

**What Every Long Islander Should Know:  
Build a Better Burb**

By Nancy Rauch Douzinas

Long Island needs a makeover . . . and we're giving you the job.

It's a design competition--"Build a Better Burb"--sponsored by the Long Island *Index*. The task: take a downtown, any downtown, and think of something smart and wonderful to put there.

We're focusing on downtowns because that's where development makes sense. Downtowns have the infrastructure that helps keep costs, and taxes, low. They offer access to transit, bringing job opportunities and workers closer together. They bring *people* together, too, fostering community, cultural activity, and commerce.

Projects can be anything, from an energy-generating bus shelter to a mixed-use complex covering a whole city block. We're looking for bold, innovative ideas. Projects that will dazzle our imagination, raise our aspirations, give us new ideas about what's possible.

For too long we've been stuck in one sprawling approach to development. Put single-family homes here, an office park there, a shopping mall somewhere else, and connect them all with roads. Then move out and do it all over again.

That's left us with problems we know too well. Not enough housing for young people and seniors. Staggering taxes. Too much traffic, and pollution. Too sterile an atmosphere for the talented young people our businesses need.

The smart move forward is to shift our focus back, to a landscape centered on town life. Instead of using up our last remaining open space just to add to our problems, let's start retrofitting our underutilized downtowns.

The land is there, ripe for revitalization. Some downtowns are languishing from decades of

neglect. Even the most vibrant have sizable areas that could be much better used. A new study published by the *Index* catalogued just the land used for surface parking, vacant land, and unprotected open space located within ½-mile of a downtown or rail station—and came up with 8,300 acres, in 156 localities. Port Washington has 50 acres of such land, Amityville 124, Water Mill 20, and on and on.

Imagine what could be done with that land. I mean *really* imagine it--and show us your vision.

The contest is open to all: professional architects . . . students . . . anyone who can see things as they never have been and ask why not.

The best ideas, designs, images, and videos will be selected as finalists by a jury of distinguished academics and professionals. Finalists' work will be displayed and publicized and Long Islanders invited to comment and vote for a "People's Choice" Award. Cash prizes totaling \$22,500 will be awarded.

It's all about us getting together and thinking about what Long Island can be. It's about rekindling the bold, visionary spirit that made our region great. Long Islanders led the way in inventing suburbia. Now let's re-invent it.

So come on, everybody. Start dreaming, start planning. Get contest details at <http://buildabetterburb.org>. Then scope out the interactive maps on the *Index* website. Pick out a spot that's in need of a brilliant idea. And give us a glimpse of the future.

*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.*