

*Dear Citizens and Elected Officials of East Hampton,*

*Since leaving office, I have been hesitant to comment about Town Government for fear that everything I penned would simply be seen as political. Trust me - I have no further political aspirations. I have chosen to comment, this one time, for fear that certain Town assets are at great risk and absent decision makers with a strong financial resume and vision, the taxpayers will eventual bear an unhealthy burden of current shortsightedness. Specifically, I'm talking about the future of the East Hampton Airport.*

*I proudly speak from a resume of strong financial performance both in the private and public sectors. This includes the resuscitating and restructuring of the East Hampton Town government, the significant reduction of property taxes, the dramatic cut in operating budgets, the streamlining of our workforce and an overall environment of doing more with less. During my tenure as Supervisor we were recognized for these efforts with 2013 and 2014 Moody upgrades and the first New York State Local Government Performance and Efficiency Program (LGPEP) Award recognizing our "leadership for their innovative thinking which will improve their communities".*

*On top of the list of critical financial performance behaviors is the maintenance of essential Town assets, especially infrastructure assets, because of their impact on safety, health, security and overall welfare of the Town. Historically, many millions of dollars have been invested on these assets and current, politically motivated decisions are jeopardizing the future viability of our Town.*

*It should be no surprise that I view the East Hampton Airport as critical to the economy and vitality of our Town. I campaigned in 2007, 2009 and 2011 for maintaining that asset, ensuring that it was a safe and secure Town property for aircraft ingress and egress. I said then and continue to refer to it as a jewel.*

*Built in 1936 as a federally financed project under the Works Progress Administration, the town took care of any improvements until 1979, when the main runway needed resurfacing. The town then applied for and received F.A.A. funds for the first time. Millions of dollars necessary to maintain this asset have continued year after year for the last seventy-eight years. And, as I have said during my campaigns and while in office, I find it incredulous that we would burden our taxpayers by bonding for airport maintenance and improvements, when we already pay a surcharge every time we board a commercial airline for the very dollars that some are rejecting now - FAA grants. Adequate bonding will require tax revenue for payment and a significant increase in the property taxes we pay as East Hampton residents. There is no need for double taxation.*

*We have recently witnessed numerous reports by consultants and committees' presenting their opinions and views on what is wrong with this facility and what is wrong with the behavior of the users of our airport. These issues are important, but as I said while Supervisor, you can get a consultant to say anything you want. So true is it for metrics, it all just depends on what you want to see.*

*To date, presentations regarding the use and safety of the airport have clearly demonstrated a stunning lack of accuracy and abundance of politics. The metrics the opponents to the airport use to support restricting access - or even closing the airport -- have been tilted at best - complaints filed vs. source of complaint; embellished noise analysis (e.g.-31.8 million times properties were effected by aircraft noise above town code levels); "every flight exceeds the Town noise criteria somewhere"; singling out a particular year for data analysis; and lastly relying on a 2004 FAA report to Congress, a 10 year old report. The Town's recent \$60,000 noise study is prime example of manipulating facts in order to see a reality you wished for, rather than the facts as they are. This needs to stop as it blurs reality and makes honest conversations almost impossible.*

*But it's not too late to change and avoid a potentially harmful decision that will affect all of our economies and our ability to respond in an emergency.*

*In 2013 the Airport user community was largely united. We talked about runway 4-22 as critical for our single prop local pilots. We installed a control tower to assist in traffic issues. After realizing our neighbors to the North and West were being adversely impacted, we jiggled the routes as a good neighbor. We met with the East Hampton Helicopter Association to stress voluntary compliance with routes and increased attention to complaints. The complaint hotline was in effect and effective. Now it appears that we have divided the user community. We now have singled out Jets vs. Turbo vs. Helicopter vs. Piston. In addition to this divide and conquer approach, the airport has a target on its back and even its ardent supporters are maintaining a very low profile. But it's not too late to come together again.*

*This asset is bigger than any single person or group's wants or wishes. It's about the community. It's about safety. It's about the economy. Just because something is constantly repeated doesn't make it right. Just because a few voices express their opinion with ample modulation doesn't make it right. We don't need arbitrary and capricious conclusions. We don't need opinions without any factual basis. What we need is case histories, not extracts that fit their wants. What we need is real data and partners willing to come together to find solutions. What we need is complete transparency. We expect nothing less from those experts that represent us.*

*It's time for us to end the damaging rhetoric and misleading studies. It's time for us to put politics aside and to work together and find solutions that do not end in a zero sum game. The time is now, before it's too late.*

*Sincerely,*

*Bill Wilkinson*