

## **Long Island Regional Planning Council**

### **LIRPC Meeting – February 17, 2022 Zoom Virtual Meeting Summary Minutes**

#### **LIPRC Members Present**

John D. Cameron, Jr., Chair  
Jeffrey Kraut, Treasurer  
Theresa Sanders, Secretary  
Supervisor Don Clavin  
Elizabeth Custodio  
Mayor Barbara Donno  
Nancy Engelhardt  
Jeff Guillot  
Mayor Robert Kennedy  
Supervisor Edward Wehrheim

#### **Staff and Guests Present**

Richard Guardino  
Elizabeth Cole  
Missy Leder  
Katherine Heaviside  
Mark Smith  
Louise Harrison  
Robert DeLuca  
Shaye Hallee  
Catherine Stark  
August Ruckdeschel  
Parvin Purawal  
Brooke Gondek  
Rachel Titus  
John Rottkamp  
Jim McCaffrey  
Daniel Segal  
Sarah Schaefer-Brown  
Vera Chinese  
Elizabeth Hornstein  
Joyann Cirigliano  
Matthew Swain  
Al Krupski  
Kathy Czepiel  
Rob Buchanan  
Stephen Boscola  
Holly Sanford  
Gwynn Schroeder  
Harry Yamalis  
John Turner  
Pierce Rafferty  
Suzy Goldhirsch  
James Brako McComb  
Guy Jacob

Dr. Artie Kopelman  
Pete Topping  
Heather Johnson  
Lisa Ott  
Anthony Piccirillo  
Aaron Goode  
Patti Bourne  
Debbie O’Kane  
B. Patterson  
Natalie Wright  
Tony Borelli  
Pete Topping  
Esther Nelson  
Meg Larsen  
Ronald Webb  
Esther Nelson  
Susan Tamulevich  
Harry Yamalis

**Meeting Commenced:**

John D. Cameron, Jr., opened the meeting at approximately 11am.

**John Cameron:**

Good morning and welcome to the inaugural 2022 meeting of the Long Island Regional Planning Council.

Pledge of Allegiance – Jeff Kraut

**John Cameron:**

Thank you. Our Executive Director, Rich Guardino, will now conduct a roll call.

**Rich Guardino:**

Welcome, everyone. Thank you all for being with us this morning.

**Roll Call**

John D. Cameron, Jr., Chair  
Jeffrey Kraut, Treasurer  
Theresa Sanders, Secretary  
Don Clavin  
Elizabeth Custodio  
Barbara Donno  
Nancy Engelhardt  
Jeff Guillot  
Robert Kennedy  
Ed Wehrheim

**Rich Guardino:**

We do have a quorum.

**Shaye Hallee:**

Thank you for the opportunity to assist with this meeting. As a friendly reminder, for those who have not participated before, we do have a presentation this morning. At the end of the presentation, we'll invite the LIRPC Council and then members of the public to either ask a question or share a comment which can be done in one of two ways. If you are

joining us through the Zoom platform on your mobile phone or your computer, there should be a Q&A button down below where you can type in your question. When we get to the end of the presentation and it is time for Q&A, I will read the questions out loud, and a member of the panel will respond. Another way to ask a question is to use the raise hand feature, which is below and looks like someone is giving you a high five. That sends a command to me to let me know that you would like to raise your hand and speak. When the time is right, I will call out your name, take you off mute and you can then either ask your question or share your comment. This meeting is being recorded for archival purposes. With that, I'd like to hand it back to Rich to continue the meeting.

**Adoption of the October 14, 2021 minutes.**

**Motion: Barbara Donno**

**Second: Jeff Kraut**

**All in Favor: So moved.**

**Election of Chairman and Officers for the 2022 LIRPC**

**Motion to Accept John Cameron as Chair of the Long Island Regional Planning Council: Michael White**

**Seconded: Jeff Kraut**

**John Cameron abstained**

**All in Favor: So moved.**

**Motion to Accept Michael White as Vice Co-Chair of the Long Island Regional Planning Council: John Cameron**

**Seconded: Nancy Englehardt**

**Michael White abstained**

**All in Favor: So moved.**

**Motion to Accept Jeff Kraut as Treasurer of the Long Island Regional Planning Council: John Cameron**

**Seconded: Barbara Donno**

**Jeff Kraut abstained**

**All in Favor: So moved.**

**Motion to Accept Theresa Sanders as Secretary of the Long Island Regional Planning Council: John Cameron**

**Seconded: Michael White**

**Theresa Sanders abstained**

**All in Favor: So moved.**

**Rich Guardino:**

Let me just take this opportunity to thank all the officers and members of the Council. For those folks that may be tuning in for the first time, all members of the council are volunteers, and we really appreciate them taking the time to be with us day in and day out and working on these issues with us.

This morning, we're delighted to have a presentation "Envision Plum Island Preserved" and we have two distinguished individuals to do that presentation. Louise Harrison is the New York Natural Areas Coordinator for Save the Sound. Louise is a conservation biologist who has served on Long Island in federal, New York State and Suffolk County agencies as well as in leadership and consulting positions for not-for-profit environmental organizations. She has led task forces and community coalitions protecting open space. She has extensive field experience working Long Island's coastal communities and natural ecosystems and has received numerous awards for open space preservation efforts. We also have Bob DeLuca joining us. Bob has served as President and CEO of the Group for East End since 1992. He holds a BS, Environmental Science from Fordham University and an MS in Environmental Science from the State University of New York College of Environmental Science and Forestry. Prior to joining the group, Bob worked both as a biologist and senior environmental analyst with Suffolk County Office of Ecology and taught environmental advocacy and policy as an

adjunct professor at Long Island University for over 15 years. Bob began his career with the group in the mid-1980s as an environmental analyst. In this role, Bob developed the group's first environmental outings and community education programs. We're just delighted to have these two distinguished individuals with us this morning.

**Louise Harrison:**

We're going to be talking about the attributes of Plum Island, why we're excited about Plum Island, and have been trying to preserve it for years now. I'm going to tell you a little bit about the campaign to preserve Plum Island, where we are today, and why we think we might be close to achieving this vision of Plum Island Preserved. This artwork is by Bluedorn, who's an artist in East Hampton and you will also see some pen and ink drawings by him in the presentation today evocative of the Native American concept of land arising on the back of a turtle. We know the most charismatic animal at Plum Island is the harbor seal, so we love this drawing.

One of the reasons Save the Sound got involved in Plum Island, if not the primary reason, is its remarkable ecological communities. You may have heard of the New York Natural Heritage Program that has some of the top natural science scientists in the state. They were able to go on Plum Island in 2015 and do an inventory of the natural communities there. Their report came out the next year and it is available online on their website. They identified that there were at least five significant natural ecological communities on Plum Island and I'm going to show you some of them now.

This first on the left has both the maritime beaches and the maritime dunes. The maritime dunes ecosystem at Plum Island is nearly 100 acres and it's unspoiled and remarkably beautiful. Maritime bluffs at Plum Island are extensive, in some places 70 feet high, and unspoiled without any houses at the top of them ready to teeter into the waterways. Here you see one of the New York Natural Heritage Program scientists doing an inventory of the plant life there. You may have heard that submerged aquatic vegetation like eel grass is becoming increasingly rare worldwide. We are aware that there are at least three marine eelgrass Meadows at Plum Island. They're rare and they're important for all kinds of marine life like shellfish crabs, sea horses, as well as sea turtles. In addition to those outstanding examples of ecological communities found only on Plum Island in our area, another exemplary area on Plum Island is an amazing freshwater wetland. The area is 97 acres in size and is quite beautiful. It's quite unusual. Seen from the air it has these stripes of land across it that we think were ancient dunes. There are stumps of a rare tree called the Atlantic white cedar that are still evident in and around this wetland that perhaps could be restored someday. In your mind's eye, I'm going to ask you to think about an island off the east coast of Long Island, a mile and a half off the North Fork, surrounded by salt water. The West End has Plum gut, a turbulent waterway and here is freshwater. Imagine how important that is for animals and birds to be able to land on Plum Island and get fresh water when they're surrounded by saltwater. This is an amazing resource in and of itself.

Under the water around Plum Island are an amazing array of organisms and we're learning more and more about them. The New York Natural Heritage Program with support from Save the Sound donors sent divers there in 2019 and just last summer. We have a report coming out on March 31 which will discuss this amazing biodiversity. Another amazing fact about the life on Plum Island is the extensive number of bird species. Again, I'm going to ask you to use your imaginations and think about a map of North America. Think about it extending all the way up through Canada and Alaska, all the way to the Arctic and think of all the different kinds of habitats represented in North America and how many bird species probably are in those habitats. A quarter of all those bird species found in North America, north of Mexico, have been cited on the 822 acres of Plum Island. If that's not the most remarkable fact. This tiny island, teeming with biological diversity, has been attracting a quarter of all the birds in North America. They don't all stop there. They may fly over but they've been cited there.

As I said before, the most charismatic animal at Plum Island are the seals. There are harbor seals and also grey seals. The harbor seals are most plentiful, and they haul out on the rocks. It's called a haul out area. They haul out to rest and warm up in the winter in large numbers. It's the largest seal haul out area in New York, and one of the largest in southern New England. On a winter's day, probably just about now, you may go there nearby by boat, and you may see hundreds of them hauled out on the rocks. Why are they there? They are undisturbed. They're very skittish around people and they require that kind of isolation. The grey seals have even been having pups at Plum Island, which is amazing.

But of course, Plum Island has historical significance as well. This lighthouse was built in 1869 and is on the National Register of Historic Places. It's the second lighthouse as the first one deteriorated after only a few decades. It is so charming and has so much history associated with it and there's a movement to get it restored and rehabilitated. We would hope that one day it would be open for visitation.

Now you're seeing the west end of Plum Island looking back toward Orient Point. You will see in the distance, Orient Point and Plum gut. That's where my cursor is going back and forth. This water tower is right near the Plum Island Animal Disease Center and hear more in the foreground is some of the remains of Fort Terry, which just last year was put on the National Register of Historic Places. None of the buildings have been taken down and some are in good enough shape. Others could be rehabilitated and used for other purposes. We're excited to think about that as well. Now, I'm going to turn this over to Bob to talk about why we got involved with wanting to preserve Plum Island.

**Bob DeLuca:**

Thank you very much. I want to thank the Regional Planning Council, not only for giving us an invitation here, but really for the great work that you've been doing, especially on the Long Island Nitrogen Action Plan.

A lot of people have read novels about Plum Island and all the terrifying things that go on there, but most of the operations that go on have been consolidated to a fairly small portion of the site, which will become important when we talk about the future of the property. As many of you know, this goes back to 2008 when the federal government, in its wisdom, decided that it no longer needed Plum Island, and it was going to consolidate its agro and bio defense facilities in a new constructed laboratory in Manhattan, Kansas. In a couple of lines in an appropriations bill in 2008, they decided to offload this by public auction to the highest bidder. That got clarified a little bit later in 2012 saying that their proceeds would essentially go to support the new facility in Manhattan, Kansas. That, of course, got all of us in the conservation community and the planning community very concerned about what would happen on Plum Island.

With just one look, you realize Plum Island is a resource that should be protected in the public interest if it doesn't have another public purpose. The great irony here was that unlike many of the pieces of property that we try to protect, this piece of property was already in public ownership. It was then put up by our government for sale to anybody who wanted to buy which meant that, in addition to losing it from the public domain, there was no zoning on this Island. It had been a federal facility for over 100 years and there was no local zoning in place. After a fair amount of examination of the island thinking about what could be sustained and supported by legitimate zoning, we came up with and supported this idea of two basic districts. If you see to the right, the kind of aquamarine color, that's known as the Plum Island Conservation District. The purpose of that district was to preserve the integrity and the regionally significant natural and historic resources of Plum Island for public benefit. That chunk is about 650 acres in size and the activities that would be allowed there were restricted to either a nature preserve, a public park, an education facility, a museum housed in one of the historic structures and the possibility of a small solar array capable of supporting any of the activities on the island.

One of the goals we had was to diminish the cash value of the island to speculators as well as limit what those speculators might do with it. We thought that might have some effect in terms of the federal government's interest and trying to turn this thing into a lottery ticket. My limited experience in Washington suggests that there were people sitting around who figured that someone might pay \$10 billion for this island out in the Hamptons and maybe they were right. A large part of the island was always going to be protected in this new zoning category. The second part of the zoning was the Plum Island research district and is about 180 acres. The purpose was to encourage the use of this already developed portion of the site for research and educational opportunities and to provide some quality employment opportunities while preserving the island's natural, historic, and scenic resources. As a little background, multiple millions of dollars were spent reconstructing the facility after 911 to make it safer and more secure and to upgrade a number of the things. Nonetheless, the Department of Homeland Security's wanted to consolidate everything up in Kansas, which is what they did.

Another part of the property serves as the ferry dock for the access to Plum Island. That piece of property took a little bit more thinking. There is already some marine zoning in the Town of Southold, but that marine zoning allows multiple primary uses and there was concern that changing the zoning in this area would create a number of non-conforming uses. The town board basically said, we're going to do a whole new thing here and that whole new thing is going to be to create a Marine district that applies specifically to this piece of property under the new zoning. What is there now in terms of ferry service would be left with no additional building with the potential exception being the possibility of a museum or a public meeting space. That secured the future of this facility, retaining its marine access to Plum Island without the risk of more commercialization, which was of great concern to the people that live there.

This was done to create a major backstop. In the event the conservation effort that Louise was describing would not come to fruition, we wanted to make sure that there was some way to have a backstop if this fell into private hands. Part of that plan also included creating a large interstate conservation coalition. Right now, over 118 regional and national organizations are involved, ranging from smaller organizations like mine to large organizations like National Audubon Society, Sierra Club and various organizations that have a footprint in DC. That, of course, was very helpful in terms of finding the strategic partners that we would need to tell our story to people who would listen and have access to leadership in Washington. That's been an ongoing process. One of the things that came out of a meeting in Washington is relevant to the second part of this presentation and that is the congressional leadership from New York and Connecticut was very supportive of doing something other than just flipping the property as a piece of real estate, but they wanted more details about what we are going to do with this thing and who is going to manage it. That is what kicked off the Envision process, which includes as many of the stakeholders as we could find, including indigenous people, members of business organizations, labor organizations, nonprofit Civic organizations. We tried to tie everybody together in one unified strategy for the future of Plum Island so that we could hand off a plan to the federal government and state leadership. Those efforts have been supported.

**Louise Harrison:**

Thank you, Bob. That's great background. Taking the cue from the people we met within Washington who advised that we need more than just zoning and this vague concept of research and conservation, The Nature Conservancy and Save the Sound got together and hired a nationally known consulting firm that has been involved in turning federal properties into conservation areas. We hired them to help us put together a process where we could create a vision for Plum Island that reflected a broad constituency. It was our job to pull those people together and we did. We reached out to all sectors. We had three formal workshops that brought up some questions and put us back to work. We heard from naturalists and scientists and then historians and people with particular interest in in cultural heritage. By 2020, we were

able to come up with some results and we mostly used the Plum Island zoning as the basis. We had the Town of Southhold heavily involved in this. We use this as a basis of what our future vision would be.

In a nutshell, here it is. You may see that there are these same two big districts, but we added a few more. This area that was the research district, we've split into three zones. Here's the area of the laboratory, where it exists today. You can see most of the buildings and other facilities and here's that wonderful freshwater wetland that I showed you before and the dune system and the beaches down below. We consider this area to be very delicate ecologically and if visitation takes place, it should be quite limited here and done by tour. It would be open to researchers and their students who want to study the natural environment. This area by the lighthouse should have a zone of its own. This is the harbor area where the boats and ferries come and go to Plum Island. This area on the east end, this skinny area, is also very delicate ecologically. However, it contains some artifacts of the old gun batteries that were associated with Fort Terry. Some people are really interested in military history, and this is a National Historic Register site is no joke because it's unique in the nation. Some people who are experts in that type of study have said that there are elements in Fort Terry that really are unique and people will want to see it. This central portion we see is sort of the most durable. This is where the old parade grounds are that you see here in yellow which have been trampled for years with military exercises. Some of the vegetated areas that are regrowing are in rough shape. We need some invasive species to come out. There's some work that must be done here, but we do see this as an area that could receive the most visitation. Here's the Plum Island ferry dock at Orient Point. The town's zoning allows for one of its buildings to be reused as a potential Visitor Center and we see that as a place where people might get a ferry ticket, see some exhibits, maybe attend evening lectures, and learn about Plum Island.

The full report "Our Vision" is here in this document, which you can get at the website shown here, [PreservePlumIsland.org](http://PreservePlumIsland.org). It's 72 pages and it has some good illustrations. The Preserve Plum Island Coalition is advocating for Plum Island Preserve, because it can preserve ecological elements, our nation's history, and help us to discover and celebrate our cultural heritage. One of the things that came out of that report, and our vision quest was a strong recommendation to create Friends of Plum Island as a 501C3 that could help support future activities at Plum Island, knowing that we are hoping to keep this in public hands. Because public agencies are often strapped for funds, it would be great to have some private money available that can support future activities. We created this 501C3 just this year.

Here's the vision encapsulated; Conservation, some sustainable tourism, and a potential Museum and some kind of research is still probably very viable even with a preserve concept. We don't know if the Animal Disease Center is capable of being rehabbed to a new use, but the administration building is likely a great place to do climate research. Maybe it would even be a good pairing with Governors Island, which is going to have a global climate research center which Stony Brook University is a finalist to run. It would be great to have Plum Island on the East End available to do field research for climate, mariculture, aquaculture Marine Studies, estuarine studies, or even renewable energy studies, as long as we don't have any turbines on the island because of the great concerns about the sensitivity of its ecological resources. We have been presenting our concepts all around and we have the support of a lot of individuals, including our Senators from both Connecticut and New York and our Congress people. They've all come out in favor of Plum Island and helped us reach that repeal of that legislation that was so troublesome. We knew we could never reach our vision unless we were able to repeal that problem legislation that had put Plum Island on the auction block where it could be sold to the highest bidder which would have been a private party. We knew that government could never offer more than fair market value. We were very concerned that being on the auction block would inhibit our ability to achieve our vision.

Because of the support of our congressional champions, we were able to get Plum Island off the auction block in December of 2020 and this was a thrilling event for us. Now we're in a new phase. We realize that there's going to be a new process and it has kind of a complicated name. It's called the Federal disposition process. This is what happens when the federal government has a piece of property they don't want anymore. They need to develop a report of excess and they must then deliver that report of excess to the General Services Administration, which acts like the realtor for the federal government. The GSA will offer Plum Island around to other federal agencies, they'll have 30 days to indicate some kind of interest in order to stop the clock. If nobody shows any interest in 30 days, it will be offered to New York state. If New York State doesn't show interest in 30 days, it gets offered to the County and so on down the line until if nobody shows any interest in Plum Island, it goes back on the auction block. We obviously don't want that to happen, so we are trying to engage federal agencies right now to talk about our goal for Plum Island and to try to ask them to look out for this report of excess coming their way and show some interest understanding that they don't have to agree immediately to buy it. They must be able to effectively stop the clock so that we can begin to work together to bring our vision into reality.

This happens to be coinciding with the process of cleaning up Plum Island of the contamination from having done work with highly contagious diseases over the years. They have some buildings to clean up before they leave. The Department of Homeland Security has been working with the New York State Department of Environmental Conservation to develop a plan for cleaning up the island. Homeland Security is responsible for making sure this happens. The federal government is responsible for cleaning up Plum Island, but we know that some agencies might be a little concerned about how that's going to proceed and how quickly they might want to raise their hand and show some interest in Plum Island. These two processes are happening at the same time. The good news is that there aren't that many areas left to clean up although it may take them a while to perform their due diligence. This is the old Lab 257, where the early research was conducted before they built the current Plum Island Animal Disease Center. These three buildings need to be cleaned up as well and they have a schedule for it. The DEC and Homeland Security must agree on the process and move that forward. We're very fortunate that the state is overseeing this because New York State has more stringent rules than the federal government on the cleanups, so we're going to get a good product.

Just in the last couple of weeks some letters have gone out from Homeland Security to various parties. The Suffolk County Legislature got a letter. Some individuals who were involved in the early part of the sale of Plum Island and responded to the draft environmental impact statement have been getting letters. The letters ask if you want to participate in an environmental assessment that we're going to do on the cleanup. People have until March 11 to respond. One thing that the Regional Planning Council might be interested in doing is contacting Homeland Security and saying yes, we want to be part of the process and we have something to say about it. They are going to do the environmental assessment on the decommissioning and departure from Plum Island looking just at what they call the facility which is defined as the buildings and the waste management areas. They also know that they must comply with the National Historic Preservation Act and they're going to be looking at historic buildings as well. In the meantime, we're concerned that the federal disposition process is going to be underway very soon. We know that a draft report of excess was given about three weeks ago and they have to determine if it's ready to be sent out to the agencies. We don't think they're going to do it until mid-March. Once they do, that clock starts ticking again. We've been in touch with the Department of Interior and the White House Council on Environmental Quality, and we are hoping for Plum Island to be declared a national monument which is something that can happen through the Antiquities Act. That's something a president can do. In this case, the Department of Interior would then own the island and be involved in its management. This is the kind of thing we're looking for.



One of the things that's really changed since we put the Envision Plum Island report out almost two years ago is that a private donor has shown up. This person is willing to make available tens of millions of dollars to potentially use for management of the island programs, security, and stewardship. Another thing that's changed since we put out the Envision Plum Island Report is that the repeal of that legislation took place. Now, we do have that federal disposition process about to be underway and federal agencies are first up to look at owning Plum Island. We think that the way to handle it would be to have the President declare a national monument and have an agency and the Department of Interior on the island. We would think that New York State would be a great partner in helping to manage the plant life the near shore areas and some of the endangered species that can be taken care of locally. There are nearby state resources like Orient Beach State Park which would be a good partnership. So, we're not excluding New York State, but we're being realistic and realizing that the federal government gets first pick here. We were very happy to have received a copy of a letter that was sent out on January 31. Our two commissioners of the DEC and parks, wrote to the Department of Interior Secretary and the Secretary of the Homeland Security, and said we stand by you, and we would like to help you. Let's work in partnership. They were very clear that they wanted this to be federally owned. These three people are key. The upper left is Brenda Mallory. She is the new chairwoman of the White House Council on Environmental Quality. In the middle, of course, is Deb Holland, our new Secretary of Interior, and we all know our new governor. We're asking for the Long Island Regional Planning Council to write a letter to Governor Hochul supporting the concept of a national monument at Plum Island. We believe that no President would be willing to declare a national monument unless the governor of the state that area was in favor of it. We think that it would be appropriate for Governor Hochul to write to President Biden, or Brenda Mallory, and ask for a national monument at Plum Island. We would love your help on that. We believe that Brenda Mallory would be working with Deb Holland to make it happen.

We're looking forward to a day when Plum Island can be preserved, and we do believe it's a vision that is feasible. The vision has broad support. Bob and I, and the other organizations that have been in the Preserve Plum Island Coalition since 2012 have been hearing everyone say they are in favor of saving Plum Island and preserving it for environmental purposes, preserving historical elements and discovering and celebrating our shared cultural heritage.

You can get more information from [PreservedPlumIsland.org](http://PreservedPlumIsland.org) or you can always contact me or Bob with questions. If the Long Island Regional Planning Council would like to join the preserve Plum Island coalition, all you have to do is say you agree with our mission. We'd like to thank you very much for all the time you've given us today and listening so patiently.

**John Cameron:**

Thank you, Louise, and Bob, for a very informative presentation. I think many of us know a little bit about Plum Island, but not enough. This slide presentation demonstrates the beauty of it and the potential that could be there. I believe there probably are several questions that the council members have.

**Jeff Kraut:**

Louise, wonderful presentation, you answered a lot of the questions along the way. Other than the Nelson DeMille book, we have heard a lot of stories about Plum Island. I always felt we would be cheated by not being able to step foot on that island, so I understand the importance of the National Monument. The Antiquities Act is the number one way to do it, but what would be number two?

**Louise Harrison:**

We're trying to be realistic about a process that we have very little control over. There is this federal disposition process, and the GSA is going to be offering Plum Island to other federal agencies. We're trying to involve ourselves in that

process by advocating. If the Department of Interior passes, it will be offered to New York, and we would be begging them at that point.

**Jeff Kraut:**

It would be terrible if we lost the opportunity to preserve the space. I'm curious if there was a reason why New York would not act and if it does then go back to the federal government, does the town have no zoning responsibilities or authority. Once you give it back to the federal government, does it negate all the zoning work you guys did?

**Louise Harrison:**

The Town participated heavily to envision Plum Island and we were careful to make sure that the Town's vision was part of our vision so that if we get our vision realized it will fit with what the Town wants and within its jurisdictional boundaries, even if they have no control over it. Even if it stays in federal hands, they should be getting what they wanted. They may not have the same kinds of jobs there, but there would be some jobs available. They are interested in conservation. That's what the Town wants. Bob and I presented this very similar, if almost exact, presentation on Tuesday this week to the Town of Southhold. They said they'll be writing the letter so they're in favor of this. New York wants to make sure that Plum Island's contamination is cleaned up and we have faith that it's going to happen. It looks like the planning has been going very well and it appears that it will be completed in 2028.

**Nancy Englehardt:**

I will take the opportunity to share that your presentation was so concise and informative. I'm disappointed in my own limited knowledge about the momentum of this project. While you were speaking, I was already on the website and the list of supporting organizations and people is fabulous. I would like to think about ways our circles of influence could educate many more people about the tremendous opportunity. We must preserve it and create a monument. You've given me a lot of inspiration to get more of an audience. I will be committed to working with John and Rich, and the Council to figure out ways that we can support this and educate more people creating larger scaled support for this project.

**Michael White:**

I just wanted to confirm you were saying that they felt that the cleanup would be done by 2028.

**Louise Harrison:**

That's the plan we knew of as of last May. I don't know if they have a written agreement yet between the DEC and the Department of Homeland Security, but I do know that they're working on that because they need have it in place to complete their environmental assessment. There are a lot of things happening at once; some in parallel and some dependent on one another.

**Michael White:**

So, the environmental impact statement will effectively remain open until they complete the cleanup.

**Louise Harrison:**

This is under NEPA, they're calling it an environmental assessment. They are also looking at it in a very narrow way. I think they want it to be done very soon. They were talking about it being completed by the end of the summer, so they won't have the cleanup done by the end of the summer, we don't think, but they want that environmental assessment completed.

**Michael White:**

I have one more question. If none of the federal entities want to take this on and if you don't hit it on the first go, which is the Antiquities Act and making it a monument, to my understanding it then falls to another federal agency or some entity within the Department of Interior? Or if they don't take it, the next option would be New York State and if it gets to that point, is there money involved? How would they appraise that? What does the state have to pay for it?

**Louise Harrison:**

Thank you, Michael. That's good question. If it gets transferred from Homeland Security to another federal agency, Congress will have to appropriate some funds to make a national monument happen. There will need to be resources for the management of the island. We also have this donor whose gifts will be contingent on a conservation outcome for Plum Island which is why we're really pushing for that with the Department of Interior. That's what she wants, and she would like to see this settled pretty quickly. She's not interested in buying the island, and it's not for sale to a private individual anymore. But her funding can go to Friends of Plum Island, and they can provide long time support to a federal or state agency. If it were transferred under the Migratory Bird act, it could be transferred without a cost to a federal agency. If it were transferred to New York, there is a way there is a mechanism that we learned about where Plum Island could be transferred to the state of New York at no cost or at very little cost, just like Governors Island was transferred for \$1. That's under something called a public benefit conveyance. New York would have to say that they were interested in permanent conservation or some other permanent public benefit, like a park, for that to happen. We think that this is possible at the federal level which is what we're aiming for now. So, I don't want to get too involved with this idea of New York. I don't think New York is standing ready to say yes to Plum Island if this came before them this year. I think that's a more of a remote possibility.

**Shaye Hallee:**

As a reminder, this meeting is being recorded so any questions or comments that you provide to us today will be a part of that recording. If you would like to write in a question to us today, you can click or tap the Q&A button. If you'd like to speak your question or comment aloud, you can click or tap the raise hand button. As those hand raises come in, in the order that they come in, I will call on you by your name and invite you to unmute your mic. If you are calling in by telephone, you can send me that same notification by hitting star nine and I will call you by the last three digits of your phone number.

**Louise Harrison:**

This is Louise. I see that one of the questions came in from the Preserve Plum Island Coalition spokesperson John Turner. I wonder if you would let him speak first. He's he was one of the founders of the Preserve Plum Island Coalition.

**John Turner:**

I want to thank the Council as well as Bob and Louise who gave us a very detailed and comprehensive presentation. I don't really have much to add, but I did just want to make one reference to a wonderful book that is available in the event that you want to learn more about the history and historic resources of Plum Island. It's called "A World Unto Itself." I also will add that it was back in 2009 when Bob, Louise, myself and some others first got wind of the federal legislation to put Plum Island on a path to be disposed of. It was of course great concern to us. One of the hallmarks of living on Long Island is a government that's been very responsive about preserving natural resources and preserving open space. That's been reflected by the values and the actions of the Council. Since that point, you can see the work that we've undertaken over the past decade, and we hope that it will result in some success in the near future. I just want to echo that it would be delightful, wonderful and helpful if the Regional Planning Council was to weigh in to whatever degree you think appropriate to express your support to the powers that be with your desire to see a Plum Island preserved in perpetuity for the benefit of Long Islanders.

**Shaye Hallee:**

We have a written question for the Council. Where will the recording of the meeting be available for viewing?

**Rich Guardino:**

Yes, we'll get the VHB recording of the meeting and we'll make it available on our website.

**Shaye Hallee:**

Is it possible to include invasive species removal as part of the outdoor remediation work?

**Louise Harrison:**

We would hope so. It certainly was a recommendation that came through our scientists and naturalists during the Envision Plum Island process and any of those of us who've been on the island have seen invasive species and know that they need to be eradicated. The management plan for Plum Island will arise from its designation. There will be a public process. We have collected a lot of the input from the scientists and naturalists during Envision Plum Island.

**Shaye Hallee:**

What are the possibilities for interim public access to and recreational use of the island or parts of the island during the cleanup and transition process because creating some opportunities for that could help build public support for preservation as the National Monument or State Park?

**Louise Harrison:**

I totally agree with you, but that may not be the point of view of the Department of Homeland Security, particularly as they do the cleanup. There was public access, believe it or not, until 2018. I know I first went there in 2010. Homeland Security took people on tours, and you had a chance to stand at the top of the bluffs and look down on the on the seals. You could see some of the gun batteries and you also were able to listen to a presentation about the work that they did there, which was really very interesting. We came away with this sense that the animal disease research that was done at Plum Island was really globally significant, where they created vaccines against foot and mouth disease. They cut those tours off in 2018 reportedly to begin cleanup activities. I agree, it would be great to have some access and continue to support people who've never been there before

**Shaye Hallee:**

Can you tell us how many other governments or groups have indicated that there'll be sending letters of support to the governor?

**Louise Harrison:**

We've just begun this kind of outreach. At this point, I don't want to speak for any other people, but I can tell you that we've made requests.

**Shaye Hallee:**

Are there other plans to repurpose the ferry systems from Orient Point or New London?

**Louise Harrison:**

I don't know the answer to that. One thing that I did not mention earlier is that although there's a definition of the facility as being the buildings associated with Plum Island, Animal Disease Center and the waste management areas, there's another definition of something called the property. The property includes the Plum Island

ferries and the Orient Point ferry facility, as well as the cable crossing from the very tip of Orient Point. It's all part of a package that will be transferred together.

**Shaye Hallee:**

Will deer management be part of the management plan?

**Louise Harrison:**

We are expecting that it would have to be and the reason for that is right now deer cannot coexist with the activities on Plum Island. They are hooved animals capable of carrying Foot and Mouth Disease to the mainland because deer swim. So, if they get to Plum Island, they're disposed of rather rapidly. The part of the management of the current facility is to not allow deer on the island, but things will change when deer can swim to the island again and that would have to be part of a future plan.

**John Cameron:**

Thank you, Louise. That is all the comments and questions. The idea has been raised about a possible letter of support from the Council for the initiatives undertaken here and for the preservation of Plum Island. I think I have a sense we would like to support that effort. Do we have a motion to support of a letter from the Council to support the initiatives for Envision Plum Island?

**UNANIMOUS SUPPORT**

**Michael White:**

I would maybe consult with Louise and Bob on the wording of it, but it seems to me we want to lead with support of the National Monument under the Antiquities Act, and then back up whatever they would suggest.

**John Cameron:**

Sounds good. Thanks so much, Louise. For those who may be on the call and may not be familiar with Louise and Bob, they are two outstanding career environmental professionals who continue to do great work. I think this initiative is really blessed to have those two people.

**Rich Guardino:**

Resolution 2022-101 authorizes an agreement with Long Island Financial Management Services to perform an audit of the Council for the year 2021. They have performed the audit for the past five years. The audits were completed in a timely and professional manner and all were approved by the Council. The Executive Committee recommends that the Council retain them for the audit for 2021 for fee not to exceed \$13,000.

**Motion to Accept Resolution 2022-101: Elizabeth Custodio**

**Seconded: Jeff Kraut**

**All in Favor: So moved.**

**Jeff Kraut:**

We have been extraordinarily pleased with the work this group has done. Remember, they had had to assist us on multiple years when we first contracted them to catch us up. That was a lot of work. I think we have a very good working relationship. They've had a high degree of accountability and independence, where we've worked through issues with them, and we do recommend them to continue that relationship.

**Rich Guardino:**

We did have three years in the beginning that we had to catch up on and we've now worked with them for five years. I think they're very thorough, very professional, and independent.

Resolution 2022-102 authorizes an accounting consulting agreement with Strauss CPA PLLC for accounting services. Tammy Strauss is the CPA and Managing Partner of Strauss, CPA. Tammy has more than 25 years of experience in auditing, public accounting, and technical accounting consulting. She was a partner in Grassi Advisors and Accountants for nine years. She's a graduate of the University of Texas, with a Master's in Professional Accounting and a Cornell University undergraduate. Her proposal is for accounting services at the rate of \$150 per hour not to exceed \$9,750. She was interviewed by me, Liz and Jeff as our treasurer. Jeff, you may want to comment on her qualifications as well.

**Jeff Kraut:**

I had that pleasure of meeting with Tammy, and I would say this is an extraordinarily good fit. Tammy is almost overqualified for the work we do. You've heard her background in these CPA firms. I think this is a very high value opportunity for us to have Tammy work with us.

**Motion to Accept Resolution 2022-102: Jeff Kraut**

**Seconded: Jeff Guillot**

**All in Favor: So moved.**

**Rich Guardino:**

The next item is Resolution 2022-103 authorizing a consulting agreement with Rachel Titus to serve as Program Coordinator for the Nitrogen Smart Communities Initiative, and the Long Island Water Quality Challenge. I'd like Liz just to give us a few words about both these programs and update on where we are with the programs.

**Liz Cole:**

The Nitrogen Smart Communities Program is currently in the planning stages. It's going to be a voluntary program that encourages municipalities on Long Island to take action to reduce and prevent nitrogen pollution through a coordinated and community specific plan of action. Some of the duties for the Program Coordinator position will be to educate and connect the municipalities with best management practices, provide support and technical assistance, and work with partners to identify information needs, acquire, interpret and disseminate data about the nitrogen smart communities program. The second part would be to help expand the Long Island Water Quality Steam Challenge, which is now in its third year. It's grown each year and we would like to expand that program. . The program coordinator will support these programs.

**Rich Guardino:**

We advertised a position, and we had a selection committee made up of John Cameron, Barbara Donno, Sue Van Patten from the New York State DEC and myself. Rachel was a unanimous choice after being interviewed. Barbara, you may want to comment since we appreciate you taking the time to be part of the interview.

**Barbara Donno:**

I enjoyed the interview. Rachel is extremely well qualified, and she had some really good ideas. She was a no brainer as far as the resumes were concerned. It's a pleasure to authorize that agreement with her.

**Rich Guardino:**

Great, okay. And the hourly consultant rate is \$70 per hour.

**Motion to Accept Resolution 2022-103: Barbara Donno**

**Seconded: Ed Wehrheim**

**All in Favor: So moved.**

**Rich Guardino:**

Resolution 2022-104 authorizes a consulting agreement with Raftelis to continue implementation planning for the Countywide Wastewater Management District (CWMD). The Council had previously funded two tasks with Raftelis. The Council authorized the transfer of \$500,000 to Suffolk County for Raftelis to do the Countywide Wastewater Management District Feasibility Study and Implementation Plan Report. The Report was completed and released on May 15, 2020. Subsequently, the Council authorized an agreement with Raftelis for consulting services to continue implementation planning for various elements of the Plan including drafting New York State enabling legislation for the CWMD and garnering support for the draft legislation.

**John Cameron:**

I think most people know that an integral part of our programming for several years has been the Long Island Nitrogen Action Plan. When we started the plan, we acknowledged that to control nitrogen, we need to have a management tool in effect so that government could in essence, be able to control it. Wastewater is the primary source of the excess nitrogen. In Suffolk County, only approximately 30% of the county is publicly sewered. We questioned how is Suffolk County going to be able to manage its wastewater when it has no legal jurisdiction over it? In discussions with the DEC and various environmental organizations, as well as both Nassau and Suffolk counties, we decided Suffolk County needs to have control over its wastewater. In conjunction with the County and the DEC, we put forth the idea of a Countywide Wastewater Management District. We started that work four or five years ago. We worked with the County, and we were able to get funding from DEC. We appropriated that funding to retain Raftelis. There was a public procurement and Raftelis was selected. We recognized that we needed state legislation to enable the county to put it on the ballot referendum in November for the creation of a Countywide Wastewater Management District. Assemblyman Fred Thiel and other leading environmentalists on Long Island took the challenge and ran with it up to Albany. It was put through the Assembly and the State Senate. Not only the creation of the district, but also the financial formula, which would include \$5 per month, per household is now in the Governor's budget. It's moving forward and is going to go on the ballot in November for Suffolk County voters to decide if they want to control their own wastewater destiny or not. We're really excited about it. The Planning Council has been a leader and champion working with the environmental organizations, business groups, as well as the County and DEC. It would be a great win if we can get this done. The County has embarked upon the innovative alternative wastewater management program where they're installing 1000s of these systems in residential homes. Rich and Liz have worked very hard on this program. Peter Scully is the leader in Suffolk County, and we work closely with them. I would strongly recommend that we move forward. I would like to make the motion that we approve this consulting contract with Raftelis to move the program forward.

**Rich Guardino:**

I will add is that this agreement is for \$75,000. As John mentioned, this is a critical time and Peter came to see John and myself about it. It's important that it gets passed in the budget and then it's also very important that once it becomes a referendum, it gets passed in Suffolk County. This will be a great assistance to Suffolk County as they move forward to implement the program.

**Motion to Accept Resolution 2022-104: Michael White**

**Seconded: Jeff Kraut**

**All in Favor: So moved.**

**Rich Guardino:**

Resolution 2022-105 approves the 2021 Financial Summary and the 2022 Projected Budget. The Executive Committee and the Executive Director recommend approval of the documents. The 2021 Financial Summary includes under revenue funds that were reimbursed to the Council for LIRPC advances for grant expenses because of the NYS PAUSE implemented during the COVID-19 pandemic. Revenue also includes the restoration of the full amount paid annually to the Council by Suffolk County. In the 2022 Projected Budget, the expenses include an allocation for the Study of Long Island Waterfront Uses and Zoning as well as funds for potential projects with both counties.

**Motion to Accept Resolution 2022-105: Jeff Kraut**

**Seconded: Ed Wehrheim**

**All in Favor: So moved.**

**Rich Guardino:**

Resolution 2022-106 renews the contracts and extends the terms of the Personnel Services contracts for Richard Guardino, Executive Director, Elizabeth Cole, Deputy Executive Director, and Missy Leder, part-time Executive Assistant. The 2021 Summary of Work is included in the attached documents.

**John Cameron:**

We're really blessed with an outstanding staff that has just done great work advancing the initiatives and important issues for Long Island. We couldn't really ask for a better staff than Rich, Liz, and Missy. We made some modest adjustments to the salaries for this year. Jeff, would you like to speak to this?

**Jeff Kraut:**

I would just say that we've been a pretty good steward of the limited resources we've been given and a significant portion of our resources, obviously, must be for personnel expenses in order to do the work that we're doing. As John just said, we are very fortunate to have true professionals that have a breadth of experience. We get enormous value for what we're paying. The executive committee did review the payment history and as John said, we made a modest adjustment in the salaries and some of the benefits that we're applying, which, by any standard in our community are on the lower end. We would recommend the Council adopt the recommendations as proposed in our budget.

**Motion to Accept Resolution 2022-106: Nancy Engelhardt**

**Seconded: Barbara Donno**

**All in Favor: So moved.**

**John Cameron:**

I thought today's meeting was outstanding and it was an important one. These are challenging times, globally, nationally, statewide, and also regionally here on Long Island. These past few years have caused us all to adjust our personal and professional lives in ways we never would have anticipated. It's caused us to reflect upon our life's priorities and sometimes the need to modify them. We have all been forced to come to grips with how fleeting life can be with the loss of a family member, friend, or business associate. Hopefully, we use these challenging lessons as an opportunity to improve the quality of our own lives, and work to help others to do the same. We've just started a new year, 2022. Let's make this year the beginning of a new day where we see the similarities in each other rather than the differences. Let's respect others and most importantly, let us remember that peace and harmony is not possible without respect and civility. Together, we can work to address our problems and challenges. Long Island is a special place, but only if we work together.. Thank you, Rich.



**Rich Guardino:**

Thank you, John, very well said. A request for proposals for the study of Long Island Waterfront Uses and Zoning was issued on January 24, with a return date of March 8. The purpose of the study is to assemble an inventory of waterfront uses and marinas and commercial fishing on Long Island. The inventory will examine how each of the waterfront uses are currently zoned. Land use patterns and regulations vary by the many municipal jurisdictions here on the island. This study will create a central database of waterfront uses and their associated zoning classifications. The project will include analysis and a survey of waterfront areas and land parcels that currently exist in active commercial municipally owned marinas and commercial fishing facilities. We think that this will be an excellent tool for our policymakers as they look at these facilities. Certainly, everybody's aware that they're under a lot of development pressure. The facilities are great in terms of recreation and tourism, but there is no central database which is what we'll get out of this study.

Next, I'd like to mention the STEAM challenge which now in its third year. The Water Quality STEAM Challenge empowers middle school and high school students to design projects that can reduce nitrogen on their school grounds. Letters of interest were due on January 31, and this year 11 schools will be competing including Jericho, Sewanhaka, Herricks, Woodmere, Southside, Northport, Half Hollow Hills, Lawrence Middle School, and Uniondale. A panel of experts from DEC, the South Shore Estuary Reserve, Nassau County Soil and Water, and the LIRPC will evaluate all the proposals. There will be an award ceremony for the top projects. The proposals are due back on March 21.

Finally, the Water Quality Monitoring Program continues the monthly collection of water samples in Hempstead Bay. The monitoring of atmospheric nitrogen deposition also continues uninterrupted. Additional funding has been released to extend the program for an additional year. The scope of work and the budget for the 2022-23 monitoring year is under review.

That completes my report, John.

**John Cameron:**

Thank you, Rich. Is there any new business from council members or any public comment? If not, we will conclude the meeting. Thank you all for participating.

**Motion to adjourn. So moved. All in favor.**