

FAA Opens the Door For Airport Tower

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Last week, the Federal Aviation Administration accepted East Hampton Town's Airport Layout Plan (ALP), paving the way for town officials to pursue the installation of a seasonal air traffic control tower, which East Hampton Town Councilman Dominick Stanzione said would increase regulation at the Wainscott-based facility.

However, critics note the approval also sets the stage for the East Hampton Town Board to accept more grant monies from the FAA, which gives the agency some control over operations at the airport.

The FAA informed East Hampton Town Supervisor Bill Wilkinson of its approval via letter last Tuesday, stating the FAA's New York Airports District Office deemed the ALP "acceptable."

"This fulfills a campaign promise-to get our airport into a more safe and secure position within professional aviation and just as important, to be a better neighbor," said Wilkinson. "Now we can move on a seasonal control tower."

The FAA's approval allows East Hampton Town officials to obtain FAA authorization for a temporary seasonal control tower and the designation of ten-miles of airspace around the airport under direct FAA supervision, according to Stanzione, who is the town board liaison to the airport.

Supervisor Wilkinson said this would give East Hampton "effective control of our airspace."

According to a press release issued by Supervisor Wilkinson's office last week, town records show that the last time the East Hampton ALP was approved was in 1989.

"This is a historical moment in modern town history," said Supervisor Wilkinson.

The newly approved ALP accepts the town's layout for the airport as it exists today, in both physical and technical aviation terms, said Stanzione. The town board adopted both the ALP and the Airport Master Plan last year, although the FAA has not made any decisions regarding the sufficiency of the Airport Master Plan.

That document is the subject of a lawsuit brought by a group of residents last year, who claim the issue of noise was not sufficiently addressed within the Airport Master Plan.

"While the FAA approval of our ALP is a milestone achievement, it is part of a more comprehensive approach to managing the airport as a business and community asset, and to creatively and practically mitigating impacts of aviation activity, efforts Councilman Stanzione has diligently pursued," said Supervisor Wilkinson.

The approval also allows the town the ability to seek funding from the FAA for capital improvements.

Critics of the noise generated by helicopters and planes flying in and out of the airport maintain the town would be best served by allowing FAA grant restrictions to expire in 2014, rather than extend them by accepting more funding.

According to Barry Raebeck and Bob Wolfram, of the Quiet Skies Coalition (QSC), allowing those restrictions to expire would give the town the ability to return the East Hampton Airport to its intended use – a small town airport, rather than an airport that accepts around 80 percent of the air traffic volume seen at Islip MacArthur Airport.

On Friday, September 9, 2011, Raebeck and Wolfram attended the Sag Harbor Citizens Advisory Committee (CAC) to introduce the QSC and enlist

the CAC's support as the organization battles to reduce the amount of activity at the airport.

Raebeck said outside of the quality of life and noise issues many residents of East Hampton and Southampton contend with each summer due to the number of planes and helicopters flying into the airport, the amount of activity at the facility creates visual pollution, air pollution and is an environmental danger.

Wolfram asked the CAC to reach out to Southampton Town officials and implore them to ask the East Hampton Town Board to "control" their airport as the impact of the facility reaches far outside East Hampton Town borders.

"We are not trying to close the airport or attack our local recreational pilots, but return the airport to its original use," said Raebeck. He added the current town board under Supervisor Wilkinson have disbanded the noise abatement committee and refers to the airport as if it is a community asset. Raebeck said likely just one-to-two percent of the community uses the airport, with just two or three local businesses profiting off its existence.

"The helicopters and seaplanes are largely based in New York and Dutchess County," he said.

Raebeck said the QSC was attempting to expand beyond its 150-membership to become a large organization with influence, and will be asking all candidates seeking office in East Hampton this fall to pledge whether or not they plan on taking more funding from the FAA.

"If the airport reverts to local control, we have local control," he said. "We could say, no helicopters. We could say, from 5 p.m. to 7 a.m. the airport is closed."

"I don't want a major, metropolitan airport near my house, or anyone's house for that matter," added Raebeck.