

BOB KEELER

A Better Long Island for All

Perhaps the most difficult attitude to nurture in Long Islanders is regional thinking. Despite the best efforts of the Long Island Index and *Newsday*, the Long Island newspaper, regional thinking remains a still-desirable but still-distant goal. That is deeply disappointing to me, as a Long Islander, as an employee of *Newsday* for more than four decades, and as the author of a book about the paper, which also focused on the history of Long Island.

In the 1940s, the decade when both *Newsday* and I came into being, Long Island was essentially a collection of small villages separated by large trees. The number of trees has declined, the number of villages has increased, but the sense of regional interconnectedness has not grown nearly enough.

Yes, entities such as the Long Island Regional Planning Council and the Long Island Regional Economic Development Council have come into existence, and they perform useful roles. But the instinct of separateness and parochial thinking continues, untamed.

Take the Third Track for the Long Island Rail Road, between Hicksville and Floral Park. Research commissioned by the Index showed that it would produce major regional benefits. Still, local officials resisted, thinking locally instead of regionally. One of the great triumphs of the Rauch Foundation and the Index, through the creation of the Right Track for Long Island Coalition, has been overcoming that resistance and putting the Third Track on a promising road to completion.

Still, the array of more than 600 governmental entities, from elevator

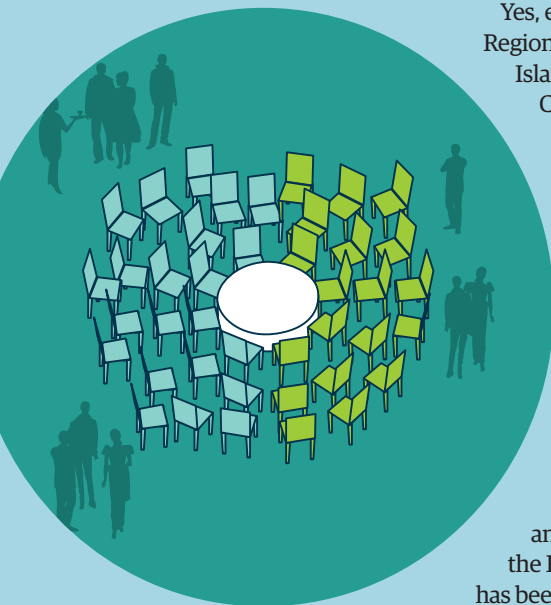
districts to huge towns, has stood in the way of regional thinking and progress toward a sustainable future for Long Island. That progress requires less reliance on cars, better mass transit, and walkable downtowns—all key elements of what the Index research has shown Long Island needs.

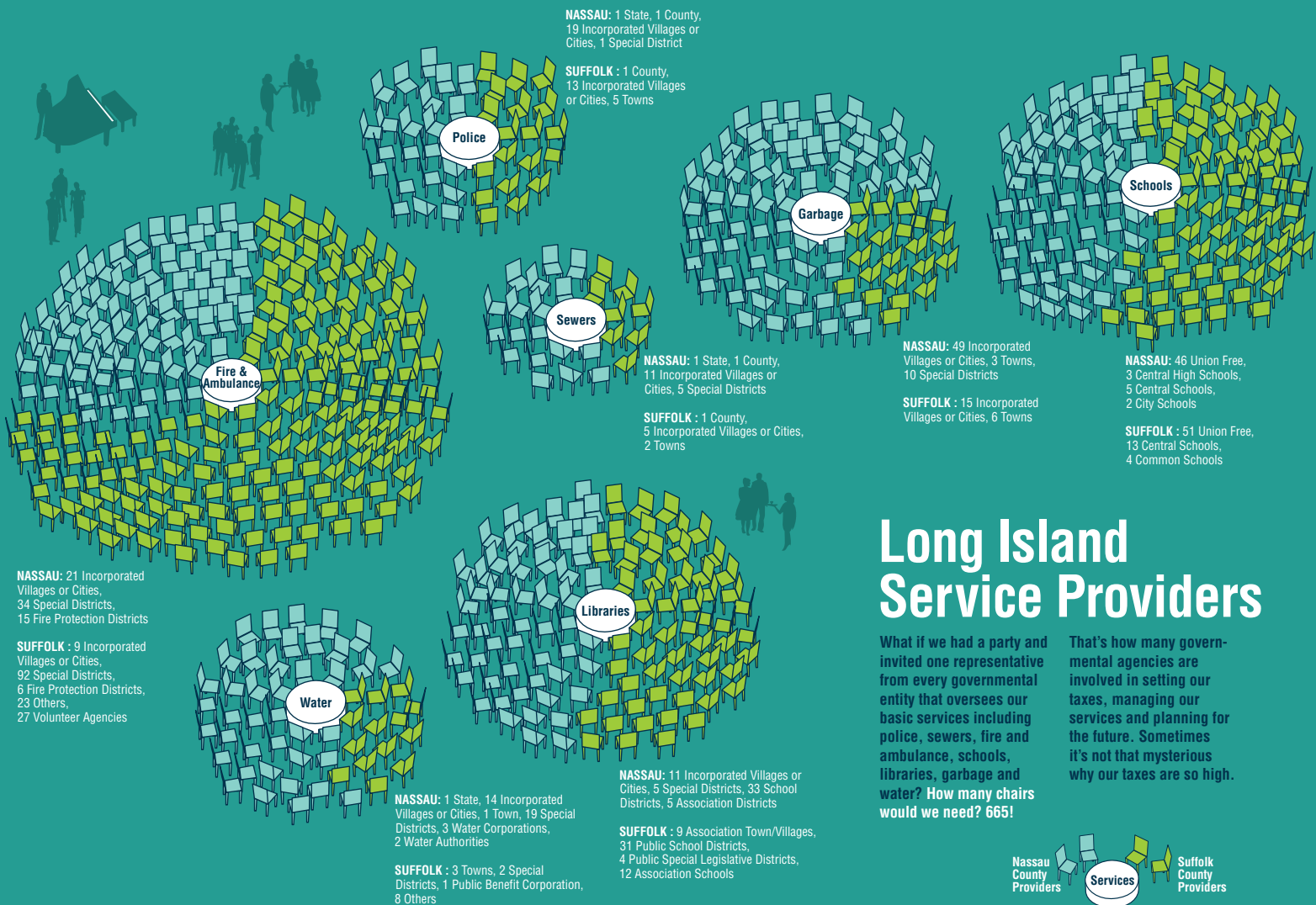
“Cost aside, those many levels of government, and their varying rules and regulations, also slow the planning and development process and make it harder to move forward on the key issues impacting the region,” said the Index’s overview of issues impacting Long Island. “As a result, developers find it far easier to replicate the automobile-dependent, single-purpose suburb of the past than to create the mixed-use, transit-oriented and walkable downtowns the region needs for the future—and which young Long Islanders demand.”

In addition to the multiplicity of government units, the obstacles to a sustainable region include the proliferation of industrial development agencies, too often competing with one another and giving corporations tax breaks that do not produce the promised number of jobs.

Until we start to think as a single unified region, working toward the common good of its nearly three million residents, we will continue to be stuck with the reality that the Index has documented: the continuing loss of the young people who should be the region’s future. The Index has worked hard to produce the data that show what we need, what we have, and what we’re missing. Now it’s time for our local leaders to lead the way to the future with a strong dose of regional thinking.

Mr. Keeler is a former Newsday reporter and editor.





Long Island Service Providers

What if we had a party and invited one representative from every governmental entity that oversees our basic services including police, sewers, fire and ambulance, schools, libraries, garbage and water? How many chairs would we need? 665!

That's how many governmental agencies are involved in setting our taxes, managing our services and planning for the future. Sometimes it's not that mysterious why our taxes are so high.