

An Airport for Brighton, Almost

In March 1946, a young Army Air Force veteran came before the Brighton Town Board and through his attorney, Harold J. Berlove, pleaded his case for an airport in Brighton. William J. Evans of 2005 Westfall Road explained that he was endeavoring to establish a landing field on his father's property to conduct a training school for people interested in flying. William was the son of J. Edward Evans whose family had farmed on Westfall Road since the 1850s.

Using slides to demonstrate his case, he showed that the proposed runway would extend 3,000 feet west from Edgewood Avenue and would be 75 feet wide. He went on to explain that during flying lessons the planes would *"...in all probability be flying over the town of Pittsford or the town of Henrietta, therefore the inhabitants of the Town of Brighton would not be too much disturbed nor would they have reason to be concerned about possible mishaps."*ⁱ

The application had already been denied by the Planning Board. The application to the Town Board represented the appeal process.

The Town Board hearing continued with comments from the public. First to speak was a representative of the Continental Housing Corporation that had developed the Edgewood Tract near the Evans farm. Continental had assured its buyers that Brighton zoning laws would protect their investment so the prospect of a change in the law to allow an airport next to their houses was unacceptable.

Charles Rittenhouse presented a petition with 122 signatures of residents of Rowlands and Edgeview Lane in opposition to the zoning change. Thirteen other men also spoke against the proposal. Most cited noise, loss of property value, and the possibility of plane crashes.

An editorial in the Brighton-Pittsford Post of 7 March 1946 summed up the dilemma for the Brighton Town Board. Citing the obvious, that applications for new airports would undoubtedly come from former servicemen like William Evans, it said *"Who else...would have the interest and verve to take up this new business? In recognition of these service men who had sufficient dare devil spirit to take planes through thick flak to reach their objective, all home folks will hesitate to deny them any privilege within their control... That Brighton [Planning Board] has already turned down a service man because of the nature of his business in the location it was asked for, is indicative that sentiment will not alone pave the thinking which enters a decision to grant special permits...The Brighton Town Board has inherited a question from the Planning Board for which they will need much deliberation and exhaustive study..."*ⁱⁱ

The outcome: The Town Board denied the petition to amend the zoning law to allow the airport. William Evans married Alice and moved to Edgewood Avenue where he became a farmer. J. Edward Evans, his father, died in April 1947. His widow, Teresa, married Walter Burke and sold the Evans farm to Schantz Development Corporation in 1954. By September 1958, 150 houses of the Evans Farm neighborhood had been constructed, with more than 130 more to come.

Mary Jo Lanphear
Town of Brighton Historian 14 November 2023

ⁱ Brighton Town Board meeting minutes, 13 March 1946, page 42.

ⁱⁱ Brighton-Pittsford Post, 7 March 1946