



Rules Raise Concern

Some in Montauk worry about more helicopters

By Joanne Pilgrim | February 12, 2015 - 12:10pm

A proposed year-round, nighttime flight curfew and a weekend ban on helicopters at East Hampton Airport from May 1 through September is causing concern about a ripple effect on East Hampton's easternmost hamlet, where, it is feared, the privately owned Montauk Airport could become an alternative helicopter destination.

In a letter to the East Hampton Town Board, Jeremy Samuelson, the executive director of Concerned Citizens of Montauk, wrote that the proposed restrictions — four laws that are on a fast track for adoption before the summer season — do not “consider or quantify possible impacts to the hamlet of Montauk, its economy, environment, or residents’ quality of life.” The town board has scheduled a March 5 public hearing on the proposed regulations. With a large crowd expected, it will begin at 4:30 p.m. at the LTV Studios in Wainscott.

After the C.C.O.M. letter was presented at a board meeting on Tuesday, Councilwoman Kathee Burke-Gonzalez, the board’s liaison for airport matters, said that consultants preparing an analysis of the potential impacts of the proposed regulations would include a look at possible effects on Montauk.

The Concerned Citizens asked in its letter that the town board “demonstrate whether alternatives to the proposed legislation could achieve similar results for East Hampton while minimizing or eliminating impacts for Montauk,” and that the board “identify specific measures that could minimize impacts to Montauk.”

In addition, the group asked that the town immediately begin working with Senator Charles Schumer, Representative Lee Zeldin, and the Federal Aviation Administration

to enact a mandatory helicopter route over water for traffic landing at Montauk, similar to an F.A.A.-mandated helicopter approach to East Hampton requiring a route off Long Island's north shore until helicopters turn south toward East Hampton.

The proposed restrictions are in four separate laws. One would establish a standard airport curfew from 11 p.m. to 7 a.m., while a second would extend that curfew for planes that fall into a "noisy aircraft" category, as determined by an F.A.A. metric, to from 8 p.m. to 9 a.m.

A third rule would ban helicopters from the airport on weekends (noon Thursday through noon Monday) from May 1 through September, and the fourth would restrict "noisy aircraft" to no more than two uses, or one round-trip, per week during the summer season.

Led by Ms. Burke-Gonzalez, aviation and legal consultants for the town have worked throughout the year to analyze and define noise data and craft regulations that will pass muster with the F.A.A., meeting the agency's legal standards for local airport restrictions.

The announcement of the proposed regulations last week prompted thanks from residents and officials across the East End, who have been pleading for East Hampton Town to act to reduce aircraft noise, but it also unleashed a wave of criticism and threats of litigation from the aviation industry, including a number of helicopter companies.