

· EDITORIAL ·

A costly and divisive decision in Readington

In the Readington Township Committee's longstanding efforts to preserve open space, officials have always made an attempt to regain some of their investment in buying land or development rights. Some feel those costs are already high, but many in the township support open space efforts, especially since

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Readington Twp. has filed a suit seeking to condemn Solberg Airport. Please see page 1.

the alternative is more roads, houses, schools and the overpopulation that is so prevalent in some communities to the east of Readington Township.

But now the Solberg Airport condemnation effort, which has also been billed as an effort to preserve open space and Readington's quality of life, threatens to spiral out of control as far as costs.

The township has offered a little more than \$21.7 million for the airport and is already racking up legal and public relations bills, with a certainty that the \$22 million bond ordinance approved by voters on May 16 will be overspent. Many Readington Township residents are no doubt opposed to an expansion at the airport which they fear will bring more and larger aircraft flying over their neighborhoods. But their vote last May did not necessarily mean they wanted to write the Township Committee a blank check to proceed with condemnation at any cost. Suzanne Solberg Nagle has asked that the Solbergs be given the same opportunity as other township landowners to only sell development rights, and keep ownership of the 625 acres handed down through the family from their father. We would like to see that line of negotiation pursued, but wonder whether any form of agreement can be reached now that condemnation has begun.

We can somewhat understand the township's frustration in getting a straight, unified answer from the Solbergs, who have not publicly named a price or exact length of the runway they would be willing to accept. But we would have liked to have seen mediation and other attempts to break the stalemate before heading to condemnation.

The resulting financial impact can even siphon money away from other worthy open space preservation projects. And the heated controversy sparked by the turmoil of condemnation that most likely will drag on for years will do nothing to heal the divisions in a town already split on this subject.