

**What Every Long Islander Should Know:
Building Consensus**

By Nancy Rauch Douzinas

Imagine a table with a large map of Long Island spread out on top, showing not only roads and highways, but rail lines, housing, commercial development, farms, and open space. Also a stack of chips of different colors.

The chips aren't for gambling; they're for planning Long Island's future. Each color represents a different kind of development: McMansions, apartment houses, office buildings, etc.

Your job: decide where on Long Island to place what kind of development to allow our region to grow by an estimated 400,000 souls by 2035.

That's the task that was given to some 140 Long Island leaders—including politicians, developers, businesspeople, environmentalists—some weeks ago at the Melville Marriott. It was an exercise in "visioning" organized by the Regional Plan Association, Vision Long Island, Sustainable Long Island, and the Long Island Regional Planning Council.

The idea was to move beyond broad statements of principle—"We need to preserve," or "We need to grow"—which mostly serve to divide us. Get down to concrete choices, the thinking goes, and you'll find much more agreement than you'd expect.

Think, for instance, where you would place your chips. Would you:

- Spread housing evenly across the Island and continue the Island's existing development pattern.
- Spread it in small doses, but in downtown areas and near railroad stations.
- Focus it in major hubs, such as the Nassau Hub and the former Pilgrim State Hospital.

At the Marriott meeting, the first option was the least popular. Participants thought it better to avoid using up open space and filling in existing neighborhoods. A consensus agreed on the benefit of placing development near rail facilities. Redeveloping underused sites, instead of eating up more land. Increasing the stock of multi-family

and smaller-lot homes. Bringing housing and employment opportunities closer together, in major hubs, smaller downtowns, and technology centers near universities and Brookhaven National Laboratory.

You don't have to be a policy wonk or "Long Island leader" to see the sense in such ideas. Indeed, a Long Island Index poll found that a solid majority of Long Islanders favor re-zoning to allow more rental apartments in downtown shopping areas and near train and bus stations.

That was in 2007. It seems like Long Islanders are waiting for their leaders to catch up.

The men and women at that visioning meeting now realize how much they agree on. I'd like to see them get together and turn these ideas into reality. If a coalition of developers, business interests, environmentalists, and others came together to support concrete plans, it would open a new chapter in Long Island's history.

Other regions have done it. In Silicon Valley an alliance of business and other leaders got behind plans for more affordable housing and sustainable growth. In seven years the average density of new development more than tripled. And by 2005, nearly 40% of all new development was located within ¼-mile of transit facilities.

Long Islanders in agreement—that's a rare sight. Let's build on 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