Long Island Regional Planning Council
Zoom Virtual Meeting Summary Minutes
March 10, 2026

LIPRC Members Present
John D. Cameron, Jr., Chair
Michael White, Vice Chair
Jeff Kraut, Treasurer
Theresa Sanders, Secretary
Elizabeth Custodio
Nancy Engelhardt
Jeff Guillot
Mayor Barbara Donno
Mayor Robert Kennedy
Supervisor Ed Wehrheim

Staff and Guests Present
Richard V. Guardino, Jr., Executive Director
Elizabeth Cole, Deputy Executive Director
Missy Leder, Executive Assistant
Rachel Titus, Program Coordinator

Christiana Kastalek
Katherine Heaviside
Mark Smith

Meeting Commenced:
John D. Cameron, Jr., opened the meeting at approximately 10am.

Rich Guardino:
Good morning and welcome to the meeting of the Long Island Regional Planning Council. My name is Rich Guardino and I'm the Executive Director of the Council. We have a very exciting presentation this morning, and we thank you all for joining us. I'd like to do a roll call of the Council members.

Roll Call
At this time, we will start with the Pledge of Allegiance. Supervisor Wehrheim, since you have a flag, could you please lead us in the Pledge.

Supervisor Wehrheim:
Pledge of Allegiance

Rich Guardino:
Thank you, Supervisor. Next, I am going to turn it over to Christiana to talk about the procedure for the meeting.

Christiana Kastalek:
Good morning to the panelists as well as members of the public attending this meeting today. There will be opportunities throughout the course of this meeting to ask a question, engage with the panelists, and also offer a comment as needed. If you would like to do that, you may either raise your hand using the Raise Your Hand feature, which is provided on the lower panel of the bar on the Zoom, or you can type in your answer using the Q&A feature, which is also located at the bottom of your screen. At that point, we will look for either your raised hand or we'll open that Q&A feature. We will then read those questions aloud, allow the panelists to engage, and then move on from there. That'll happen throughout the course of this meeting as directed by Richard and John. John, I'll hand it back over to you.

Adoption of the Minutes from the December 18, 2025 Meeting.
All in Favor: So moved.

<u>Election of Officers for the 2026 LIRPC</u>

Motion to Accept John Cameron as Chair of the LIRPC: Michael White
Seconded: Jeff Kraut
John Cameron abstained
All in Favor: So moved.

Motion to Accept Michael White as Vice Chair of the LIRPC: John Cameron
Seconded: Supervisor Ed Wehrheim
Michael White abstained
All in Favor: So moved.

Motion to Accept Jeff Kraut as Treasurer of the LIRPC: John Cameron
Seconded: Supervisor Ed Wehrheim
Jeff Kraut abstained
All in Favor: So moved.

Motion to Accept Theresa Sanders as Secretary of the LIRPC: John Cameron
Seconded: Supervisor Ed Wehrheim
Theresa Sanders abstained
All in Favor: So moved.

Rich Guardino:
Resolution 2026-101 authorizes an agreement with Anthony Basile, CPA, to perform the audit of the Council for 2025. The Basile Accounting Firm has completed the 2023 and 2024 audit in a timely and professional manner. The Executive Committee recommends retaining the Basile Accounting Firm for the 2025 audit, and the resolution authorizes an agreement at a cost not to exceed $20,500.

Motion to Accept Resolution 2026-101: Jeff Kraut
Seconded: Theresa Sanders
All in Favor: So moved.

Rich Guardino:
Resolution 2026-102 authorizes an accounting consulting extension agreement with Strauss CPA. Strauss has done an excellent job providing accounting services for the past four years. The Executive Committee recommends extending the contract with Strauss through the end of 2026 at a cost not to exceed $11,000.

Motion to Accept Resolution 2026-102: Jeff Kraut
Seconded: Michael White
All in Favor: So moved.

Rich Guardino:
Resolution 2026-103 authorizes a renewal of the agreement with Epoch 5 Marketing for consulting services including public relations, social media, education and marketing strategies for the Council and the Long Island Nitrogen Action Plan. The Council entered into an agreement with Epoch 5 Marketing, a New York State certified woman owned business enterprise, in 2018. The agreement has been renewed annually since then as all the services have been rendered and performed in a professional manner. The Executive Committee recommends this resolution authorizing an agreement through the end of 2026 at an annual sum of $42,000.

Motion to Accept Resolution 2026-103: Jeff Kraut
Seconded: Michael White
All in Favor: So moved.

Rich Guardino:
Resolution 2026-104 approves the financial summary for 2025 and the projected budget for 2026 for the Council. The Executive Committee has reviewed both the financial summary and the projected budget with the staff of the Council and they recommend approval.

Motion to Accept Resolution 2026-104: Jeff Kraut
Seconded: Supervisor Ed Wehrheim
All in Favor: So moved.

Rich Guardino:
Resolution 2026-105 authorizes a consulting agreement with Raftelis to prepare an Economic Impact Analysis of Suffolk County's Countrywide Wastewater Management District. Raftelis previously prepared

a feasibility study and implementation plan to guide the establishment of the District. Following the release of the plan, Suffolk County established a District authorized by state legislation.

Raftelis has submitted a proposal to prepare an economic impact analysis of the District. It will include an analysis of the economic impact and output of the County's current operating and capital expenditures. The cost is not to exceed $60,000.

Motion to Accept Resolution 2026-105: Michael White
Seconded: Jeff Kraut
All in Favor: So moved.

Rich Guardino:
Resolution 2026-106 renews the contracts and extends the terms of the personal service contracts of the staff of the Council.

Motion to Accept Resolution 2026-106: Michael White
Seconded: Elizabeth Custodio
All in Favor: So moved.

John Cameron:
I would like to just make a comment. I think we all know that our staff headed by Rich, Liz, Missy and Rachel do an excellent job for us. They make our lives as Council members a lot easier. I offer a heartfelt thank you to all of them.

Rich Guardino:
Let me just thank all of you. We appreciate your support. We know you're all volunteers. This can be very time-consuming and we're very grateful to have your support and have you as members of the Council.

And with that, I'm delighted to have with us today, Louise Harrison, the Project Manager, Senior Science Advisor for Save the Sound and Bob DeLuca, the President of the Group for the East End. They will be doing a presentation on Envision Plum Island Preserved.

PRESENTATION
Louise Harrison:
Thank you very much. This is such an honor and a privilege to present to you again and meet you all again. I think we were here about four years ago, and we just want to thank the Chair, the Vice Chair, Executive Director, and all the staff who have been so helpful in setting this up for us.

I'm here with my esteemed longtime colleague Bob DeLuca, and we are going to give you a short presentation today, some of which you may have seen before, but we think is worth reminding everyone

why we want to protect Plum Island for its ecological conservation value, for historical preservation, and for the discovery and celebration of our shared cultural heritage.

We will have a three-part presentation, first going over some of the features of Plum Island, touching on our campaign, and moreover where we are today in our campaign. I'm going to bring up the slides now. I am hoping that they are all showing at this point. I also want to mention that we have a few people with us today in the audience who are members of the steering committee of the Preserve Plum Island Coalition, and at the end of our presentation, we might be steering a few questions over to them, as they are experts in various fields related to Plum Island. Also, Bob will be putting some things in the chat, different links that you may want to open and save on your computer if you feel that's useful as we move forward with the presentation.

I think the last time we spoke with you, we might have had about 120 members of the Preserve Plum Island Coalition. We started with about 11 organizations. Yes, there are individuals in the coalition, but our coalition is made up of approximately 130 local, regional, and national organizations, all who want to help preserve Plum Island. We started in about 2011, and here we are 15 years later, still trying to find a way to preserve Plum Island. You are on Bob.

Bob DeLuca:
Thanks. Let me just pick it up from there. I put a link in the chat, which you can take a look at.

With respect to the mission, what are we trying to do? I think our mission is pretty simple, but it's also thorough and it's been enduring. The two principal things we're trying to get accomplished here are:

1. We're trying to secure permanent protection of the significant natural and historical and cultural resources of Plum Island.
2. We want to advocate for comprehensive conservation and management solutions that safeguard this treasure in a public trust as a National Monument, Wildlife Refuge, a preserve or other equivalent protection with carefully managed and equitable public access.

One of the things that we've learned over the last 40 years or so is that you need to keep your options open as long as you can because you never know what's going to happen. If there was something about the Pine Barrens Act or the Community Preservation Fund or the Suffolk County Water Quality Restoration Fund that is unifying, it's that we kept a lot of options open with a common goal, and I would argue that we have the same thing going on here.

I'll also put in the chat a link to the Preserve Plum Island website. If you have not been to Plum Island, the closest you may have been was taking the Cross Sound ferry from Orient Point over to Connecticut or vice versa and you've seen the iconic Plum Island Light Station. We're going to take you a little closer, show you the features of Plum Island and why we love it so much and why we are determined to preserve it.

This is overview government photograph (not showing how green Plum Island can be) shows it as a pork chop shape. I'm going to quickly use my cursor to go over some of the features here and you'll see close-ups of them later. Right here is the harbor going into Plum Island where the workers have been coming and going since I guess 1954. Prior to that, the military came to the Plum Island Animal Disease Center, which is in the northwest corner of the island. You can see the light station here in the western/northwestern corner as well. This large stripy area is a 97-acre freshwater wetland and the triangular area South of it is about 100-acre area of pristine dunelands. You can see the pristine beaches surrounding Plum Island and in the central portion here, the remains of the former Fort Terry which is on the National Register of Historic Places as is the lighthouse also on the National Register. The East End of the island has a road going out to an area where there were gun batteries. There are remnants of military installations throughout and a few on the South Shore of the island as well.

We do believe it is an island of treasures, top of mind, biodiversity. When we talk about ecological communities, we're talking about assemblages of plants and animals, and they have been given distinct names by the New York Natural Heritage Program, which had an opportunity to go to Plum Island over during the four seasons in 2015. In 2016, they published a report of the significant ecological communities they found there. They identified about 24 different kinds of ecological communities on this island of 822 acres, which is diverse in and of itself, but they found five that were particularly significant as best examples in the state of New York.

Here you can see some of the pristine beaches. This is leading out to Piney Point, which is a western promontory on the southern part of Plum Island and a piece of the 100-acre dunes. Here is a better view of the dune system which is extensive and you can see a little bit of the beaches leading out to the beautiful bluff line and the eastern end of Plum Island. Here is another view of the beautiful bluffs. Why do we say they're beautiful? They're not armored at the bottom. There are no houses at the top. These are natural bluffs, undisturbed and unprotected. This is the way bluffs have been for thousands of years before people wanted their views.

Another important place on Plum Island (and probably the best example in New York State) is the Marine Rocky Intertidal Shore on the north shore. There is another really good example off Old Field Point, but the New York Natural Heritage program told us they thought this was the best in the state. Underwater vegetation submerged aquatic vegetation around the world is threatened, but we're very fortunate that right here in Suffolk County around Plum Island, we have 3 marine eelgrass meadows. The largest is just north of the harbor leading into Plum Island, and there are two others along the south shore and the east end of Plum Island. These are really important for nurseries for shellfish, crustaceans and other species.

Here's a better view of that beautiful freshwater wetland at Plum Island. You can imagine how important it is to have a freshwater source on an island surrounded by salt water for the species that live there or fly over and need to visit for a drink. This is a wetland that is interesting. It has stumps of Atlantic white

cedar, and the heritage biologists who were able to go there did not get all the time they wished to examine it. So, there's plenty more here to learn about.

Plum Island is known for an amazing array of birds, and we know there are at least 229 species that have been sighted there. That doesn't mean they all live there, but people on Plum Island have been able to look up into the sky at residents or stopovers or breeders. This is approximately 1/4 of all the species in North America and north of Mexico, all on 822 acres. Pretty remarkable.

We like to brag about all the wonders of Plum Island. As you look at it, as you walk around and think about the various cover types and ecosystems there, but we also shouldn't forget that Plum Island really doesn't exist in isolation. In fact, it's part of a much larger integrated ecological community that extends as an island archipelago, including Little Gull, Great Gull and Plum Island together. That matters because of the species identified on and around Plum Island. They also reside on small neighboring islands and could perish but for the collective presence and synergy of all these unique island habitats.

A great example of that is the Roseate tern which is in this picture here. Fun fact - if you want to know why they call them that, there is a light wash of rose-colored plumage that they get during the breeding season which I have yet to ever see, but I'm told it's there. It is both a federally and state endangered species due to its historic exploitation and its rather restrictive breeding areas. It likes to breed in areas which are not common. They feed on the spearing and sand lance that can be found in the Plum Island waters, and they breed over on Great Gull Island where their risks of disturbance and predation are reduced.

For 2025, I just got these numbers yesterday, the Great Gull population contained 95% of the entire New York State Roseate tern population, considered now the second largest breeding colony in the Northwest Atlantic, representing 37% of the entire endangered US population. The total Roseate breeding population at Great Gull is about 2,300 nests, with a likely total population of about 5,000 birds. Not all of them are always breeding there. Great Gull Island also provides home for some 25,000 common terns as well. It is the second largest colony in the Northwest Atlantic and one of the largest colonies in the world.

All these species could be imperiled by rising sea levels. It's been seen as a major management concern for the area, including places like Plum Island. All of that means that we can work together to protect not just the island for itself, but for the benefits that it provides for so many other species.

Plum Island provides a remarkable unobstructed shoreline and near shore habitat for some of our most beloved marine mammals. Plum Island's undeveloped beaches and rocky shorelines offer an excellent opportunity for seals. You can see them from fall to spring. They live free of harassment or conflicts with humans or pets or other disturbance. Because of all these factors, there is favorable food supply. Plum Island's been recognized as the largest seal haul out in the state of New York and one of the largest seal haul outs in all of southern New England.

As many as 600 seals have been seen in a single survey. The two main species we see are harbor seals and gray seals. They range back and forth between all the islands that I mentioned before and therefore benefit from this ecological archipelago. The harbor seals tend to be most prominent on Plum Island, but you can also see the occasional gray seal there as well.

Louise Harrison:
Plum Island is part of the historical territory of the Montauk and Indian nation. It's also an important part of the Montauk cultural heritage. Sandy Brewster Walker, Executive Director and government affairs officer and liaison, is on the steering committee for the Preserve Plum Island Coalition. We've learned a great deal from her, and we've come to realize exactly the impact of not having public access to Plum Island.

You know that Montauketts were dispossessed of Plum Island in the 1640s and sometime after that it became private property. When the US government started to acquire it in 1897 and develop a Fort, it was a military installation, and you had to have a good reason to go there. When the USDA took over the island in 1954 and it became a high security research facility, it was very difficult to get to Plum Island. So effectively, public access has been cut off since the 1640s and we're very interested in opening it up again in a sustainable manner.

There has been a little bit of public investment in Plum Island in recent years. The cupola and the lantern room of the light station were restored. Apparently, there's more work that needs to be done. Over to the left you see scaffolding. That's actually the operating light station at this point, but this is a historic structure that has potentially another life for some use in the future, could be a bed and breakfast or some other type of facility that would benefit public access and be interesting to members of the public.

I just want to point out this hardened shoreline here. This is the only part of the island where you'll see a hardened shore. The rest of it is natural. You can see the old historic Fort Terry, again on the National Register of Historic Places. Look, this is a view where you can see Plum Gut in the background and on the other side is Orient Point. You don't usually see Orient Point flattened like that with that kind of oblique view. The rest of the North Fork is beyond here, and you see the central part of Plum Island, the water tower and the laboratory are over here where my cursor is.

We have other experts who understand the military history here, but I'll share an interesting little story. It was intentionally designed to look like a New England village. It was built precipitated by the Spanish American War. I think the idea was to bring people closer to the island, thinking that they might find a village and then they would become within firing range. So, a bit of a sneak attack on any invading ships, which never came. The Fort did serve through that war and then into World War I and World War II for training purposes and for departures. This is what's left there. There were other portions a little bit to the east that are part of the facility. The buildings that were in Officers Row are gone. What you see in

this open space here now is known as the Parade Grounds, of course, the Famous Plum Island Animal Disease Center.

Another government photo pointing out that this potentially has a reuse. This area with the blacktop is the administration building. It's the newest part of the facility. It has classrooms, offices and an auditorium space, and the rest of the laboratory is here. There are features of this that we believe can be reused. And as you know, world class research was conducted here since about 1954 when the USDA came. After 2001, it became a part of the holdings of the Department of Homeland Security Science and Technology Directorate.

This facility now is under decommissioning. The pathogens have been transferred to the National Agro and Biosafety Facility in Manhattan, Kansas. And for the next few years, this facility will be completely cleaned up, decommissioned and returned to turnkey condition. We were told that the next holder of Plum Island (as you know from reading the news and listening to us in the past) was supposed to be Kansas. We first learned about this in 2008 through congressional legislation and the island was put on the auction block. That was changed in 2020 and now we're on a different trajectory but still trying to find an owner for Plum Island. That led us into this campaign and among the first in the campaign was the Town of Southold. Bob's going to tell you more about that and why they jumped in and what they did.

Bob DeLuca:
Thanks, Louise. So, we're extremely thankful to the Town of Southold. If you know the Town of Southold, my hometown, you know it doesn't do many things quickly. But one of the things it reacted to very quickly was the likelihood that this island, with all of its wonders and magnificent natural resources, was really going to be sold off. That became increasingly clear after the federal decision was made to put the property on the auction block.

At the time, the town was in the middle of developing a comprehensive plan. It literally pulled this parcel out of that plan and examined it from a zoning perspective, essentially wanting to see what it could do as a legal backstop in the event that the property went into private ownership.

Back then, Town Councilman, then County Legislator, and now Supervisor Al Krupski was kind of at the helm of this. Working closely with the Town Board, they took a hard look at what could happen out there while still protecting the resources. They came up with a strategy that would maximize protection of the natural areas, and I'll talk about that. They also developed a strategy to determine what could be done with the built portion of the island, which is the purple section on the left side of your screen.
The natural area comprises about 650 acres of the island, which totals 840 acres. There, the zoning requirements would allow only a preserve, a park, an educational facility, or a museum, with extremely limited accessory structures and possibly some type of solar installation. The goal was to avoid accusations that they were depriving any future owner of all economic value in the property. At the

same time, the zoning was very strict about what could be disturbed and what would have to occur before any new clearing or construction could take place.

In the smaller portion of the island, known as the Plum Island Research District (the purple section) there are about 180 acres. This is where the vast majority of the island's infrastructure is located. Things like the laboratory buildings, sewage treatment plant, animal holding rooms, and related facilities. Here, they believed there might be an opportunity for a very limited but potentially adaptive reuse of the laboratory facilities.

It's important to remember two things. First, before the federal government decided to leave the island, it had invested tens of millions of dollars, I believe about $90 million, in cleaning up and securing the site. This followed a Government Accountability Office report in 2003 that identified significant security issues, as well as outdated systems that needed upgrading. All of that investment had already been made, and there was interest in seeing whether it could be put to use rather than simply mothballing the facilities. Second, people may not realize that in my hometown, about 200 of the 400 people who worked on Plum Island (many of them on the operations side) were not going to be relocated to Kansas. There was interest among town leadership in finding opportunities for some of those individuals to continue working in the future. Whether that ultimately happens remains to be seen.

The bottom line is that the Town stepped up, took action, joined us in the conservation effort, and created a very important legal backstop in the event that something other than municipal or public ownership were to occur. I think that is a huge benefit. The Town remains very interested and has not changed its position. It wants to see the island protected, and we continue to have a fully supportive Town Board today.

Thank you.

Louise Harrison:
So, there were many milestones in the campaign, some of which you heard about last time, including a lawsuit against the General Services Administration and the Department of Homeland Security over a poorly prepared environmental impact statement. But one of the key moments followed visits to Washington, D.C., where Senate staff members were telling us that the zoning was interesting and that they appreciated the effort and the fact that we endorsed that zoning. They said the federal government is not in the habit of holding on to properties that have no mission and if we wanted the federal government to stay involved with Plum Island, which at the time we were pushing for, and still would be open to, we needed to come up with something much more specific.

So, The Nature Conservancy and Save the Sound pooled funds and hired a consulting firm, Marstel-Day, which was involved in conservation work across the nation, to create a plan and engage the public. We brought together more than 160 stakeholders from all sectors to meet with us in large groups and small groups and talk about their vision for Plum Island. We heard diverse voices, but we were able to come

together and find a lot of common ground in what people thought the island could be. We're going to show you an illustration now of where all of that ultimately coalesced.

So again, you have the shape of the island here, and you can see the research district, where my cursor is circling on the left, and the rest of it as the conservation district. It's superimposed over a map of ecological communities produced by the New York Natural Heritage Program, because that also helped guide our thinking about future uses. You can see that there are different sections that we've delineated. The point here was that we saw the potential for different uses. So, this is a brief overview of those uses that we were hearing about from the public and then incorporated into a plan.

First, I'll show you that we cordoned off the lighthouse in its own district because we imagined that people visiting the lighthouse might not necessarily want to be interacting with whatever research, commercial, or other activity might be taking place in the research zone. So, we drew a line there and envisioned it as its own campus.

This area next to the research district contains the 100 acres of dunes, the 97-acre freshwater wetland, and pristine beaches. We saw this as a delicate area where we wouldn't want to see a lot of people going without some kind of guide or someone to help interpret the landscape. We did see it as a potential area for researchers and for students who might access it on a permit basis, but overall we viewed it as a very sensitive area requiring limited access.

We saw the same thing for the East End. This is also a delicate area. In addition, there are features that would make foot traffic somewhat challenging. There are remnants of old armaments and gun batteries that have not been maintained. They're broken down and deteriorating. We would want to make sure that people entering this area were guided and had an opportunity for interpretation. Most of the seals you saw earlier gather along this portion of the South Shore. So, we would like to see this area accessed by guide, a docent, or by permit.

We saw the central area of Plum Island as perhaps the most durable part of the island and perhaps the area that has been used the most over the centuries. The woods here are largely successional. This open field has been maintained and mowed for more than 100 years. This is where the remains of old Fort Terry are located. We thought this might be the area where we would hope to see members of the public and their families come for a day, have a picnic, look at birds, enjoy the shoreline, and take in the scenery. Perhaps they could then go on a limited tour of one of the other areas.

Let me quickly take up the issue of the Plum Island ferry dock, which is part of the overall government-owned property. One of the things that started circulating, true or not, was speculation that the federal government might try to offload this piece if they couldn't dispose of the island in the way they intended. This property was also not zoned. Once again, the Town of Southold stepped up, took a look at it, and created another new zoning district, the M-3 District, which would allow only a ferry to and from

Plum Island, along with the possible use of the existing building shown in this image as a museum or some other type of public gathering place.

Bob DeLuca:
One of the interesting things here is that the people in Orient Point are very sensitive about how much traffic comes and goes. The existing Cross Sound Ferry is right next door. There was discussion about whether people could literally come from Connecticut, walk over, and take one of the guided tours that Louise talked about, without having to put another car on the road on the North Fork.

Louise Harrison:
That concept was broadly supported by the public. Again, the town stepped up and created a very limited future use scenario, while still maintaining access for ferry service to and from Plum Island. There are many more details available in the vision plan we developed for Plum Island. They're contained in a 72-page report that is available online. You can flip through the pages of the report on the website. Bob is going to put that link in the chat as well.

There's a quick version of it, sort of a cartoon version, where you turn 12 pages and get the overall vision for Plum Island. We're happy that this is available to people.

We do want to point out, though, that this longer vision was prepared when Plum Island was still on the auction block. We had learned that conservation benefit conveyance was possible and it still is. At the time, we thought it would be most appropriate for Plum Island to be conveyed to the State of New York. That's probably the only significant difference between where we are today with our vision and what we were thinking at that time.

Plum Island is no longer on the auction block, as you know, and we've learned from New York (at least under the previous administration) that Plum Island was not something the state wanted to own but rather help manage and be a part of. They saw it as an incredible conservation opportunity. We don't know exactly where the state stands on that right now, but we do know there is a New York State Open Space Conservation Plan that promotes the protection of Plum Island. That plan is from 2016, and it actually says that if the Fish and Wildlife Service did not take on Plum Island, the state would. That's going to be updated pretty soon when the next Open Space Conservation Plan comes out.

Fast-forwarding, as I mentioned earlier, the pathogens have left the island, and that kicks into play the preparation of something called a Report of Excess. That's a key point in the government process for transferring a property out of federal ownership or to another agency from the agency holding it at the time. As you probably know, GSA stands for General Services Administration. That administration is essentially the realtor for the federal government. It has responsibility for looking for potential new owners, acquainting them with the facility, and working out ways to undertake transfers.

We're happy to know that the Science and Technology Directorate at the Department of Homeland Security and the General Services Administration staff are supportive of conservation and have been trying to help move that along. They've been showing the island to large numbers of employees at the federal, state, and regional levels. But the key point will be when the Report of Excess from the Science and Technology Directorate is released. That will start the clock for GSA to begin, in earnest, finding a new owner for Plum Island. We expect that Report of Excess to be issued in the middle to late fall of this year. At that point, GSA will be asking federal agencies for expressions of interest, then state agencies, then the county, then the town, then nonprofits.

If no new owner is identified, or if no one raises their hand, proverbially speaking, and says, "We're interested, tell us more," it will go back on the auction block. This is something we must prevent. We're working diligently to make sure it does not happen. There are timeframes involved, but the good news is that all that's needed is for some entity to notify GSA that it's interested and wants to talk. It doesn't need to make a commitment. That alone will stop the clock again.

We've heard from DEC and Parks in previous years that they were interested in helping. We need to hear from them again, particularly with regard to the historic structures and the amazing natural resources on Plum Island.

I want to show you a little bit of what we've done as a coalition. Our steering committee is about 22 people from different organizations. Bob warned me not to show a picture of people sitting around a table, but it's the only picture I have that illustrates this. We had a chance to go to Plum Island in November of 2024. Our steering committee met with GSA and Homeland Security. We were there on a mission that day to find out what parts of Plum Island could be reused.

During the National Monument campaign that many of you supported four years ago, we had been hearing from federal agencies that there were concerns regarding infrastructure on Plum Island. We wanted to know the specifics. Are there really parts that could never be used again? Are there parts that would impede preservation? What's the story? We had a very open and productive meeting that day. We learned a lot. We got to tour places that most people never get to see. But here's what we learned that we never knew before.

First, we were very pleased to hear that Homeland Security would be open to some kind of interim ecological management while it continues its Plum Island closure and support program. That was good news. But the best news of all, and what really opened up our thinking and imagination about what might be possible, was that we learned that, yes, Plum Island would need to be transferred in a single closing to a new ownership entity, but that entity does not have to be singular. There could be multiple organizations that come together as a consortium. As long as there is a single real estate closing, it would be possible for GSA to make that transfer through a conservation benefit conveyance, which is what we've been hoping for.

This was exciting because up until then we had been hearing that one agency didn't like the infrastructure, another agency had concerns about something else, or that certain aspects didn't fit a particular vision. This creates an opportunity because Plum Island is so diverse with historical resources, cultural resources, and extraordinary biodiversity that perhaps multiple parties could come together and find a good way to preserve it.

This is one of the main reasons we wanted to speak with you today. There are opportunities here for reuse of the administration building as a visitor center. There are portions of the laboratory complex that we learned could remain open, while other portions could be closed permanently. So, we want to help spark your imaginations as well.

We have had support all along from our congressional champions in both Connecticut and New York. Not just in the Senate, but also in New York's First Congressional District, going back from Tim Bishop to Lee Zeldin to Congressman LaLota. All have tried to help preserve Plum Island and continue to do so.
As a matter of fact, in the current Congress there are several relevant bills, and another is expected.
On the Senate side, Senator Blumenthal of Connecticut has reintroduced two bills that were pending in the 118th Congress. The Plum Island Preservation Study Act was voted on by the Senate at the end of the 118th Congress and was approved, but it did not have a matching bill in the House at the time. There was another bill with a similar title, but it was not the same legislation. Likewise, the bill introduced by Congressman LaLota did make it to the House floor but was not voted on. Even if it had been, the two bills were not identical. We expect Congressman LaLota to reintroduce the legislation this year. We know he wants to. We meet with him every few weeks, and he remains very interested in doing so. The Congressman has also written letters to the Secretary of the Interior and to the current President in support of preserving Plum Island.

Another piece of good news is that Suffolk County appears interested in becoming involved with Plum Island. The County sent a letter to GSA last fall. As soon as county officials learned that a consortium approach was possible, they announced that they were looking for partners. Those partners could be involved in education, science, marine biology, climate science, and even island security research. So, this is another opportunity. The county is working with the Congressman and has maintained a high level of interest in Plum Island.

Bob DeLuca:
This brings us to our ask, and I know we're tight on time, so I'll wrap up this way. This has been a long journey, but it's a journey worth taking. We've had no defections, but like anything else, you have to keep elevating the importance of an issue if you want to generate action. We're approaching another major decision point, and we want to make sure that everyone who has expressed support for the coalition's work does so again. Let's continue making it known that there is shared support for conservation, historic preservation, discovery, and the celebration of our shared cultural heritage.
And because Suffolk County has recently taken an interest in this opportunity, I think it helps when they hear from people beyond the usual voices. That's one reason we've come to you. Your stature and

leadership across Long Island are well known and respected. You've helped us before, and we'd be grateful for your support again. Through your contacts and channels, if you can help us identify additional partners committed to conservation, laboratory reuse, historic preservation, cultural study, academic research, or even island security research it would be most welcome, and we would be very thankful.

I thank you on behalf of myself and the coalition.

John Cameron:
Great. Thanks, Louise and Bob. We are advocates. Excellent presentation. And again, the Council unanimously voted and we submitted the letter supporting the efforts for preservation. First, I'd like to open it up to the Council because I'm sure there are some questions here and then see what we can do to help advance this agenda.

Michael White:
So, this report comes out. Is the federal government willing to give it to an entity, which could be a consortium or collective of different entities, or are they looking for money?

Louise Harrison:
It depends on the future use. If there's a promise of maintaining the island for 30 years in conservation status, it could be transferred for a dollar or less than a dollar, which is really good news. There's a list of a few things like education and public health that an island or property can be used for where a public benefit conveyance could be undertaken. But in this case, we're looking for conservation, with the subtopics of education because, of course, they go together.

Michael White:
I would think that for the federal government to transfer it, they're going to need a financially viable entity. Whether it's a joint venture or collaboration, they're going to need to know that this entity has the resources to maintain this for, say, 30 years. Has anybody developed a request for qualifications or a request for expression of interest for potential ventures? Has there been discussion with the state, the county, or anybody to serve as the quarterback in pulling that together?

Louise Harrison:
Thank you for asking that. There's a couple of questions in there. I think you're right, and GSA would not be willing to transfer an island or property without some kind of proof of financial ability. I think that's part of their job. In terms of pulling together a consortium, we advocate for that. We're interested in seeing how these bills in Congress are going to come about. The Plum Island Preservation Study Act that we expect to have introduced by Congressman LaLota calls for something called a special resource study. That would take a while before the federal government produced it and determined whether there were nationally significant features worthy of being kept in the national family of agencies, for instance the Fish and Wildlife Service or the National Park Service. We don't know what the outcome of the

legislation will be, but we do know that the county, in particular, would be taking another route. In other words, not going through Congress but going through the process that GSA already has under the Property Act, which is a longstanding law that the federal government already has. They would be going through that process when the report of excess comes out. So, County Executive Ed Romaine and the Congressman, are in conversations with each other, and we expect those conversations to be cooperative.

We don't know what's going to happen this year, but we do know that it's going to be soon that some agency will need to raise its hand and say they're interested and I believe at that point the General Services Administration can help.

I think they can also wait. First of all, there's time before Plum Island is completely decommissioned. That may be 2030 or 2031. During that period of time, the GSA can help whatever entity has raised its hand determine all the things it needs to determine. It may be even longer before Homeland Security leaves because there is a furlough now and defunding taking place at the federal level. So, there are some slowdowns.

I don't know if I'm answering your question directly, but as advocates we can't pull everybody together. We can support that.

Michael White:
No, I understand, Louise. I think that if there could be a number of entities that would have interests. I could envision numerous entities. But I would think that for someone to express interest, they're going to want to know: What's my responsibility? What are the financial requirements or legal requirements here? Instead of saying, "Hey, we have this island. It has tremendous potential," is there remediation? What limitations are there? Are there private entities? Is there a way for some company, private entity, or public entity to derive revenue to make this fiscally responsible? I could think of a dozen questions that someone's going to have. I think it would help if there was somebody pulling it together who could say: These are the assets. These are the potential liabilities. This is what you would need to do.

Louise Harrison:
I think we all agree with you on that right now. Hopefully the county, if they're going to pursue this, has embarked on that. If it's going to stay in federal hands, that would be handled by the agency that would be adopting the island as its own. I couldn't agree with you more.

I can say that with regard to remediation, we have somebody on the call today. Marion Lindberg is here and she can touch on that if we can open her microphone. She's on our steering committee.

Marion Lindberg:
Well, that was a wonderful presentation, Louise and Bob. Thank you so much. You pulled it together beautifully.

I was with The Nature Conservancy for many years, and as part of my duties I served on the Preserve Plum Island Coalition. I was involved in the Envision process and made a point of reading a lot of the materials from the engineering firms that surveyed the areas on the island needing remediation.

Now, we are environmentalists, so we have taken a keen interest in the state of the land as a result of the use by the Army and the lab. We can assure you that there's been a tremendous amount of study and remediation performed on the outside areas. It's key to distinguish between what's needed inside the lab and what has been done externally, mostly in the conservation district but also in the research district.

Beginning in the 1990s, the areas where there had been waste storage on the property were reviewed and cataloged. There's been a tremendous amount done. Only a few acres remain, and it's not because they're the most problematic. It was fairly easy for the state and the federal government to agree on what was most problematic. It's more a difference of opinion about what, if anything, remains to be done.

The DHS people and New York State DEC have been in touch frequently. Louise has also been in touch with DHS representatives about the latest developments. I don't know how much detail you want, but there are issues like whether we need a foot of soil cover on this acre or two feet, and whether there should be any further removal of waste or whether it should be capped.

There has been groundwater and soil monitoring, and some of that continues in a couple of areas. There are myths that one hears about the state of the island, but we can tell you that it's been very thoroughly handled and reviewed.

As far as the internal lab buildings are concerned, that process has started. There are autoclaving machines to deal with any possible contamination. The internal cleaning can't begin in earnest until the place is vacated, which will happen over the next couple of years.

Question/Comment:
Now, Marion, do you know if the federal government has offered, or have they been approached about possibly indemnifying a prospective buyer? Because nobody's going to want to walk into a potentially hazardous waste remediation situation.

Marion Lindberg:
Excellent question and yes, it's in standard deed language. You can see it on the GSA website. They've pointed it out to us. It will be in the contract and closing papers that there is indemnification of any later-discovered issues and any liabilities arising out of what's already been done. That issue seems to be pretty well covered. I agree with you that should be noted in any materials given to prospective members of a consortium.

I also agree with you that we need costs. What is the minimum necessary to run the island? What are the minimum costs in terms of security, keeping the power going, water, sewage? We don't know yet how forthcoming DHS and GSA are going to be. In the past they've said, "That's classified information. We can't tell you." But now that they're in a mode where they want to sell, hopefully they'll be more forthcoming with that kind of information.

Question/Comment:
Is there a wastewater treatment plant there operating?

Louise Harrison:
Yes, yes. State-of-the-art. It was recently built. Plum Island has the world's second-largest autoclave on site, and it's being used constantly as part of the decommissioning of the whole place. The people there love the island. They've been going back and forth every day. They want to leave it in good condition. They're required to, and they also want to see it end up in conservation.

I recently spoke with Deputy County Executive Jennifer Juengst, and she said that if there is interest in coordinating with the county, people ought to contact the County Executive's office with ideas. Again, you can contact us if you wish, but we would probably then be deferring. We are continuing our advocacy role. We would love to do more, but we're all limited as nonprofits in our various roles.

I want to mention one more nonprofit which I didn't mention earlier. A representative and the President of Friends of Plum Island is on the call today, Richard Remmer.

Richard Remmer:
Thank you, Louise and Bob. Again, a wonderful presentation.

One of the questions that has come up on a regular basis from the federal government, Department of the Interior, State of New York, and I suspect Suffolk County might be asking the same thing is transportation. If you're going to provide the sort of access that Louise was speaking of, whether it's limited tours or however that unfolds, one of the concerns is that a potential owner or group of owners would need a very expensive, high-powered ferry system similar to what GSA runs now.

The GSA goal and mission are different. They have to get scientists back and forth to the island regardless of weather. They need to be able to transport pathogens safely. So, they have ferries that are very expensive to build and maintain. But there are models elsewhere. Clearly Suffolk County has a great deal of experience managing water transportation in conjunction with Fire Island, as well as the Shelter Island Ferry. We've got the Bridgeport-Port Jefferson Ferry. There are independent companies that have successfully moved millions of people every year to Fire Island. They run people to Block Island. It doesn't necessarily have to be run by the county or federal government. The Department of the Interior has proven that model is successful at Boston Harbor Islands National and State Park, where concessionaires are used.

On the wildlife side, you've got the small islands on the Maine Coastal Islands National Wildlife Refuge, where passengers are transported by concessionaire boats. The Stewart B. McKinney National Wildlife Refuge on Long Island Sound uses a similar model from the Connecticut shore out to the islands for birdwatching and other activities. We think that is a model that potentially could work, especially when you consider the existing maritime community in Greenport and Orient. I'm sure some of those boat owners have already expressed interest.

Louise Harrison:
Richard, do you want to talk at all about Friends of Plum Island and the role you see it playing in the future?

Richard Remmer:
I'd be happy to.

There is a 501(c)(3), Friends of Plum Island, which was formed specifically to support the coalition now and potentially whoever is involved in the ownership and management of the island going forward. One of the small but important missions is that we've raised sufficient funds to install a Motus Tower on Plum Island with the agreement of the Department of Homeland Security.

For those who aren't familiar, Motus is a wonderful system used across the country where birds are banded and fitted with small transmitters, and towers pick up their flight paths and travel patterns. The antenna on Plum Island will be able to record some of those 229 species as they pass through. We envision Friends of Plum Island being active in that effort and supporting whichever government entities, private organizations, 501(c)(3)s, or conservation organizations are involved going forward.

Question/Comment:
Have the Montauketts made any claim, or could they make a claim, to the island?

Louise Harrison:
Sandy Brewster-Walker has expressed to us that although there has not been a desire on the part of the Montauketts to own Plum Island, they do want access. They would like to be able to go there, find ways to interpret their own cultural heritage for themselves and others, and perhaps have tours, exhibits, programs, and opportunities to practice their own spiritual traditions on the island.

Jeff:
Terrific presentation. I was out on the North Fork over the weekend. What a fabulous place. These conservation efforts are incredibly noteworthy. Under this administration, the previous administration, or the administration before that, has anyone lobbied the President to invoke the Antiquities Act here? My understanding is that, dating back to the days of Teddy Roosevelt, the President of the United States can simply designate a National Monument or National Historic Site.

Louise Harrison:
You're absolutely right. As a matter of fact, when we approached the Long Island Regional Planning Council a few years back, we asked for an endorsement of a National Monument concept. Under the previous administration, there was a policy aimed at preserving 30 percent of the nation's lands and waters by the year 2030. In keeping with that policy, we did approach the President through letter campaigns, through your support, and through a great deal of support from others.

We also had members of Congress willing to back that concept, thinking that if a National Monument were ever threatened, legislation could support it and codify it, making it impossible to undo through executive action alone. Now we've seen many executive orders reversed, and Antiquities Act proclamations have become subject to challenge and litigation. At this point, it seems like a more precarious route, although if it were supported by congressional legislation, it would be much more secure.

Jeff:
And you have the bill in the Senate and the House, right?

Louise Harrison:
Well, not yet, but Congressman LaLota is expected to introduce legislation supporting a National Monument backed by what is known as a special resource study. That is a process the government would have to go through to make a National Monument designation more durable than one created solely through the Antiquities Act. We were saddened to see that many places protected as national parks or monuments are now facing uncertainty.

Richard Remmer:
I'll just add one thing. Relative to the Antiquities Act and the authority of the President, or even the Secretary of the Interior, Congressman LaLota has written to the White House, I believe twice now, asking President Trump to use his executive authority to create a National Monument at Plum Island. To the best of my knowledge, that letter remains active and under consideration.

John Cameron:
Christiana, I believe there's a question from the public.

Christina Kastalek:
The question is, "What is the status of Lab 257? Has it been thoroughly disinfected?"

Bob DeLuca:
Lab 257 is one of the last facilities awaiting New York State DEC approval for cleanup. My understanding is that if they haven't already received approval, they're very close to reaching agreement on the methodology to be used. My understanding is that they're looking at vaporized hydrogen peroxide, which can penetrate pores in concrete, fissures, and cracks and thoroughly decontaminate the facility.

There is a strong belief that after all these years there are no pathogens still alive in the facility. However, DEC wants to be certain. It appears they are close to finalizing the methodology, if they haven't already done so.

Louise Harrison:
You raised such an important point, and I'm wondering whether you can provide direction or guidance, or whether this Council wants to take it up among yourselves after this meeting, as to a good way to find the resources needed to conduct the kind of study you're talking about.

John Cameron:
Maybe we can discuss it internally and then perhaps with County Executive Ed Romaine and Supervisor Al Krupski. I would also think the state could play a role. State Parks and DEC could be logical partners. Let's discuss it internally and see whether we can come up with some guidance. Not that we're going to have all the answers, but I think we may have many of the questions. And I'm sure you, Bob, Richard, Marion, and your team do as well. Personally, I look at this as a tremendous opportunity, but I also see it from a business perspective. Someone looking at this will see tremendous potential, but also risk. You mentioned a wastewater treatment plant. Who's going to operate it? Who's going to pay for it? There are a lot of questions regarding liabilities and operational responsibilities.

That's why I could envision a scenario where, if the federal government retained ownership under a National Monument framework, it could lease certain operations to public, private, or nonprofit entities. That might be the safest route. But let's discuss it.

Louise Harrison:
We appreciate it because we know the right minds are here to raise these questions and help identify resources. We didn't discuss some of the ideas that have been generated. For example, climate-related work. There have been discussions about connecting Plum Island with the climate initiatives on Governors Island involving Stony Brook University. There have also been discussions about Plum Island potentially serving as a staging or support location related to offshore wind development. There may be opportunities for private investment from some of those sectors. So, I think there is a great deal of potential and many ideas. We would welcome any help you can offer.

John Cameron:
Well, on behalf of the Council, I'd like to thank you, Louise and Bob, for an outstanding presentation, supplemented as well by Marion and Richard's comments. Again, we have expressed our strong support for this effort.

Are you looking for another letter from us, Louise, or anything else right now?

Louise Harrison:

I think you might consider issuing something that reaffirms your support. If that gets to the County Executive and a few other people, or if you meet with Congressman LaLota, keeping the issue elevated among people like yourselves helps us a great deal.

John Cameron:
I think the Council is supportive of that. Anybody opposed? We voted on it before, but just to reaffirm. Everybody in favor? Absolutely. Thank you. No one speaks in opposition, so we're happy to do it. We know this is a challenge, but it's one we believe is worthwhile. Whatever we can do to help. So, thanks again for all you've done. We appreciate it. Thank you.

CHAIRMAN'S REPORT
John Cameron:
As we all know, although we live on an island here, our lives are deeply affected by what happens in our region, the state, the nation and the world. What's happening now is we know the major conflict in Iran over the past 10 days has resulted in the US and Israel decimating Iran's military and oil assets, as well as much of its central critical infrastructure.

President Trump's stated goal of neutralizing Iran's capacity to launch weapons at Israel, other Mideast countries and beyond is well underway. Much of the country's leadership has also been eliminated. With any war comes uncertainty as to its duration and collateral damage that will occur. Concerns over acts of terrorism are also heightened. The stock market vacillates almost daily, as does the price of crude oil. While the national preoccupation is presently on Iran, watchful eyes remain on China, Venezuela, and now Cuba. It appears that for the time being, much of the conflict and wars that were occurring in Africa seem to be to be quelled well nationally.

Political vitriol continues to dominate the media and much of the potential of political discussion discourse. Principal areas of division centered around the Iran conflict, funding of the Affordable Care Act and the power of ICE.

With elections scheduled for November, it's unlikely that a major reconciliation of all these outstanding items will take place anytime soon. The change in the nation's energy policy has also caused great focus on the green energy industry, in particular solar and wind, also affecting Long Island's businesses.

In New York State elections this November will be challenging for all candidates, but especially the local elections as local, state and federal elections are all on the ballot together. Nassau County Executive Bruce Blakeman, as we all know, is challenging our incumbent governor Kathy Hochul. It'll be interesting to see how this new voting system affects all elections, but in particular the down ballot local elections.

Oil prices locally as well as nationally have risen significantly in the past week and the duration of those high prices will largely depend upon the outcome of the war in Iran and the timeliness of its outcome on

the Long Island region. While inflation has been relatively low, unemployment numbers have also been muted for most sectors.

New construction starts have been disappointing unfortunately for major industrial projects with most construction starts being in the multifamily housing market. Though the market need, as we all know, far exceeds the supply expected to come online this year. Our strong demand housing market continues to add to our unaffordable housing situation here on Long Island for young and new potential purchases. Our housing as well as taxes continue to make our most desirable island largely unaffordable for much of the working class. We still have much more to do if we're going to be sustainable for future generations.

Also, I want to share that Nancy's going to be leaving the Council with anyone who may not have heard. She's going to be moving and this was her last meeting. I would like to express our sincere gratitude to Nancy Engelhardt for many years of serving on the Council. But we wish her the best in her move and a lot of health and happiness.

EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR'S REPORT

Rich Guardino:

The Council entered into a contract with Stony Brook University's Gobler Laboratory in the School of Marine and Atmospheric Sciences for the lab to retain and supervise a Lake Ronkonkoma Lakekeeper. The lab has received over 30 applications for the position and is currently considering each candidate and setting up interviews.

Also, the Council entered into an agreement with GEI Consulting to prepare a Connetquot Watershed Action Plan.

We're scheduling an initial meeting to identify key stakeholders to coordinate throughout the preparation of the Plan.

In April, the Council will launch the 4th annual Long Island Garden Rewards Program, a collaborative effort with DEC and NEIWPCC and the Long Island Sound Partnership. This program reimburses property owners up to $500 to undertake small scale water improvement or conservation projects on their properties, including rain garden installations, native plant plantings, and the use of rain barrels. The three eligible practices all play a key role in reducing stormwater runoff and fertilizer usage. The program encourages Long Islanders to take action on their property and protect Long Island water bodies on. To date, we've had more than 500 participants in the program and we're looking forward to the program again this spring.

John Cameron:

Great Rich, thanks. Is there any other new business from Council members?

No. With that, we will close the meeting for today. Thank you everyone.

Motion to adjourn. So moved. All in favor.