

# Airport Tipping Point

## *Some have warned of a so-called nuclear option*

Editorial, East Hampton Star | September 1, 2016

Aviation business owners, along with a number of pilots, have long insisted that the true agenda of anti-noise activists was to shut down East Hampton Airport. Less-excitabile observers have acknowledged the danger of not responding to community concerns. Some have warned of a so-called nuclear option: A fear that if the town and Federal Aviation Administration did not deal with noise, public pressure could build to a level where closing the airport seemed the only choice.

Now, for some residents at least, that point has been reached. East Hampton and the surrounding communities may not yet have reached the same point as a handful of activists, but that day could come.

For East Hampton Airport to endure, town officials, pilots, and aviation interests alike must recognize that they must take concerns about noise much more seriously.

It bears reminding the helicopter companies, their paying passengers, and others, that it would only take a majority vote of the five-member town board to begin the process by which the runways were torn up and the property converted to some other purpose. To be sure, there would be years of litigation and studies about how local businesses would be hurt, but in the end, closing the airport could actually happen. And it would be the refusal of airport users and elected officials to find meaningful ways to deal with noise that would make it so.

Pilots' groups are now saying, "I told you so." But, if you think about it, their attempts to block noise controls have been part of the problem for years. Today, as the full impact of their decades-long effort to halt effective solutions is finally being understood, a cataclysmic result might lie ahead.

Just what the point of the airport is in today's world is a good question. It is an important one, too, and whether or not one agrees with the new Say No to KHTO group (KHTO being the airport's official shorthand), it is something that bears examining. Over the weekend, after news of the call to tear up the tarmac broke, we heard conversation from reasonable people questioning just what the point was of East Hampton's having an airport.

A modest airport might have made sense for East Hampton when planning for it began during the Great Depression. Today, serving largely as a luxury option for the elite, its purpose is less easy to define.

Aside from the jobs it creates, the airport does relatively little for most residents. Its value for emergency evacuations is limited, for example — the county's medevac helicopters have a range of other options, where they land very frequently. And only the very richest can use the facility — even owning a single-engine aircraft is a luxury available only to the wealthier portions of society.

Those who travel here by helicopter charter are richer still, and those who arrive by Gulfstream jet have means or corporate backing beyond that. It is only because of a quiet tradition here of

deference to the moneyed that the airport has been allowed to grow and operate as it has — at the cost of peace and quiet of those who live or vacation under its flight paths.

Now, as the separation between the wealthiest and the rest of society grows ever wider, the facility points to a bigger question, one about the nature of government and in whose interest those in power should act — clearly and to this point it has not been the majority of North and South Fork residents.

It is not all that difficult to imagine a day when the close-the-place vote put three people sympathetic to their cause on the town board. Hardened positions of the past brought East Hampton Airport to this current tipping point. Assuring that it remains in operation will require greater flexibility than has so far been demonstrated among all concerned.

**Copied 9/1/2016 from: <http://easthamptonstar.com/Editorials/2016901/Airport%E2%80%88Tipping-Point>  
(Highlights, footnotes and minor edits may have been added, but only to add clarification)**