

**READINGTON TOWNSHIP
MAYOR GERARD SHAMEY**

JULY 11, 2006

At a Committee meeting on Wednesday, June 28, the Readington Township Committee introduced an ordinance formally authorizing acquisition of the open space surrounding the airport and development rights on the airport itself. Tonight we will have the second reading of this ordinance, and a second opportunity for anyone who wants to go on the record with their thoughts in this public forum.

By creating the framework for a formal offer, this ordinance is the first step in the resumption of bona fide negotiations, which can only begin after such an offer has been tendered. It is an important milestone in the efforts of this Township Council to move forward toward a resolution of the future of the airport. After so many years, it is time. This township is tired. Many of us are exhausted from talks that seem to go nowhere, or that permit confusion to develop over who offered what terms at which meetings.

In a recent news article, Thor Solberg was reported as saying, quote, "I'm disappointed that [the Township] ignored my requests to have a meeting so that we could discuss this as neighbors, as fellow citizens, in order to arrive at a solution." We have had those kinds of informal meetings, "as neighbors," for thirty years. Readington residents have repeatedly voted for steps toward more formal discussions, literally at every opportunity. And I am disappointed that, as far as formal negotiations are concerned, it is Mr. Solberg who has recently ignored several invitations from the Township and Township's legal counsel to come to the table.

But that is the next step we are seeking, and that is what this ordinance will make possible. And I am heartened by Thor's statement in the same report that, quote, "everything is on the table for negotiation." This ordinance makes those negotiations possible.

Let me say a few words about what this ordinance is not. The ordinance does not specify an offer price, and does not convey any rights to the Township. Before any transfer of rights can occur, the Township must approve independent appraisals of the property, extend a formal offer to the Solbergs guided by such appraisals, and pursue good-faith negotiations for a voluntary conveyance should the owners reject the formal offer.

Also, this ordinance does not initiate a taking under eminent domain. Condemnation could only be employed, by law, should bona fide negotiations fail. Indeed, the ordinance explicitly highlights the continuing hope and preference of the Township Committee to arrive at a voluntary conveyance at an appropriate price — a price guided, as we must be, by fair and up-to-date independent appraisals of the value of the property and other rights under consideration.

We should have independent appraisals available to review soon, and we will be notifying you about that once we have them in hand. By that time, it is reasonable to expect — and it is our duty as elected officials to deliver — some kind of forward motion on this issue. After more than thirty years, that is not rushing anything. It is simply the willingness to bring some reality into the process.

Readington needs something else at this point. We all need a measure of healing. I've been

gratified when we've been able to explain why we are pursuing the course we've chosen, and why we think it represents the best possible course to protect Readington's interests and priorities. But I also know that some have always disagreed. They've disagreed in a way that is principled, reasonable and honest. To those of you tonight who may disagree, I thank you for making this a fairer and better process. And I promise that this process will continue to provide opportunities for all side to be heard.

In summary, let me reiterate that the Township's purpose is to make future negotiations more transparent, productive and conclusive than those that have gone before, and to bring some resolution to an issue that has concerned residents of our Township for over thirty years. As ever, our goal is not to acquire the airport, but to further Readington's long-stated priorities including protection of Readington's natural resources, open spaces and community character.