

## **Study Finds Long Island Downtowns Are Good to Grow**

By Nancy Rauch Douzinas

A team of researchers went looking for land in all the right places—and found oodles of it. Enough to start building a new, more vibrant and prosperous Long Island.

That's the news contained in a study just released by the Long Island *Index*.

The researchers, from the Regional Plan Association, explored for usable land located within ½-mile of downtowns or railroad stations.

Those are the places where it's smart to build the townhouses and apartments Long Island desperately needs to staunch the brain drain that is crippling our economy.

Downtown and transit-centered development stimulates the local economies. Expands opportunities for jobseekers and employee pools for business. Eases traffic, cuts pollution, and helps preserve open space. And most of the time, this type of development is tax positive, meaning that if you build it, taxes will go down for everyone.

That's why regions across the country are focusing their growth on downtown areas. It's happening even in places that essentially have to create their downtowns from scratch.

By contrast, Long Island is blessed with great and historic town centers. Some have become frayed in the past decades, but yet are rich in infrastructure and potential. But some have questioned whether these existing areas have the capacity to absorb significant new growth.

The answer, in turns out, is a resounding YES.

Counting only vacant land, land used for surface parking, and unprotected open space, located within ½-mile of downtowns or rail stations, the RPA researchers found some 8,300 acres.

To put that number in perspective: if we were to build single-family homes on all of the available open space left on Long Island, it would get us 90,000 units of housing. We could get those same 90,000 units with a mix of townhouses, garden apartments, and apartment buildings—on just half of those 8,300 downtown acres.

The land is to be found in 156 places, large and small. Twenty-nine downtowns were identified as having high potential for redevelopment. These range from large town centers such as Mineola, Freeport, and Hicksville, to small and mid-sized downtowns like Bay Shore, Port Jefferson Station, and Wyandanch. (The complete list is contained in the report, available on the *Index* website. Interactive maps identify the specific parcels and provide detailed information on every Long Island downtown.)

The study emphasizes that planning must be done case-by-case, based on numerous factors. Not the least of which is compatibility with the town's existing character.

Many of the high-potential places have been previously identified by counties, towns and others as good targets for redevelopment. Some of the places have already begun.

Mineola based its 2004 Master Plan on expanding residential and mixed-use development around its rail station while preserving the integrity of single-family neighborhoods. Patchogue moved to replace five acres of rundown properties near its railroad station with a new mixed-income, two-bedroom townhouse development.

Patchogue's stunning progress over the past decade shows what smart growth can do for a village. Better still, the new report reveals, if you put Long Island's villages together, it's enough to remake the region.

*Nancy Rauch Douzinas is president of the Rauch Foundation and convener of the Long Island Index. The Index provides data about the Long Island region, in order to promote informed public debate and sound policy making. For more information visit [www.longislandindex.org](http://www.longislandindex.org).*