

January 19, 2009

Floral Park Noise Monitor: First in Nassau County

As many of us know, the friendly skies haven't been so friendly over Floral Park in recent years as jet noise continues to disturb our residents especially during the warmer months.

This is not terribly surprising in that our village is located approximately 7 miles from JFK Airport and many homes are situated directly in these runway flight paths. That jet noise is more subdued than in decades past is of little comfort especially in light of the greater frequency of flights in our air space.

In order to support our position that our village continues to bear an inequitable burden of air traffic into Kennedy Airport as well as an unbearable level of noise scientific, verifiable data of noise levels must be determined.

That's why it is deeply gratifying that the Port Authority of New York and New Jersey are in the process of identifying a suitable residential location in Floral Park's Hillcrest section for a portable noise monitor to be installed this year. This will be the first monitor placed in a community in Nassau County for the purpose of gauging noise generated by aircraft arriving into Runways 22L and 22R.

Portable noise monitors usually remain in one location for a minimum of one year. During this period, Floral Park can request reports in one of three formats: Summary for a day report, which digests the sound level data on a daily basis; or summary by flight event report, which records the noise level for each flight over a given noise monitor site. All of these reports will provide data relevant to measuring aircraft noise for short-term purposes, such as supporting a proposal for alternative flight patterns. The reports will also serve to measure the impact of different operations, for example, nighttime versus daytime, and, more importantly, determine the aircraft noise level over Floral Park.

There is no gainsaying the achievement in becoming the first community in Nassau County slated to have noise monitors installed. This was not a matter of chance; fortune, after all, is a fickle mistress while progress is the residue of undaunted persistence. While there have been roadblocks we've proved that a few fleabites cannot stop a spirited horse. Clearly, however, the lion share of the credit for our success in obtaining the Port Authority's intervention is due to the unhalting efforts of Trustee Mary-Grace Tomecki, the village noise abatement officer who never lost sight of the objective at hand and made obtaining noise monitors from a reluctant Port Authority a personal crusade.

With the prospect of jet engines in the future being no louder (so we are told) than your washing machine, it is possible that technology will make noise monitors for overhead flights a relic of the past. In the meantime, the steadfastness not to sacrifice the interests

of the village to the caprices of bureaucratic politics, blind and deaf to its surrounding communities, has paid off handsomely in obtaining this noise monitor and not leaving our village unarmed in the battle for the skies above.

MTA Public Hearing

On Wednesday, January 21, between 6 p.m. and 9 p.m., the MTA will hold a Public Hearing at the Garden City Hotel's "Grand Ballroom" at 45 7th Street at which the public is invited to comment on proposed changes in fares and service on the MTA Long Island Railroad.

While there is no mention of the closing of the ticket office at the Floral Park Train Station members of the Board of Trustees, it is our custom as well as our duty, to be in attendance. Any resident wishing to attend is invited to do so. For more information please see the MTA website, www.mta.info.

15 Verbena Avenue

There are certain places that cling to the soul like the morning dew glistening peaceably upon the loam of the earth. There are sites where the hand of history weighs heavily; I've felt its gravity when visiting places like Valley Forge, Gettysburg and Ground Zero in downtown Manhattan all of which forged a deadly and dramatic narrative from the collision of terrific and terrible human forces.

Nothing like that, of course, is remotely comparable to anything that has ever happened in our own hometown. But there are sites that have had an interesting, if not compelling history and have served to shape Floral Park. One of these sites is 15 Verbena Avenue, which rests in the shadow of both the oldest church in the village and its seat of government at Village Hall.

This location was once occupied with 7 houses complete with yards, driveways and garages. Some time in the late 1950s the property had come to the attention of Century Theatre who expressed interest in developing the site for their corporate office. Century Theatre proposed to the Village Board a building that would be equipped with office space as well as a viewing room for motion pictures to be screened by high-powered executives before being placed on the theatre circuit.

In 1961, the Board of Trustees approved the construction of Century Theatre's flat roofed building with white glazed block. In order to build its corporate office and its accompanying parking lot, Century Theatre purchased the properties of all 7 homes and effected the necessary zoning changes to proceed with the demolition of the homes and to construct a building with a modern architectural design described above.

In the mid 1980s Coopers & Lybrand, an accounting firm took the property over. Various banks occupied the space where the current Chase Bank is located. The original bank was the Franklin National Bank and another long standing bank was the EAB.

It was, however, in the year 2003 when an application was presented to the Village's Building Department to construct an above ground 3 story parking garage that the site, even more so than the demolition of the 7 houses, came into the crosshairs of public controversy. The village board was required by law to hold a public hearing, which it did on November 18th of 2003. It would become a history-making event as the application before the board turned into the longest public hearing on record. While a couple of residents spoke of the need for parking to support the business community, the overwhelming sentiment was that an above ground 3-story parking lot would be an insidious encroachment into a suburban community. The temper of the evening was such that many were under the mistaken impression that the village board was promoting this use for the property. While nothing could be further from the truth the site would, nonetheless, manifest itself into a volatile steam bath fraught with political coloration and dissent.

It all, however, became a moot point, at least in terms of the parking garage, when the petitioner withdrew the application and the village board, in correspondence with the strong sentiments of the community, prohibited above ground parking garages and required a special permit for underground garages.

When Jackson Development Corporation, who subsequently bought the building, decided to renovate the existing structure both the village board and the building department was resolved that the new building would become something of which the village could be proud. Thanks to the influence of my brother-in-law, a self-described repressed architect and disciple of the legendary Frank Lloyd Wright, my budding interest in architectural design began to flower. My eyes had been opened to the possibilities of architecture, how it can, at its best, represent a kind of frozen poetry. I learned that while form should follow function, a building's distinctive embellishments can reflect not only a cultural ideal but also provide an aesthetic richness against the austerity of mere functionality. I thought the writer George Santayana (most famous for saying he who does not know history is condemned to repeat it) put it quite wonderfully when he said a building without ornament is like a sky without stars.

The upgrading of the parking lot and a complete makeover of the landscaping enhance the overall appearance. Under the auspices of our Building Superintendent, Steve Siwinski, who is also a skilled architect, the building incorporated a modern design that fits splendidly into a village that takes pride in its traditional architecture. Indeed, its consummation is a comprehensive achievement in that one part cannot be understood from a single perspective.

Walking around the building, your eye is drawn by the different features all in the style of the architecture's original design. The building has new exterior surface material, the white glazed brick replaced with granite panels and stucco materials. The colors and textures of the materials are in keeping with the surrounding buildings and give the exterior a warm and inviting feeling.

The building especially comes to life in the evening when the village is asleep and the night dark and deep. The sheathed glass of the tall windows on the exterior of the once solid brick walls give a transparency that is especially radiant when the building is bathed in light. As the snow began to fall ever so softly this past Sunday evening I saw it, really for the first time, from the unique vantage point of Heritage Park. Surrounded by a sea of whiteness, the light and shadow of the building reminded me of how vividly pleasing visual sensation can be and how the world is anything but changeless.

Just a few years past, one could scent on these very grounds, the gun smoke of conflicting ideas and misunderstandings. Now a palpable aura of peace and serenity crowns the landscape and what was once a battlefield has become a moving testament, if not a living legacy, of a village rising above its contentiousness to create something anew and beautiful.