

STATEMENT
By
Gerard J. Shamey
Mayor, Township of Readington

September 22, 2006

For thirty years, Township residents have been in limbo while the owners of Solberg Airport have threatened the open space and natural resources surrounding the Airport by taking steps needed to expand its runways. As time passes, the fate of Readington's long-stated preservation priorities remains in doubt, while the Airport readies itself to accept jet traffic.

In an effort to bring some resolution to these long-standing questions, the Township Committee has obtained independent appraisals of the property, has offered full and fair value for open space lands and development rights in accordance with those appraisals, and has undertaken transparent negotiations in good faith. Using our initial offer as a starting point, we indicated a clear willingness to discuss expansions of hangar space and other concessions needed to modernize the Airport and enhance its safety.

The responses from the Solbergs have been evasive. First they requested an extension of time, which the Committee immediately granted, despite the fact that negotiations already had been ongoing for several months dating back to last September. Unfortunately, no amount of time appears sufficient to make negotiations fruitful. On September 7, Lawrence Berger — who has never responded to the Township's request that he clarify his business relationship to the Solberg family — rejected out of hand "limiting the use of the airport" to preclude jets as we had proposed. This is consistent with the Solbergs' position this January, when they refused to continue negotiations after being advised that the Committee would not tolerate expansion of the Airport into the surrounding open space and natural resources.

The last proposal from the Solbergs came in late 2005, and contemplated expansion of the runway to 5,000 feet, with 500,000 square feet of hangar space. Neither Mr. Solberg nor Mr. Berger has made a counter-offer since then, nor does Mr. Berger's September 7 letter provide any explanation of what would constitute a "modernization plan" that does not envision serving jet aircraft and encroaching on the Township's natural resources.

Instead, the Solbergs have effectively declared a complete impasse. The Solbergs have spent many years delaying and avoiding the Township's good-faith efforts to resolve this matter. This time — perhaps for the first time — they have done so in the context of a formal, public and transparent process. In doing so, they have left us no choice on how to proceed. It is our hope and belief that this course of action will lead to a relatively swift and final resolution. We should emphasize that this decision allows the Solbergs to retain ownership and control of their airport without modifying its use or configuration, while preserving open space and natural resources.