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Build Apartments, and They Will Come

The economic future of Long Island depends on developing transit-oriented multifamily housing across all price points. That's not instead of single-family neighborhoods; that's to strengthen single-family neighborhoods.

We all know too well the complaints of excessive property taxes, unaffordable housing, not enough jobs, and young people leaving. That won't change until Long Island offers more housing options, accessible to public transit, in settings that attract businesses and young people.

My experience building more than 1,000 affordable rental apartments, while leading the Community Development Corporation of Long Island (CDCLI), provides confidence

that such essential developments will enhance the region's traditional strengths and values—not undercut them. That experience suggests some guiding principles:

First, the housing should always be transit-oriented: near trains and/or buses. That provides easy access, enhances walkability, and reduces congestion and pollution. Walkability is key, because it increases community, strengthens local businesses, and provides a destination for those living downtown as well as those in nearby neighborhoods, which are reinforced in the process.

Second, the housing should be at all price points (with both ownership and rental options) for several reasons: to offer breadth of opportunity and choice to respond to diverse needs; to provide housing for those who work in local businesses as well as those who shop there, and to ensure that



everyone, regardless of income, has money (not consumed by housing) to spend locally. It's always easier to get approval for higher-cost housing, but it's vital to have the full range.

Third, that range of housing should be located together—not separated. It should reinforce community, and it's already happening. Wincoram Commons, which CDCLI co-developed, and the luxury Enclave at Charles Pond Apartments are located next to each other in Coram. Together they bring needed definition and vitality to the hamlet's center.

Fourth, support for multifamily housing has grown on Long Island, as Long Islanders themselves seek more options. The 2017 Long Island Index survey shows that most Long Island residents support raising height limits in local downtowns from two to four stories to build apartments above stores. That proposal is especially popular among young Long Islanders (74% of those 18-34). And 26% of Long Islanders expect to live in an apartment, condo, or townhouse in five years (an increase of 11% from 2015).

That support is reinforced by growing evidence of downtown development. Downtowns like Patchogue, Copiague, and Rockville Centre have permitted higher-density housing, and it has invigorated their centers as well as the surrounding neighborhoods. The benefits are no longer theoretical; they can be seen, experienced, and enjoyed over dinner.

Fifth, the greatest practical barrier going forward is no longer public opinion; now it's outdated municipal zoning codes—often 50 or 60 years old. It will take time, effort, and expense to update them. But that's no excuse; it's essential.

Long Island is lopsided with single-family housing, and the multifamily housing that is needed will not change that reality. What it will do is provide a range of housing options and the economic vitality to sustain the region's single-family neighborhoods in the 21st century.

Build apartments, and they will come. And they will be coming largely from Long Island.

Ms. Garvin was President & CEO of the Community Development Corporation of Long Island from 2009 to 2017.

