

Grand Island saved by residents 74 years ago

In 1946, residents of Grand Island told their Town Board in a vote of 354 to 30 that they did not want a regional airport on the Island. The vote was taken as an informal expression of Islander public opinion against the building of a large airport meant to serve the eight counties of Western New York. This was reported in the Buffalo News edition of Sept. 11, 1946. The overwhelming opposition was registered in spite of an explanation by the airport consultant for the Niagara Frontier Planning Board that Grand Island could tax the airport and receive about \$750,000 a year in taxes.

How is that relevant for Grand Island today?

Grand Island is being confronted today by a similar enormous project that would destroy many acres of land and green space, pollute air and water, and would forever change the residential character and rural nature of the island. The proposed Amazon distribution warehouse would sit on 145 acres and its size would be 3,783,000 million square feet

— a square footage that would put the warehouse among the largest in America. The plan has 484 tractor-trailer trucks coming to the warehouse every day. That breaks down to one truck every three minutes.

Grand Island is being told the warehouse will bring significant taxes to our municipality, yet the amount to the community has potential contingencies based on state tax programs and incentives.

Why did the Grand Island residents reject an airport 74 years ago? Why didn't the Grand Island residents choose the lure of the \$750,000 a year in taxes? A tax total that with today's value of the dollar, is equivalent to \$10 million.

The key points that led to the defeat of the airport proposal was the "evident desire of the Islanders to preserve the quiet residential character of their community." (Buffalo News, 9/11/46)

"We like our island as is, exclaimed Archibald B. Kirkwood, homeowner in the East River Road. "I moved out of Buffalo because of the very conditions

that make this a desirable airport site."

"No one came to Grand Island to be in the middle of a brass band," commented Joseph Pugh home owner in the West River Road."

George H. Alt, Jr., chairman of the Grand Island Revisory Zoning Board stated, "We'll have a blighted area of probably three miles around this airport. So far as Grand Island itself is concerned, the tax proposition has been the outstanding bait for accepting the airport. But are we going to accept taxes for a condition we cannot put up with?"

I found this newspaper article in George Alt Jr.'s 1946 journal, and I echo my great-grandfather's statement.

The majority of residents today have the same oppositions to such a massive project on Grand Island as did the residents 74 years ago. They saved the Island then, and we can do it again today.

Nicole Renee Gerber, PhD
6th generation Alt

Amazon will not be good for community

The recent Zoom meeting on the topic of the proposed Amazon distribution facility was an eye opener. It revealed to everyone on the call that TC Buffalo and its lobbying representatives have been hard at work not only submitting forms and plans but also responding to requests from various town representatives while our entire community was locked into COVID-19 quarantine and Town Hall was ostensibly closed for business to all others. By any definition, doing business with Amazon while the town slept, in any form or fashion, would reveal an abject failure to act in good faith. Yet the tone expressed by TC Buffalo's Amazon representatives suggests it's ready to pounce, and that it presumes a right to proceed.

Not only is one Zoom meeting in which a vast majority of Island residents didn't and couldn't even understand how to attend insufficient, there has been little more than an obviously pro-Amazon article published in the Island Dispatch to inform everyone about the nature of this project. Worse, hearing Chamber of Commerce President Fiebelkorn's pro-Amazon speech on the call explained the presumptive tone of TC Buffalo's representatives. Legally, it should in no way be presumed that this project is allowed to proceed, and if it is, things will escalate quickly. Many, many more public meetings should take place before anyone takes any tone whatsoever.

The vast majority of Grand Islanders want you to know that we are wholeheartedly opposed to a 3.8-million-square-foot, 9-story tall facility, (equal to 1,800 new houses) at the north end of our small community. It's not just unsustainable, as our highway department has already convincingly explained, it is not in character with our town to host a global behemoth. We urge you to take the long view and remember that once the wetlands and natural habitat in the proposed property are paved over it is forever. You know for yourselves what happens when even one vehicle breaks down along the 190 corri-

dor from bridge-to-bridge. Round the clock delivery trucks and Amazon's employees will clog our roadways in ways we can hardly imagine and should not permit. The time to act is now.

Residents along the north end of the Island, many of whom were born and raised here and have lived in their homes for decades, will no longer enjoy the peace we relish in our community. If this project is approved, their property, backyards and views will be made adjacent not just to commercial development, but to a global corporation running incessantly, tangibly and immediately diminishing their value. Despite what Fiebelkorn and his fellow chamber members purport, Amazon will not be good for our community. It will not even be good for business. If you research the experience of other communities who have fought against Amazon's intrusive domination, you too will understand that they ask for many concessions, waivers and exceptions and neither contribute to the tax base proportionally nor treat their employees fairly. Apart from the labor used to build the Goliath compound, there is a disproportionate equation between the size of the facility, the sacrifice by Grand Island residents it represents, and the number of employment opportunities it would offer, disproving any arguments about its business development advantages, and particularly for a very small Island with a fragile ecosystem. The Amazon project simply does not pass a proportionality test. As I said in the Zoom meeting, Amazon is indeed also not a person, and it will not behave like any of the local business people who, with noted and bizarre irony, agreed as chamber members to speak in its favor on the call. Instead, it will be a gigantic concrete jungle with sem-trucks traveling up and down our roads 24 hours a day, ruining what is now a place where people hike, hunt, watch our wildlife, go boating and can hear the birds sing. Think of the number and variety of natural species that will be gone forever if you say yes to this proposal.

Is that the kind of community you sought election to serve? If it isn't, then say no for the sake of all your neighbors who count on you to speak for them.

You will soon begin seeing peacefully loud protests across Grand Island and signs vehemently asking you not to approve the launch of this project. Not a single one of us is against business development. On the contrary, we're against an outsized, peace-stealing, one-person advantage that will cost the rest of us too much and forever. We support responsible business growth alongside cautious preservation of Grand Island's irreplaceable qualities, and we'd like to think you do too. I urge you take a year or more to allow every single Island resident a chance to fully comprehend what is being proposed and to state their views. It would only be fair given that the town is even still not fully opened following quarantine. I also ask you, with sincere respect, to remember your duty to all Island residents, not just supposed profiting interests or the one guy who stands to walk away with the most money, and as that duty pertains to our future quality of life and the character of our Island, the grand place in which we all enjoy a very unique lifestyle.

I believe you will come away knowing that you acted honorably by standing against those who would not reside here and whose profits will not linger here to preserve what we all daily experience as our special gift. Encourage Amazon and its representatives to seek instead a repurposing of one of the countless abandoned industrial spaces in Buffalo or to build up in the wide open spaces of Niagara County. It begs logic to think that such a project fits on Grand Island, and the majority of us see that as obvious. Why on earth would they want to take over our Island? Why on earth would they presume we'd let them? Please, don't let Grand Island's beauty be forever ruined.

Maureen P. Phillips, Ph.D.
Captain, USAF/ANG (Retired)

From the Board of Education

Thank you to our Grand Island community for supporting the school budget and to our district clerk, Jude Kuehne, and her team of election poll inspectors all of whom made the governor's executive order to vote by absentee ballot possible. Mrs. Kuehne did an unbelievable amount of work to ensure the budget vote and election went smoothly, and we would like to thank the election poll inspectors including Sharon Nichols, Linda Lichtenthal, Jane Winne, Lisa Macaluso, Phyllis Martin for assisting with the process. Finally, thank you to Chrissy Salonek, our district messenger, for her dedication amidst a great deal of additional work.

Congratulations Class of 2020! As a board, we are very excited that students had the opportunity to walk across a stage with their classmates, and Grand Island High School's outdoor ceremony at Beaver Island is certainly a graduation ceremony to remember! Given this was such a unique situation and experience, one might imagine the hours of planning involved in such an event. Thank you to Dr. Graham for being the superintendent willing to take on this challenge. We would like to thank Cheryl Chamberlain for being a leader in planning graduation alongside our Amy Boutet and Julie Brown, the class advisors for 2020. Mike Lauria, Karen Surdyke, Hillary Kretz-Harvey, Karen Fischer, and Melissa Kosmoski were also heavily involved in the six week planning process. Kim Kinney and Jude Kuehne did an outstanding job on the programs and mailings to our seniors, and Mark Gorton was instrumental in planning for FM transmission and sound at our Beaver Island location. Lastly, thank you to our buildings and grounds staff for the work you did to set up stages and equipment.

On June 15, the New York State Education Department facilitated a regional task force meeting and collected suggestions on nine dif-

ferent sub-categories related to reopening schools. Presenters and speakers included Chancellor Betty Rosa and Vice Chancellor T. Andrew Brown of the Board of Regents, Interim Commissioner Tahoe, Natalie Walrond, a noted expert on social-emotional learning and well-being from WestEd, and several others spoke at the workshop. The Board of Regents and WestEd will analyze information collected from task force meetings around the state and share findings at a Board of Regents meeting in July. In the meantime, our district developed task force sub-committees to plan for a safe reopening that will include the areas of teaching and learning, special education, transportation and facilities, digital equity, budget and finance, social emotional needs, bilingual education, staffing and human resources and health and safety. Please contact the district office if you are a parent or community member interested in serving on a committee during the summer months.

This fall we will have new leadership at Kaegebein Elementary School and Veronica Connor Middle School. Congratulations again to Mrs. Haggerty on her retirement and to Felicia Pallaci, who was recently appointed Principal of Kaegebein Elementary. The selected candidate for the Middle School assistant principal position is Adam Buffomante, who joins our district after working as an administrator at the Charter School for Applied Technology in Buffalo for the last several years. Please welcome them to the Grand Island School District.

We hope you enjoy the weather and outdoors this summer vacation and look forward with anticipation to the opening of school.

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