

## **LETTER TO THE EDITOR – July 25, 2012**

Grand Island Tax Payers: Recreational Airfield, Staley Road

I have listed below a response I received from the School Superintendent as well as further questions/clarification on the issue at hand. Please take the time to read it through. I invite all concerned to attend the Town Board and School Board joint meeting on Monday, July 30th at the Grand Island Senior High School Cafeteria. Please check for the exact time of the meeting and the agenda at: <http://www.grand-island.ny.us/>

From: RobertChristmann@k12.ginet.org

Date: Mon, 23 Jul 2012 15:47:49 -0400

- 1) The land was never given to the Club. It remains the property of the school district. The BOE approved allowing the land to be cleared by George DeGlopper in June 2010.
2. This use of the property by the flying club can be reviewed at any time by the BOE.
3. We have a nature area at Eco Island on Staley Road to which we bus our students as part of an educational opportunity. In the same manner, we anticipate teaching our tech students in the area of aeronautical engineering. They would use the flying field during the school day also as a field trip. We have had a donation of 30 planes to the school district for our use by the tech program. For safety reasons the field on Staley Road would be a better location than that of flying next to the school while it is occupied by other students.
4. We have worked very closely with the Town after they came to us to assist them in finding a location to help this community group. Whenever a location for a function (like the Transportation Center, cell tower, etc.), a case can be made for a different location to be used. It was felt by the Town Board and School Board that the Staley Road location would best meet the needs of the Club, the Town and the school district's educational program.
5. The flying club has already provided us with a copy of their insurance coverage for this site.
6. The District one year ago spent about \$500 to prepare the field after it had been cleared. We estimate that in terms of time and materials, it costs us \$25 to cut the grass as needed.

7. We are currently working with the Club to determine the hours of use. They have their own strict set of rules that their members must adhere to or they lose their membership status.

Thank you for your email to me this morning. I hope that my response now before the board meeting will be somewhat helpful to you. Of course the board members are always interested in hearing comments from residents.

I would be more than willing to meet with you and any others at your convenience to discuss the Staley Road site. Please don't hesitate to call me at 773-8801 to set up a day and time, again, should you be interested.

Robert W. Christmann  
Superintendent of Schools  
Grand Island Central School District  
1100 Ransom Road Grand Island, NY 14072  
716-773-8801 (phone)

July 25, 2012 Mr. Christmann..thank you for your response. I am being aggressively contacted from many Grand Island residents asking further questions and will try to be as brief as I can in my response to the below information. A meeting would be welcome, but prior to that I need to obtain clarification on some items so as to be prepared. I have copied Mary Cooke, Town Supervisor as well as the Zoning Board on this email as some questions pertain to their area of expertise.

1. I understand the land was not "given" to the club and I apologize for a bad choice of words. The land was offered for use to the club for free. The BOE approved George DeGlopper to clear it in 2010, however the land was cleared by town employees.

2. Thank you for the information. As of current the land is zoned as R-1A according to the GI Town Zoning map. Under Article V R-1A on page 24 of the codes it states:

§ 49-35. Principal Uses and Structures.

The following are Principal Uses:

- A. Single-family detached dwelling.
- B. Public parks and playgrounds.
- C. Public and private schools.
- D. House of Worship.
- E. Agricultural uses.
- F. Keeping of up to ten (10) agricultural animals, with an Agricultural Animal Permit.
- G. Nursery (including growing of plants and retail and wholesale sales).

I am requesting clarification on where the activity planned to take place falls under on the above. If a "change of use" was in order, can you provide information on when that was approved as I have not been able to locate any information on it.

3. Comparing Eco Island to the flying club educational program is not a fair comparison. Eco Island is utilized by various schools with many different age groups as well as with summer clubs and nature clubs. The Niagara Sunday Fliers Clubs educational program benefits a handful of students only from the High School who are enrolled in the technology class. Having not seen the curriculum that will be covered in this class I am using my best estimation of this club possibly taking a field trip once or twice a year. I do not see how it benefits all the students or how it justifies using school tax dollars to maintain a field for this small group of students. Also there is no paved area for buses only over grown stone driveways that have not been used for over 20+ years. Eco Island has adequate parking. For safety reasons the Staley Road land was chosen. I have been assured these planes are not loud, safe and under control at all times. Why is flying them in a location that is zoned residential with a horse farm running along side of the property and students standing out in the open field any different than the technology students walking to the back of the open field behind the high school when no other students are using the location and homes are a safe distance away? If a few planes are being shown, I don't see the safety risk. It also saves our tax dollars to be put into other improvements of our schools as you will not have to provide busing and maintenance of land.

4. You state you have "worked closely with the Town after they came to you to assist in finding a location to help this community group". Mrs. Cooke, why would the town involve the school board with assisting a private membership only club? I realize they are a community group within the club but they are truly not a Grand Island only community club. It also states that a case can be made for a different location for functions, however those functions including cell towers, and the transportation center have all been clearly posted under various Town notices. The Niagara Sunday Fliers Club has not been posted in any of the public notices that I can locate or shown approval was being given on any of the agendas or minutes dating back to 2009 in the Towns information. Yet a sign has been erected on the property showing the land in question is now home to the Niagara Sunday Fliers Club. Again where does this club fit under the current zoning?

5. Thank you for the information.

6. The district spent approximately \$500 a year ago to prepare the field. You estimate it will be approximately \$25 to cut the grass as needed. I find these estimates to be grossly low. Driving the tractors there, employee salaries, gas and the amount of time needed to cut that amount of land will require a few hours of time. A cost study should be conducted.

7. In working with the Club to determine the hours of use, how will residents be notified by the club of their schedule? How do you prevent others from coming at will to the land and flying? If this is a community club how do you exclude others from the community of Grand Island from using the land?

8. As brought up at the meeting by Ms. Droit referencing Ms. Tuffillaro's concern about monitoring the land to keep teenagers from gathering or others from trespassing on the

land, how can this effectively be done? The land is widely open and 4 wheelers, motocross bikes, kids on bicycles or walking can very easily congregate in the back area of the property without being easily seen. I grew up in the house we now own and have been on Staley Road for over 35 years. I know when this field was a working baseball field there were many times we would contact the police about parties at the baseball diamonds. The field at that time was wide open to the back field line and very visible from the street. At one point there were teenagers living in tents in the back of the property just inside where the cut area ended and the fields began. Blocking the front entrance with a rope will not deter anyone if they truly want to get in there. Also if police are asked to patrol it, we are now involving another group and more money to have that take place. They have to patrol a tiny radio station area on Staley Road as cars are in there all the time. They have recovered drug scales and paraphernalia from the parking lot of the abandoned building. I personally have called many times to report activity in the building but it is because I am able to see what is happening there. Who will be able to monitor this area effectively?

I would like to point out again; my issue is not with the Niagara Sunday Fliers. I am bothered by the fact that there are many "gray" areas on how this all came about as well as my tax dollars being used to assist in something that does not benefit all students/residents. If this club was accommodated in an area currently maintained, public and not costing the tax payers any extra money it would benefit all residents as well as the educational program as needed.

Tina Giambra

I will be at the meeting Monday to hear further developments but would hope all involved would be able to educate me on the above issues prior to that meeting. Thank you.

Tina Giambra