

Meeting notes from the LI Regional Council Public Participation meeting  
September 12, 2011  
Hofstra University  
Nassau County

Regional Council members in attendance: Vice Chair Kevin Law, Stuart Rabinowitz, James D'Addario, Tracy Edwards, Belinda Pagdanganan, and Paulette Satur. Work Group members in attendance: Larry Levy, Patrick Duggan, Yves Michel, Linda Bianculli.

The following Regional Council staff attended the meeting: Barry Greenspan, Mark Grossman, Aida Reyes-Kuehn, Amy Lowth, Marianela Jordan and Brian Foley. Approximately 80 members of the public attended.

The meeting began at 5:00pm

Stuart Rabinowitz, Regional Council Vice Chairman welcomed the public and noted that this is the second of several forums to solicit input from the public. He gave an overview of the tasks assigned to the Regional Council and the importance of public participation in the deliberation process.

Kevin Law recognized the members of the Council in attendance. Barry Greenspan, representing the Council's Executive Director, Andrea Lohneiss, made a fifteen power point presentation highlighting the mission of the Council and stressed that detailed information about the Council can be found at <http://nyworks.ny.gov/content/long-island>. After the presentation Kevin Law introduced the Work Group representatives and asked them to provide a brief update on their deliberations and accomplished task so far.

Council member **Belinda Pagdanganan**, representing the Natural Assets Work Group, reiterated how fortunate Long Islanders are to have abundant natural assets and that these assets can be leveraged in order to build a sustainable economic future for our region. The Work Group is currently identifying catalytic, community supported, transformative projects that will capitalize on our regional economic drivers. The drivers identified by the work group include: agriculture, fisheries, travel, tourism and the leisure and hospitality industries. The Work Group supports capitalizing on our natural infrastructure to create a sustainable economy that revitalizes downtowns and restores and promotes the natural environment. Preliminary projects identified by the Work Group include the promotion of eco-tourism, mobile farmers' markets to serve underserved communities and sustainable agriculture and fisheries projects.

**Mark Grossman** represented the Workforce Work Group and identified the growing skill gap between employers and employees as one of the critical issues identified by the group. In addition an aging workforce is also an issue. The limited pool of employees training in engineering and math and the importance of bolstering a STEM curriculum both at the elementary, secondary and college levels was also identified as problems. Mark added that BNL

has proposed the establishment of a STEM learning center: “A portal to discovery” that would address some of the obstacles and issues identified by the Work Group.

**Stephen Savage** spoke for the Innovation Work Group and stressed the importance of innovation as an engine for high value jobs in areas such as biotechnology, life sciences, clean energy and software development. These industries, he added, should capitalize on the highly skilled workforce residing in the corridor encompassing Long Island and New York City. The need to reduce the high energy costs on Long Island was also identified by the Work Group and the solution should include smarter technologies that can be utilized in the region and replicated and exported elsewhere. Mr. Savage also indicated that the lean concept should be applied to the health care, software and manufacturing sectors in order to streamline processes and increase productivity. The Work Group has also been studying the issue of tech transfer and how to nurture new technologies and keep those industries growing here on Long Island.

**Desmond Ryan** spoke for the Infrastructure Work Group and indicated the group is taking an inventory of what we have now and identifying projects of significant impact to the Region at sites such as the Calverton Enterprise Park and where to locate a casino and affordable housing. The Work Group is looking at all aspects of infrastructure including sewers.

**Larry Levy** spoke for the Writers Work Group and indicated this group has the hardest task which is to organize in a cohesive and meaningful way all the ideas and projects identified by the Work Groups and produce a competitive Strategic Plan that conforms to the Regional Council Manual and the imposed standards.

Vice-Chair **Stuart Rabinowitz** provided a summary of the Nassau Hub Committee of the Infrastructure Work Group, and indicated that its main goal is to advise and guide Nassau County in gathering pertinent information that can be incorporated into an RFP for the redevelopment of the site. County Executive Mangano has expressed his desire to cooperate and collaborate with the Work Group.

Upon conclusion of the Work Group presentations, Vice Chair Rabinowitz opened the floor to members of the public who had expressed a desire to provide testimony.

**Jasleen Anand**, representing GEB HIRISE, a developer of affordable housing, expressed her concern about the need to retain an aging population on Long Island and how affordable housing is a key consideration to the workforce.

Vice Chair Rabinowitz agreed that the issue of affordable housing is critical and it influences the deliberations of the Council as a whole.

**Judy White**, representing the Brookhaven Rail Terminal, provided a summary of this key project and highlighted that so far \$40M in private capital has been invested to develop this multi-modal freight rail facility. The project is a joint effort between NYS DOT, US Rail of New York, the County, the Town of Brookhaven and private companies. The site will handle construction

aggregates, building materials, intermodal containers and offer a variety of value-added services to its subscribers. This project will have the potential to reduce by 100,000 the trucks presently using our roads by 2016, reducing the shipping costs to companies and reducing carbon emissions.

**Spencer Ross**, representing the National Institute of World Trade, provided an update on current issues and trends in international trade and indicated that the most important issue facing the region and the country is the trade imbalance. The US faces competition from rapidly developing nations and this provides both opportunities and challenges.

**Peter Quinn**, retired resident of Long Island, indicated that he has no vested interest in any of the issues presented to the Council and was shocked to see that the issue of bond indebtedness has not been raised by anyone. He cited the indebtedness rate of LIPA as an example which is 16% of its \$4B budget. He added that if the Council is looking at proposals and projects, it has to take this into account and the need to reduce, revise and refinance the debt.

**Nancy Becker**, Adjunct professor at Hofstra, brought to light the issue of the needs of caregivers. She indicated the Town of Islip provides, free of charge, four hours of respite every other week to caregivers. She suggested that this program be expanded to the rest of Long Island and that it will provide employment opportunities as well.

**Heidi Sanft**, representing the Nostrand Gardens Civic Association, expressed her concern about the lack of focus on underserved communities such as Uniondale, the Jerusalem Avenue corridor and South Hempstead Avenue. She proposed the creation of a restaurant row in Uniondale to take advantage of the diverse community and nationalities represented in the area. She also recommended a greater involvement by Hofstra University, Nassau County Community College and others with underserved communities and sited as a small step the ongoing beautification efforts in the area spearheaded by Hofstra faculty and students. These efforts, she concluded, help a community learn about each other and grow.

Vice-Chair Rabinowitz agreed and indicated that most educational institutions have a desire to improve the communities where they are located.

**Julie Marchesella**, representing the Nassau Council of Chambers, commended the Governor for his progressive idea of forming Regional Councils but criticized the fact that no “Mom and Pop” small businesses were represented in the Council or Work Groups. This sector of the economy wants a seat at the table and can submit ideas related to mix-used development, building code changes etc. She also indicated that her group supports the establishment of a casino in Belmont since its potential million dollar plus economic activities will have a positive spillover effect on the local economy.

Vice-Chair Rabinowitz clarified for Ms. Marchesella that the Governor determined the composition of the Council and that we have small business representatives in the Work Groups and on the Council.

**Brandon Palanker**, representing Renaissance Downtowns, stressed the importance of sustainable, priority, knowledge-based deliberations in identifying projects and that there needs to be a sustainable approach that can be replicated successfully. Downtowns, he added are the best venues for such projects which have the potential of assisting in the re-development and re-use of buildings and infrastructure in these areas. He added that we need to leverage private sector dollars in doing this and that, as an example, the Village of Hempstead project needs to be taken into consideration. It is important to support shovel-ready projects, he concluded, with a combination of public and private investment.

**David Zuniga**, representing the Hofstra Student Government Association, indicated that opportunities for internships for students in private companies should be increased and incentivized. Students need internship opportunities here on Long Island; otherwise they set their sights to NYC for internship and employment opportunities. Local young talent has aspirations for NYC, not LI and that will change if more internship opportunities are available.

**Georgia Kuhen**, representing Options for Community Living, indicated her group is a local provider of housing and support services. Their goal is to provide affordable rental opportunities to individuals in order to break the cycle of homelessness. In addition to affordable housing, her group provides health services support, educational services and job placement to help these individuals and families integrate back into the community. She indicated that not only the tenants benefit but also the community at large by increasing property values, providing construction jobs and reducing the fiscal impact on social services. This concept is an alternative to crisis care and crisis housing and it is a good way to leverage private and public resources and has a significant multiplier effect in the economy.

**Paulus Stema**, representing the Young Adult Vision Council, identified two key issues of importance to young adults: housing and transportation. He indicated that if the Council wants young people to stay on Long Island, the region has to provide better affordable housing close to adequate transportation. He said the main reason younger graduates leave the island for NYC for example, is that local transportation is expensive since you have to own a car and there are very few areas where young people can live, go to restaurants, socialize and use public transportation to commute to work.

Vice Chair Rabinowitz commended Mr. Stema and Mr. Zuniga for bringing the youth perspective to the deliberation process.

**Roberta Tracy**, representing the Kimmel Foundation, provided a synopsis of their current affordable housing project in Westbury and how it has been quite a success. She recommends that the Council look at zoning in order for developers to be able to offer affordable two or

three bedroom units for families. She also indicated the need to bury power lines and offered her expertise to the Council.

**Jean Menard**, representing the Uniondale and Hempstead communities stressed the need to extend assistance to disenfranchised communities and the need for healthy activities and markets for the residents of those areas. She also indicated that the current LIRR line going through the Uniondale and Hempstead communities creates a segregation corridor of color and that a connection between the north and south LIRR lines is needed for proper integration of the communities.

**Lisa Mitten**, representing the Small Farm Initiative group was surprised that the Council's power point presentation did not mention agriculture as an economic driver especially when Suffolk County is the largest agricultural county in terms of sales. She stressed the importance of organic farms and the increased interest in the establishment of these farms throughout the Island, not just on the East End. She said so far 16 farms have been established in many diverse communities on Long island and that the public at large is becoming more and more interested in consuming food that is produced locally. She emphasized that Long Island needs to grow food for Long Islanders.

**Lisa Tyson**, representing the Long Island Progressive Coalition for Social and Racial justice wanted the Council to take into consideration that when they talk about a "better business environment" that it does not translate into projects creating jobs paying minimum wage with no health care benefits. She said the current political climate is creating a fertile environment for this and that working for Wal-Mart, for example will not provide an adequate living wage for employees. She supported a balanced approach taking into account people, the environment and the economy.

Energy retrofitting and energy efficient improvements in homes and businesses for example, are the kinds of activities that can provide good jobs, reduce the dependency on power plants and re develop downtowns. The Council should establish a Working Group for underserved communities, she added.

**Lynette Fry**, representing the Long Island Small Farm Summit Initiative, made a presentation on her group's efforts toward sustainable local agriculture on Long Island. The group held its first summit in April and was deemed a success since 600 individuals attended the event. Her group supports the concept of using unused land for farming; especially organic farming and these efforts can provide employment opportunities in farming, food production, local food distribution etc. She mentioned the efforts currently underway at the Suburban Agricultural Center in Nassau County as sites that can be utilized for farming incubators and food processing centers for Long Island produce.

**William Cunningham**, representing North Shore LIJ, asked the Council how it is going to measure failure or success in mid November. He hopes the Council, as it gathers information, identifies employment goals for Suffolk County and Nassau County and uses those goals as

benchmarks to measure success or failure. We need to identify a job goal, he added. This way we can tell the public that that's the goal and enlist public support. He also mentioned that the health care industry provides a great potential for employment on Long Island and that young people should be educated in the various alternatives available in this field, in addition to MD careers. He appealed to the Council to take the health care industry into account when deliberating.

**Mary Ellen Krege**, representing the Uniondale Community Council , expressed her support for community gardens , for example as a way of improving and empowering communities but she also identified the need for apprenticeship programs for kids that can't or choose not to go to college. She also challenged the Council to provide apprenticeship opportunities through its members.

**Meta J. Mereday**, representing the VEDT, a veteran's organization, indicated she did not hear anything supporting retired or returning veterans in the Council's presentation. She said a high number of veterans return from active duty every year and can't find jobs on Long Island. In addition, the business they own are languishing. She suggested that emphasis be given to the veterans as entrepreneurs and is suggesting the establishment of a program to transition veterans to contracts with the government.

**Nancy Solomon**, representing Long Island Traditions, provided an update on her group's efforts to transition fishermen from working on the water to land based activities. She added that there are many opportunities for fishermen to work with students on projects related to water ecology and tourism for example. She also mentioned efforts to create a community supported fisheries program to bring catches to the local communities.

Councilwoman **Dorothy Goosby** from the Town of Hempstead, invited the public to a visioning forum will take place on September 22 at Hofstra University. The forum's goal is to gather ideas for the Nassau Hub.

**Marty Melkonian**, a Hofstra professor of Economics, alerted the Council that the Uniondale area is facing a mortgage foreclosure crisis that includes to-date 79 homes. He indicated this is a disaster in this community and that the banking community should be pressured to rent the houses to individuals whose homes are about to be foreclosed.

Nassau County Legislator **Kevan Abrahams** stressed the importance of viable downtowns and that those areas in Baldwin and Roosevelt are languishing. He encouraged the Council to shift the focus from the Nassau Hub into those downtown areas.

Vice-Chair Rabinowitz replied that the Nassau Hub is not the only focus area of the Council.

The last testimony was presented by a farm manager on the East End of Long Island who wanted to bring to the attention of the Council the increasing opportunities for young individuals to start a career in farming especially sustainable agriculture. He indicated that colleges should add farming programs to train future farmers and that this would help reverse the brain drain out of the region. He stressed the importance of the small farm initiative.

The meeting adjourned at 7:15pm.

.