

East Hampton Airport Neighbors Call for its Closure

Richard Morgan, NY Post | September 5, 2016



Photo: AP

Hamptons highfliers are hitting a different kind of turbulence.

The fight over the East Hampton Airport has reached new heights with longtime opponents — sick of the noise and air pollution — calling for a shutdown of the airport.

The group “Say No to KHTO,” which takes its name from traffic controller codes, says well-heeled weekend warriors have turned their once peaceful oasis into “Apocalypse Now.”

“People like to think this is a class issue, but many on our side are also well-to-do,” says Barry Raebeck, who last month co-founded Say No.

Complaints about the racket overhead have been escalating for years — but the call to shut down the airport altogether is new.

Supporters of the airport say closing it would deny easy access to the summer jet set who give the Hamptons much of its cache. They’re also concerned about the blow to the area’s economy and the harm to small businesses that cater to the air-traveling class.

“Aircraft from all over the world comes in here,” Airport Director Jemille Charlton told The Post. “If they’re not allowed to land, they’ll just go someplace else — Martha’s Vineyard, Nantucket, Vail.”

The din announcing their arrival at the airport — a 600-acre plot in the hamlet of Wainscott — moved Raebeck to co-found a group called the “Quiet Skies Coalition” in 2011.

The town responded by passing two overnight curfews — no flights are allowed between 11 p.m. and 7 a.m., and an extended ban runs from 8 p.m. to 9 a.m. for noisy aircraft. Those took effect in July 2015. A third restriction on noisy aircraft, mostly helicopters, to one weekly landing and take-off is tied up in the courts.

The curfews have helped. The town recently reported noise complaints in the first half of 2016 fell 32 percent, while airport activity by all aircraft rose 3 percent.

But those compromises failed to satisfy Raebeck’s more radical group, which split off from the “Quiet Skies” coalition.

Meanwhile, the airport’s supporters are equally fed up.

“I am sure if they closed the airport and announced affordable housing would go in they would be protesting that too,” John Majane posted on the Facebook page for “Friends of the East Hampton Airport,” which includes air charter outfits, pilots and fuel companies.

That group, which sued the town over the airport restrictions, has filed an appeal to have all three overturned. It also dragged the Federal Aviation Administration into the fight, claiming it failed to uphold laws that would prevent the town from enforcing such restrictions.

The Say No group is closely following what it considers a parallel situation in Santa Monica, Calif. The city council there voted to close its airport, which it said “predominantly caters to the One Percent that can afford to travel by private jet” — despite an FAA ruling that the airport stay open until 2023.

Say No faces a similar obstacle in that the FAA’s agreement with the East Hampton Airport, which requires it to stay open until 2021. Raebeck is undeterred.

“Are they saying that they would force a community to keep open an airport that was economically and environmentally detrimental to that community?” he said.

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