

Courier News
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Township right to seek airport bond

In the Solberg Airport bond referendum held May 16, 2006, Readington voters sent a clear message to the Readington Township Committee to protect our quality of life and natural resources by preserving the Solberg Airport's open spaces and the small general aviation airport that currently exists. Now, the Readington Township Committee has taken definitive steps in this direction.

The township is acquiring 624 acres of open space for preservation purposes and the development rights on 102 acres of airport property. The airport itself will continue to be owned by the Solbergs. The \$21.7 million offered by the township for this purchase is the higher of two appraisals done on behalf of the township by experienced, licensed appraisers. The appraisals have been done according to New Jersey state standards. This offer is generous in comparison with recent purchases of raw land and easements in Readington and Hunterdon County, and is expected to easily stand up to any legal challenges of validity.

Prior to the bond referendum, the township said the annual cost to the average house assessed at \$400,000 of a purchase price of about \$22 million would be from \$65 to \$165 for the next 20 years, depending on what low interest loans and grants are received to fund the purchase. This estimate has not changed.

What about the cost of *not* preserving the airport? If the airport were to be allowed to expand into a jetport in accordance with the approved expansion plans for Solberg Airport, it has been conservatively estimated(www.braac.org/taxes/index.shtml) that expansion would result in \$30 million in township infrastructure costs for rebuilding roads and bridges and the like and \$1.2 million in annual expenses to Readington Township, for a total annual increased cost to the average house of \$308 per year.

Not included in this cost is the significant depreciation in home values (http://www.braac.org/Impact_on_land_values.pdf) due to noise increases and the incalculable cost of the degradation in the quality of our lives and the increased danger to our schoolchildren.

The Readington Township Committee is pursuing the most prudent financial course for all of us, while at the same time protecting our environment, our quality of life and the safety of our children. They deserve our support.

MIKE KELLY

Readington