

Township Continues Action to Stop Airport Expansion

Position Unchanged Despite Defeat of Solberg-Linden Arrangement

by Arthur Merchant

Readington Township officials are still investigating the possibility of acquiring Solberg Airport despite the collapse of a deal the airport had with Linden Borough to take on extra traffic in exchange for funds to improve the Solberg facility. The Linden City Council voted on June 19 to vote down a proposed agreement in which the Linden airport would have been closed, its air traffic sent to Solberg, and Solberg receiving funds for improvements aimed at expanding the facility to accommodate the additional traffic.

This plan was put together by outgoing Linden Mayor Paul Werkmeister. He was defeated by a wide margin in the June 5 Democratic primary by opponent John Gregorio who opposed the closing of Linden's airport. As a result of the plan's defeat, Thor Solberg a partner and co-owner of Solberg Airport, said there are presently no plans to alter or expand the facility.

"I don't see any change in activity," he said. "We're basically going to maintain the status quo." Solberg said that despite the loss of funds, he was glad the plan with Linden was defeated. "We were only interested in accommodating the Federal Aviation Administration (FAA) and provide space for the extra traffic if Linden was closed down."

Readington Township Mayor Stephen Mirota said that township officials still fear the possibility of future expansions, either by the

Solbergs, (Thor and his sisters Suzanne Nagle and Lorraine Solberg), or by a future owner. As a result, officials fear that hazard zones, buffer areas surrounding airports with restricted commercial and residential use, would be expanded.

Mirota said the township's fear arises from the 1983 Airport Safety and Hazard Zone Act, which limits the ability of municipalities to block airport expansion. "The State has the right to extend the hazard zone if in the future Mr. Solberg decides to expand his facility," said Mirota. "The hazard zone very definitely would have been expanded had the Linden deal gone through."

"The Solbergs could also apply for state grants for a better, safer airport," Mirota continued, "but that would generate more traffic." He said that the state could fund up to 95 percent of the cost of acquiring the airport from the Solbergs, and that township might use the property for a park or other form of open space preservation.

The 1983 act limits development of private property within 3,000 feet from the end of an airport runway and 1,100 feet from its center. Residents who own property adjacent to Solberg Airport fear that if the airport expands the hazard zone to include their homes, their property values would fall since the properties would be subject to stringent use restrictions.

Thor Solberg said he hoped the township would change its mind about

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