**8.27.14**

**Town Hall Meeting Introductory Statement**

Good evening and welcome to this town hall meeting. The purpose of tonight’s meeting is to provide the public an opportunity to comment on a problem that has gotten much worse and has gained increasing attention this summer – the problem of aircraft noise. In particular, helicopter noise. We hope to hear tonight not only about the problem – as you experience it – but also your views on potential solutions.

This is a regional issue. So I was hoping to first get an understanding of where the folks joining us tonight are from. Please raise your hand if you are from the Town of East Hampton. The Town of Southampton. Shelter Island. The North Fork. Thank you.

Before we open up the microphone, I wanted to make a few introductory comments.

First, let me stress how complex this issue is. Everyone wants a solution to the problem of noise – including the Town Supervisor and my colleagues on the East Hampton Town Board.

While the Town of East Hampton operates the East Hampton Airport, the Town Board does not have the authority simply to order a solution to the noise problem. We cannot order planes and helicopters to stop flying and we cannot just close our airport. The federal government has exclusive control over how and where aircraft – including helicopters – fly. The Town has no control over aircraft in flight.

Even though air traffic is a federal responsibility, the Town does have some authority over who can use our airport and when they can arrive and depart. There is a fine line between our power as a Town and the power of the federal government. And I can assure you that we intend to exercise our Town authority within the limits of the law. Let me emphasize: the East Hampton Town Board is committed to do everything we legally can do to address this problem.

Those limits on our authority apply regardless of whether the Town ever again takes federal grant funds. Let me briefly address the question of federal grants.

As many of you know, the Town today must comply with the laws that regulate airports that have received federal grant funds. Some of those requirements will expire at the end of this year unless the Town decides to seek additional federal grants. Some other requirements will continue through 2021. We are committed to carefully considering the consequences of taking grants on our ability to control the problem of airport noise. and on our ability to serve the needs of the East End communities. There is no deadline for a Town Board decision and we are not going to make a quick decision on this critical topic just for the sake of making a decision.

We need to and we will work within the law – which means working with other airports, the federal government, airport users and affected homeowners to find a workable solution.

Let me stress that this Town Board will not make promises that the Town can’t keep. Therefore, everyone needs to be realistic. The Town must follow a complex web of laws, procedures and requirements before we can take any action to address the noise problem. The annoyance of airport noise affects many, many residents on both the North and South Forks. No one has to tell us that there is a noise problem – we know that. But, before we can direct a solution, we have to collect data about where and when the problem is worst, and what actions we can take within the limits of the law.

Tonight’s meeting is part of that process of collecting information – so we can adopt a solution that addresses the problem without inappropriately discriminating against any particular user.

But let me be very clear: the Town Board is absolutely committed to addressing the noise problem and finding a lawful solution. We know that there are many people who demand a solution but there are also people who do not want us to succeed. This will be a tough road but we will do whatever we legally can do, to address the intolerable situation for many neighborhoods.

It will serve no one’s interests for the Town Board to act precipitously or irresponsibly. The Town Board will listen to residents, businesses and airport users and, with the help of our noise experts, lawyers and consultants, will develop a solution that best serves not only East Hampton neighborhoods but also residents of neighboring towns who are adversely affected by aircraft noise.

Second, this public meeting is part of an on-going process which started eight months ago when I began my tenure on the Town Board. We have already made progress in setting the groundwork for addressing – and solving – the problem of noise from the airport and ensuring that management of our airport is consistent with the best interests of the greater East End community.

Just by way of example, we have already taken a number of steps:

* We have appointed three independent advisory committees to address airport finances, infrastructure, capital and noise issues. These committees have been working diligently and have already been providing useful data and analysis to the Town Board. I want to thank these volunteers for their untold hours of hard work which will be critically important for our ultimate decisions.
* We have hired a noise expert to begin analyzing noise and complaint data so we can understand not only the nature of the problem – all of you here tonight are testament to the problem – but possible solutions.
* We have adjusted airport fees to make sure that the Town has the financial ability to operate and maintain a safe airport without federal grant funds, if we decide that that is the best course of action.
* And we are in the process of hiring an engineering consultant to help us address deferred maintenance to ensure that the airport remains safe.

In the coming weeks, we will outline in great detail the process we will use and our timetable for adopting appropriate rules to address the noise problem.

When you came in this evening you should have been handed a register for you to provide your name, town, neighborhood and basic information about the issues for which you are most concerned. Please fill out this sheet so it can become part of the legal record.

Tonight’s meeting will be broadcast live on government access television in the Towns of East Hampton, Southampton, Shelter Island, and Southold. The Town Board would like to thank Joan Gilroy and her team at Cablevision for making this possible. We will also retain a video in Town files for reference as the Town Board considers how best to address this problem.

Finally, I request that everyone observe basic rules of civility. I know that emotions run high whenever we talk about noise issues but it won’t help anyone to have cheering, jeering and interruptions. We are here to listen so please be respectful and let us hear the speakers.

Thank you.