



## LONG ISLAND REGIONAL PLANNING COUNCIL



### **Keynote Address Suburban Sustainability Symposium Hofstra University, November 10, 2016**

*For all those in the planning field, “Sustainability” has become one of the most discussed and debated topics in the past ten years. This conference is another testament to the interest in the topic and the various facets of the very issue. It is however, I would post a premise and subject of utmost importance. While there are many definitions put forth for the term, “Sustainability”, is essentially a principle upon which a society conducts its business and way of life without compromising the ability of future generations to do the same. This includes utilization of resources, impacts upon the environment, distribution of equitable opportunity, management and growth of the economy, protection of the public health and welfare and striking a balance between production and consumption in a wide array of areas.*

*We, as Long Islanders, can and should legitimately challenge whether Long Island is sustainable or not. In order to properly assess that question, there are a number of issues that must be honestly vetted and analyzed. Back in 2010, the Long Island Regional Planning Council, with the assistance of many Long Island stakeholders and leaders along with a consulting team of international and local experts, assessed the challenges that Long Island faced in achieving sustainability. LI 2035 was a comprehensive document that outlined a strategic plan to insure a stable and secure future for Long*



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*Island. Thirty-nine sustainable strategies with many more substrategies were developed in the four thematic areas of Tax and Governance, the Economy, Environment and Infrastructure and Equity.*

*While a number of the Plan's strategic recommendations including the creation of a Regional Economic Development entity (the REDC), shared services for governments and school districts, marketing our Island's assets nationally, establishing supportive resources for our high-tech startups, coordinating emergency preparedness on the Island, establishing land use overlay zones and expanding health care for our aging population base have all been implemented to varying degrees of success, there still exist many challenges yet to be addressed. I would like to focus on some of the major impediments to the Island's sustainability.*

### *Firstly, Our Tax and Governance –*

*The number one obstacle to the Island's sustainability identified in LI 2035 is our unsustainable property tax burden. While its rate of growth has been muted somewhat in recent years due to the State's imposed property tax cap, exceptions to the cap and some piercing of caps by various municipal entities has still caused property taxes to continue to escalate. All of us are highly aware that almost two-thirds of the property tax bill is attributable to school taxes. Increased levels of state funding facilitated by supple state income tax coffers, as well as tapping of school district reserves has enabled most districts to stay within the state tax caps. That scenario, combined with the recent loss of the Republican Senate Majority, which has been largely controlled by the Long Island delegation, will make compliance*



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*with tax caps an arduous task going forward, putting an even greater strain on our already burdensome property taxes.*

*LIRPC, in an effort to address this vexing problem, is in the process of procuring a qualified consulting firm to thoroughly vet alternatives to our present system of taxing properties as a major source of funding for local governments and schools.*

*On the issue of governance, the recent spate of law enforcement incursions into the dealings of government on various levels has severely challenged the ability of government to effectively deal with the myriad of clear and present challenges we as Long Islanders continue to face. The ensuing cynicism which has followed the continuum of indictments of our elected leaders has racked the confidence of the electorate. We must resolve to rid our governments of public corruption and move forward with elected leaders who embrace the honor and privilege of public service and commit to the high moral tenets that accompany those offices. To fail to do so, places at risk the future of Long Island as Millennials and other young Long Islanders will choose to raise their families and grow their careers elsewhere thus exacerbating the “brain drain”.*

### *Our Economy –*

*New York State, which includes Long Island, is the nation’s leader in many categories of tax burdens placed upon its residents and businesses. The State also possesses the unenviable reputation as being one of the most unfavorable states in the nation to business. Long Island, in particular, while sharing much of those common burdens has some additional*



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*obstacles which make establishing and growing a business an even greater challenge here on the Island. These impediments include a lack of rental housing for our young workforce, some of the highest energy costs in the country, an aged and inadequate transportation network, a strained air and water ecosystem, a failed economic model of funding public sector pension and health care costs and the aforementioned unsustainable tax burden.*

### *Our Environment and Infrastructure –*

*Long Island, in its seventy-plus years of rapid development, has suffered the consequences of its own success. The attraction of a highly skilled workforce, vaunted education and health care systems, proximity to the economic and cultural capital of the world, magnificent beaches and parks and an abundant clean water supply all contributed to Long Island's population growth and economic prosperity. All those outstanding assets have gradually been put at risk due to years of abject neglect and our failure to address critical issues in the present tense.*

*Public entitlements and legacy costs have consumed an inflated portion of municipal budgets thereby precluding a proper amount of funding for necessary infrastructure standard of care maintenance and essential upgrading to accommodate economic and population growth.*

*Since our ground and surface waters are not defined by municipal boundaries, our water infrastructure should accordingly be managed on a regional basis. Suffolk County's proposed County-wide Water Quality Management District as such, is an excellent proposal which should be championed. LIRPC's partnership with the NYSDEC on the Long Island*



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*Nitrogen Action Plan is an important initiative in addressing a major environmental and economic challenge to our sustainability.*

*Our groundwater water supply system is being severely taxed and polluted by various sources. The USGS' current \$6 Million study should identify the qualitative and quantitative impacts of on-site septic systems, public sewerage, and other industrial, commercial, agricultural and residential sources.*

*Hurricane Sandy provided a first-hand graphic example as to how vulnerable Long Island is to major storms, storm surge and yes, climate change. We must strike a proper balance between retreat, protection and resilience. Piecemeal approaches to a regional problem such as this will not address the major threats to our neighborhoods, our environment or our economy.*

*Our outmoded transportation system with inadequate rail and roadway network capacity needs major improvements if we are to be able to effectively grow our economy for the 21<sup>st</sup> Century. The LIRR's Third Track project is an example of an essential transportation capacity improvement project on a system that was originally constructed over 100 years ago, that will facilitate mass transportation, improve system reliability, take automobiles off the road, improve local air quality, encourage transit oriented development including workforce housing, expand the job market with a concomitant growth in the residential and commercial tax bases.*

*Our energy supply system is dependent upon off-Island power, much of it from soon to be shuttered coal fired plants, served by underwater*



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*cables and a network of on-Island power generating facilities that are over fifty years old! While the electric utilities have done a notable job in keeping these plants in working condition, it is a fact that these electromechanical facilities are some of the most polluting, least efficient and oldest plants in New York State. LIPA and PSEG's long-awaited Integrated Resources Management Plan should hopefully call for repowering or replacing critical facilities and shutdown of unnecessary ones. LIPA's renewable portfolio should be expanded beyond solar power to include wind power, hydraulic and tidal energy, fuel cells and other forms.*

*Approximately half of the solid waste generated on Long Island is being trucked to solid waste incinerators and landfills off-Island, thus contributing to excessive truck traffic on the LIE as well as local roads, elevated levels of air pollution and exportation of numerous jobs and hundreds of millions of dollars annually from the Long Island economy.*

*With a reduced emphasis on public education programs and global impacts on recyclables markets, our recycling programs are no longer as effective as they once were. An intelligent, integrated and cost-effective program for managing our solid waste needs to be developed.*

*Hundreds of inactive hazardous waste sites continue to lay dormant continuing to pollute our ground and surface waters essentially sterilizing thousands of acres of potentially income and tax producing properties from being developed. Principal responsible parties have shirked their legal and moral responsibilities from cleaning up these brownfield sites. An effective enforcement program should be instituted to remediate these properties*



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*that pollute our neighborhoods and our environments and restore them to the active tax rolls.*

### Equity –

*Long Island is blessed in many ways with some of the highest performing schools in the state, some of the most prestigious academic, research and health care institutions in the Country, some of the wealthiest zip codes in the nation, and some of the most beautiful neighborhoods one could imagine. But not all Long Islanders share in those blessings. Long Island is also home to some of the most underperforming schools in American suburbia, to pockets of poverty and crime more closely identified with inner cities and communities whose housing is not only an embarrassment to the affected communities, but should also be for all Long Islanders.*

*The chance at the American Dream is not equitably distributed. Typical problems such as broken families, failing schools, an unskilled workforce, intergenerational poverty, rampant drug abuse, heavy influx of new immigrants, street and domestic violence, the prevalence of gangs and personal and social despair all make the challenge in our underprivileged neighborhoods a crisis that requires an immediate, comprehensive and coordinated effort by government, institutions and the private sector if these pernicious problems are ever to be resolved.*

*Long Island, with all its beauty and tremendous assets, faces major challenges to its sustainability. The problems we face are real and cannot be glossed over or addressed sometime “down the road”. We are already*



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*“down the road” with too many miles and years gone by now. We must look at our challenges honestly and forthrightly. To do anything less is delusional and immoral.*

*Long Island will only be sustainable if and when ALL Long Islanders are provided the opportunity to live and work in safe neighborhoods with the firm belief that with a proper education, skilled training, perseverance and hard work they too can make a better life for themselves and their families.*

*It is time that we celebrate the diversity not only of our cultures but also of our positions in society remembering that we all live on this Island together and that our lives are inextricably linked. Let’s get to work.*

*Thank you and God bless you all.*

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "John D. Cameron, Jr.".

*John D. Cameron, Jr., P.E.*

*Chair*

*Long Island Regional Planning Council*