

# Looking at the Impact of Airport Noise

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By Amanda Wyatt

To keep the East End peaceful and quiet, you've sometimes got to make a little noise.

At least, that's according to approximately 40 concerned citizens who attended a forum on aircraft noise held by the Village Preservation Society (VPS) of East Hampton on August 9. The group gathered at the Emergency Services Building in East Hampton to hear from a panel of experts, as well as to voice their own concerns about the growing increase in noise generated by air traffic into the East Hampton Airport.

Theresa K. Quigley, Deputy Supervisor of East Hampton, Bob DeLuca, President of the Group for the East End, Dr. Bonnie Schnitta, President of SoundSense, and planning consultant Peter Wolf all served on the panel to address these concerns.

"Our community is a resort community," said Quigley at the meeting. "People come here for the peace and tranquility, and the airport, we recognize, interferes with that quiet."

Panel members noted that in recent years, the growth in the local population has triggered an increase in air traffic. This summer, many East End residents — including those in Sag Harbor, Noyac and North Haven — have been particularly vexed by noise from aircrafts.

Panel members also mentioned that 80 percent of flights come in and out of the airport between Friday at 2 p.m. and Sunday at 9 p.m. — exactly when residents and vacationers alike want to relax.

With the exception of a few aircrafts, like emergency airlifts to hospitals, Wolf said,

“these planes do not perform any economic function that’s valuable to the town, and they have no real enduring social quality to them.”

Wolf claimed “under one-percent of our community has any use for the airplanes.”

“This is a nuisance, and it should be regulated as a nuisance,” he added.

Wolf suggested a number of tactics for reducing the noise, including reserving airspace, charging higher fees and taking other legal measures to cut back on air traffic.

Dr. Schnitta, whose company specializes in acoustic engineering and design, spoke about the effects of noise on human health. She was particularly concerned about how intermittent noise at night could cause disturbances in sleep.

“Indeed, if it is disturbing to sleep at nighttime, it will cause health problems,” Schnitta said in a separate interview. “We have to protect people when they sleep at night.”

Even if people do not notice noise at night, explained Schnitta, noise can still reduce the quality of sleep, leading to fatigue and poor concentration over time. What’s more, poor sleep is associated with a host of medical woes, including cardiac and intestinal problems.

Although DeLuca, an environmental expert, did not speak about the environmental aspects of noise at the forum, he did mention in an interview that noise can sometimes be disturbing to wildlife. Furthermore, he said that many toxins that come from planes contribute to the quality of air here, which is reportedly somewhat poor to begin with.

“Ongoing management of airports is always a risk with respect to jet fuel, aviation gas and lubricants,” he noted.

At the forum, DeLuca discussed his experience in forming the Community Advisory Board at Francis S. Gabreski Airport in Westhampton.

“There might be a road home here which starts with organizing a new committee to look at the future of East Hampton Airport, getting the issues on the table and trying to get those issues before the [East Hampton Town] Board in an organized way,” he said.

However, no decision has been made about the possibility of forming such a coalition, or any other measures. As Kathleen Cunningham, the executive director of VPS and a chairperson of the Quiet Skies Coalition, noted, this was a starting place for further discussions about aircraft noise.

“It’s really the first sign of something concrete in years,” Cunningham said.

Another topic addressed at the meeting was the collection of data on airport noise. This month, the East Hampton Town Board approved a resolution from Quigley to retain an outside company to analyze data taken between June and September.

“In order to get the approval to restrict helicopters, we first have to prove to the FAA that there is an issue that needs addressing,” said Quigley in a separate interview.

Because the airport receives funding from the Federal Aviation Administration (FAA), the town is not able to restrict airport traffic on its own. Based on the data, the consulting firm hired by the town will determine what restrictions are justified.

For example, Quigley said that the town has voluntary curfews at night for aircrafts. However, until the data is analyzed, the town does not have the authority to make these curfews mandatory.

Still, Quigley said the town is committed to reducing aircraft noise.

“Absolutely, the town has an obligation to deal with this issue, and figure out how they can lessen the burden and make it better for the citizenry,” she said.