

**What Every Long Islander Should Know:
Starting to make Connections**

By Nancy Rauch Douzinas

A child's first steps are less about the steps than the growth. The very words "first steps" imply that more are to come. It's all about promise.

I see Long Island today starting to take steps that could usher in a new stage in our growth. What's most exciting is that this growth is coming right where Long Island's development has lagged: making connections and working as a team.

From its infancy, Long Island has been balkanized. Our division into separate counties, towns, villages, school districts, and so on, has brought us inefficiency, and unequal opportunity.

Besides *causing* problems, our divisions hinder us from correcting them. Town and village officials are accountable for advancing the specific interests of their localities. No entity with any power is charged with looking out for the good of the region. Again and again we see narrow interests prevail over larger ones.

Nor have we built the bridges we need between interest groups, as other regions have. The Silicon Valley Leadership Group, to take a prime example, brings together the officers and senior managers of over 200 companies to address public policy issues affecting the region. The group advocates for affordable housing, transit, educational improvement, and more. What makes this group so effective is that it seeks out and nurtures alliances between unlikely sectors.

One of its initiatives was to join forces with environmentalists to hammer out a plan for the region's development. With the plan in place, the alliance now reviews all major building proposals, reaches consensus, then jointly advocates for or against acceptance. The result: a vast majority of the projects the alliance advocates for get approved.

Long Island is far behind in making such connections. But this may finally be changing.

- There's talk of major developers getting together and starting to build links with environmental groups to find common ground. For too long open space preservation has been pitted against the need for affordable housing, and we've ended up without enough of either. If the two sides can agree on where to build and where to preserve, that wouldn't be a baby step—it would be huge.
- On the government side, the Suffolk County Planning Commission is reaching out to planning departments at every level--from cities and towns to local villages--to win agreement for a voluntary model code. Acceptance would allow densities to rise where building makes sense: in downtowns and around railroad stations.
- Collaboration between Stony Brook University, Cold Spring Harbor Laboratory, and Brookhaven National Laboratory is also growing. Imagine: these world-leading centers in life sciences, genetics, and advanced medicine spawning a next-generation industry so cutting edge, it makes computers seem old hat.

There are proven ways for research institutes to incubate such industries. San Diego, for example, building from its university's expertise in biological science, rocketed from a city reeling from cold war defense cuts to the world's 36th largest economy (after Portugal and before Venezuela). The folks who led the effort were so much about connections, they named their group "UC San Diego **Connect**."

Now that Long Island's got hold of the idea, we should run with it.

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