

· LETTERS TO THE EDITOR ·

Solberg is running a misinformation campaign

EDITOR:

As a resident of Readington, I have been intimately involved in the issue of Solberg Airport and the owner's unrelenting disinformation campaign to allow the expansion of his airport from a single 60-foot by 3000-foot paved runway facility to that of his submitted Master Plan and Airport Layout Plan (ALP) indicating a 100-foot by 5600 foot long runway with a Runway Protection Zone encompassing a township park, baseball and soccer fields and an additional 100-foot by 4,800-foot long crosswinds runway.

I speak both as a resident as well as a 25 year veteran of military, commercial and general aviation. As a former air traffic controller, as a member of the American Association of Airport Executives (AAAAE) and the Aircraft Owners and Pilots Association (AOPA) and as the former senior project planner of Orlando International Airport, I am well-versed in federal air regulations and obviously how to read an Airport Layout Plan.

On several occasions in which the Township Committee held neighborhood presentations to inform the community of Mr. (Thor) Solberg's submitted plans, Mr. Solberg was invited to speak, and when he did I was shocked at the disinformation.

With a submitted Master Plan and ALP, Mr. Solberg with a straight face stated he has no plans to expand the airport, that a Master Plan and ALP are required by the Federal Aviation Administration (FAA) (only if you want federal funding to enhance your airport) and that an ALP and Master Plan are for conducting an inventory of aircraft and to understand what capacities may exist if the FAA wanted to make Solberg a reliever airport (this statement is just outright false).

When asked directly by neighbors in one of these meetings if he had any plans to expand the airport, Mr. Solberg said with a straight face, "No, not today," which was met with incredulous, mocking roars of laughter from the hundreds in attendance.

I was present at another meeting in which Mr. Solberg and his partners stated that "a longer runway is necessary to keep the noise down; you see this allows pilots to land and take off on the middle of the runway, keeping the noise mostly on airport property." (As a former air traffic controller, I can't begin to explain how incredibly ludicrous, wrong, hazardous and against all common sense and training that any pilot would use only the middle of a runway or that it makes it quieter. If that were true, think of just how quiet it must be at Kennedy International Airport with the second longest commercial runway in North America. At a length of 14,572 feet, it must be downright silent.

I could go on with Mr. Solberg's statements to the community to misinform so he can get what he wants, which are longer runways. Why does he want longer runways you might ask? Well it's not from the demand criteria of the critical aircraft required by the FAA (the FAA defines the critical aircraft as the largest aircraft based at a facility with at least 500 operations a year), because under that criteria Solberg doesn't qualify for one additional foot of federally funded expansion. If you really want to know why he wants to expand, just look at the label of any Merck, Johnson and Johnson, Ethicon, Ortho, ImClone, or Fisher Scientific Product and you will see the towns of Whitehouse Station, Raritan and Somerville, all of which are within five miles of Mr. Solberg's airport and currently base their fleets of jets 30 miles to the north in Morristown, 30 miles to the south in Trenton, and 40 miles to the East in Teterboro. This issue of expansion has only one point, a point that Mr. Solberg will avoid and misinform and misdirect at every turn: it is simple greed and personal profit. This is one businessman's attempt at growth to the detriment of property value and lifestyle of thousands of homes and families in a very quiet community.

Mr. Solberg petitioned for a referendum on the issue of the \$22 million bond to be

used to purchase the development rights to prevent expansion while all the while allowing the Solberg's to maintain ownership and management of their existing airport. The residents have voted overwhelmingly in support of the issuance of the bond.

Last January, when Mr. Solberg suggested that he would sell his property rights to the township for \$36 million if they would not stand in the way of a 5,000-foot runway there was no bemoaning of the heavy burden to the tax payer, there was no outcry of taking of property, there was no statements of, "I have no plans to expand the runway," or that an ALP is for aircraft inventory. But when the township's property value appraisal came in at \$22 million it is suddenly an issue of a tax burden to the community.

Mr. Solberg doesn't mention in his comments to the community that he pays a total of approximately \$40,000 annually in property taxes for his 725 contiguous acres of airport property with a business on it. Yes, you read that correctly, a land mass the size of LaGuardia airport, and he also receives a government farm subsidy of approximately \$20,000 for not farming his land, while this neighbor pays approximately \$10,000 for his two-acre residential tract.

So please don't be fooled by or sympathetic to Mr. Solberg's continuing campaign of misinformation.

Mr. Solberg, this isn't the big bad faceless government of Readington Township that is doing this, it's the well informed residents of one of the wealthiest counties in the nation that have voted to support increasing our taxes to give you \$22 million and allow you to keep your airport with one caveat - no expansion, you said no.

So in this case, I support eminent domain, otherwise Solberg will expand and as a result inevitably cause reverse condemnation on thousands of homes.

MICHAEL SIMON
Readington Township