

**What Every Long Islander Should Know:
Working Together CAN Happen Here**

By Nancy Rauch Douzinas

“Working together is not in Long Islanders’ DNA.”

I sometimes hear that when I share with people examples of regions acting in cooperative ways to address their problems.

I’ve always thought that DNA idea was hooley; now I am sure of it.

Because this time my example of outstanding regional cooperation comes from right here on Long Island.

Eight Long Island towns have joined together to form a consortium aimed at making homes and buildings in the region more energy efficient. They have agreed to commit 20% of their federal energy block grants to loan funds for energy-saving retrofits to existing buildings.

Banding together in this way enables the group to apply for millions of dollars in competitive grants being offered by the U.S. Department of Energy. The cooperation (8 of the 9 eligible towns on Long Island signed on) is key, because the federal program is specifically looking for participation across municipalities and agencies. The program could bring \$200 million to the Island.

It’s a breakthrough not only in terms of energy efficiency but also as a model of regional cooperation. But it didn’t come overnight.

It’s the product of years of work, led by Clean Energy Leadership Task Force, a project of the Sustainability Institute at Molloy College.

Since 2004, the Task Force has brought town, county, and village leaders together around energy issues. The participants discuss common needs, share achievements, and learn the latest from a range of energy experts. The meetings build the knowhow and create the energy that leads to action.

One of the Task Force’s first steps was to call on towns and counties to develop Energy Action Plans, outlining the steps to be taken in the coming year to improve energy efficiency. Nine towns and both counties are now issuing the plans on a yearly basis.

Spurred partly by their participation in the Task Force, Long Island’s municipalities have made significant strides in energy efficiency over the past years.

More fundamentally, the task force has helped municipal leaders forge the relationships that make cooperative action happen. The Green Homes Consortium itself began with an innovative program in Babylon. It was at a Task Force meeting that other towns learned about the Babylon program, as well as the opportunity posed by the federal grant program.

What does all this mean in terms of other regional priorities, such as downtown redevelopment and affordable housing?

That’s as clear as the difference between action and inaction. Counties, towns, and villages making concrete plans to do something about affordable housing—how good does that sound?

To get it going we have to get people together. Give them the time and the framework to share their concerns, discover new perspectives, learn how such matters are being tackled elsewhere. Every known renaissance was founded on people coming together. Knowledge builds the potential and communication builds the energy that creates breakthroughs. People start thinking bigger and daring more.

Does it take time? Absolutely. That’s why we need to get started.

Nancy Rauch Douzinas is president of the Rauch Foundation, a Long Island-based family foundation. The “Long Island Index” provides data about the Long Island region, in order to promote informed public debate and sound policy making. For more information visit our Website: www.longislandindex.org