lead the town with a clear mandate to clean up the financial mess — a \$27 million deficit — left by the previous administration.

Wilkinson accomplished that and deserves credit for righting the town's financial ship. However, with Wilkinson's recent re-election to office, it is abundantly clear that many residents in East Hampton take issue with the Republican supervisor and some of the other decisions he has made at the helm of the town board during his tenure.

Wilkinson secured his post for a second term by a mere 15 votes. If one resident in each election district in East Hampton turned out in favor of his opponent, Zachary Cohen, not only would Wilkinson have lost the race, but the Republican Party would have ceded political power of the town board to the Democrats after just one term with a majority.

That Cohen, a chairperson of the town's Nature Preserve Committee, but not a political heavyweight, was able to wrest so much support away from Wilkinson speaks volumes. So too does the fact that Democrats Sylvia Overby and Peter Van Scoyoc both easily won their seats on the town board, besting candidates Wilkinson hand picked to run by his side.

This reality cannot be lost on the Republican members of the town board. A 15-vote win is *not* a mandate. It's a message.

While Wilkinson has taken on fixing the town's finances with fervor and a businessman's acumen, when it has come to other issues within the town — and there are many — often it appeared as if the supervisor and his deputy, Theresa Quigley, had made up their minds long before taking their place on the dais.

On numerous occasions, residents have complained they feel they are not being heard, whether it was concerns over beach access, accessory apartment legislation, the airport, leaf pick-up, commercial fishing representation, and so on. We hope the Republican majority is now ready to listen.

There could be no more perfect time for this board to show the electorate has been heard than tonight's public hearing on whether or not East Hampton Town should take funding from the Federal Aviation Administration (FAA) to construct a deer fence at the East Hampton Airport.

The simple truth is that this public hearing was scheduled in an effort to push through a resolution that will extend grant assurances with the FAA — a move critics have said will prevent the town from gaining local control of its airport. It was scheduled before the outcome of the supervisor's race when the Republican majority was aware there was a chance the Democrats, who have promised to hold off on taking FAA monies, may have taken control of the town board come January.

We believe it is this kind of politics that has been the undoing of not just this administration, but the one that came before it.

While it is reasonable to expect residents, and government leaders, to have differing views on a complex issue like the ever expanding East Hampton Airport, to not delay voting on what was one of the most hotly debated issues of the political season until Overby and Van Scoyoc can enter the discussion smacks of stubbornness and hubris. It would also mean, once again, the residents of East Hampton have not been heard.