

**What Every Long Islander Should Know:
Imagining a Better Long Island**

By John McNally

Late last year, Nancy ceded this column to me – a 30 something trying to make it work on the Island – to talk about what it would take to retain and attract young adults to Long Island. My general point was that it's more than just rental units and affordable housing options. It's the creation of a sense of place, a vibrancy, a diverse culture where we could mix with others, walk to attractions, ride a bike to work...

Judging by the reaction to the column, I wasn't alone in that thinking. Scores of individuals, both young and old, wrote responses voicing their aspirations for the Island, acknowledging that it's a great place, but recognizing that it could be so much more. So what's stopping us?

Long Island is suffering from a crisis of imagination. For thirty years, the region has struggled with the same host of issues – high taxes, insane traffic and lack of affordable housing. - and for thirty years, we've largely ignored them. Taxes are now higher, traffic is worse, and the region's greatest export is now its bright young minds. We are, quite simply, a region in decline.

Prominent automotive engineer and prolific inventor Charles Kettering once said, "Our imagination is the only limit to what we can hope to have in the future" and I think that's true for Long Island. We led the nation in defining modern suburbia when we built out Levittown. We were cutting edge when we helped to put a man on the moon. Since then? Not so much.

It's once again time for Long Island to tap into its collective imagination and begin to create a better future.

And that's why I'm excited by the Long Island Index-sponsored Build a Better Burb contest. In March, we asked designers, architects, artists and creative minds from around the world to think of our Island not as it is, but how it could be. We identified thousands of potentially developable land in and around the Island's existing

downtowns and rail stations and asked them, "What if?". And the response has been incredible.

As I type, hundreds of people representing 30 countries and 24 states have registered for the contests and are submitting their concepts about what our towns could look like with a little dose of imagination...and in some cases, quite a bit. By the time you read this, a panel of judges will have selected the most intriguing of the ideas and we'll be asking you to vote on your favorite. In doing so, we hope you'll begin to look at your town just a little bit differently. A little bit more consciously. A little more creatively.

For most, the summer is a time when things slow down just a notch or two. More time with our families, more time in our towns and villages, more time at our beautiful parks and beaches. Next time you're sitting in traffic en route to one of these places, rather than get frustrated, why not dream a little bit about what could be?

What if that underutilized parking lot were actually a park? Could an apartment go above that corner convenience store? What would it take to turn your downtown into a place a young adult or retiring senior might want to live?

Long Island needs your ideas. We use to be a place that led that led the nation. With a little bit of imagination, we can again.

For inspiration, go to www.buildabetterburb.org and VOTE!!!

John McNally is environmental program officer and communications director of the Rauch Foundation. Rauch Foundation is the convener and publisher of the Long Island Index, which provides data about the Long Island region, in order to promote informed public debate and sound policy making. www.rauchfoundation.org