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November 1, 2010

Attn: Master Plan Comments
Nassau County Planning Department
100 County Seat Drive
Mineola, NY 11501

Dear Nassau County Planning Commission:

Sustainable Long Island is a regional not-for-profit organization promoting sustainability through social equity, economic development and environmental health for all Long Islanders now and for generations to come. For over 12 years we have partnered with local communities to help create visions and redevelopment plans that serve as guides for revitalization efforts, facilitate the remediation and redevelopment of brownfields, and promote access to healthy foods especially in communities without full-service supermarkets.

At Sustainable Long Island we believe that solutions to creating a more sustainable region must come from the bottom-up. Residents of all ages and backgrounds must be actively engaged in the decisions being made in their communities. We strongly support the master planning process and applaud the County's comprehensive planning efforts and the undertaking of this initiative. The draft Master Plan identifies many important priorities and Sustainable Long Island would like to offer several recommendations to consider as the County moves forward with the Master Plan.

Economy

Housing

Long Island generally suffers from a lack of affordable and rental housing necessary for truly diverse communities that include homeowners and renters of all ages and backgrounds. We support the County's inclusion of diversifying housing stock among policy priorities. To ensure positive long-term economic impact on the region, it is imperative that newly created jobs go to Long Islanders and that they are here to stay. Sustainable Long Island commends the County's focus on encouraging growth and partnerships in growing sectors and encourages the County to promote development of job training programs that can expedite local hiring and support local businesses. Chapter 5 of the Plan refers to workforce training as a way to stimulate economic investment (p. 3). It is essential that as these sectors grow, all Long Islanders have access to job opportunities.

Food Equity

Several Nassau communities lack sufficient access to supermarkets, making it difficult to obtain fresh, healthy, affordable produce and negatively impacting community health and economic development. In communities without adequate options for purchasing food, residents are often forced to spend their grocery money elsewhere and that money is "leaked," or leaves the community. In Oakland, CA for example, an estimated 70% of the city's "food dollars" (\$35 million per year) are spent outside the local economy.¹ Nassau communities that leak food dollars, such as Elmont and North Lynbrook, could benefit from strategies to promote economic development and job creation through food equity. According to The Reinvestment Fund, these communities are currently leaking 100 percent of their grocery dollars to neighboring areas.²

The food system has significant impacts on communities and the lives of residents in terms of the local economy, jobs, the transportation system, the environment, health, and waste disposal. Improving this system requires collaboration between planners, municipal officials, developers and community members using a mix of data analysis, land use and environmental planning, policy innovation, economic development and urban design. In its Policy Guide on Community and Regional Food Planning, the APA, which supports comprehensive food planning

¹ Laurison, H. and Young, N. (2009) Development Report 20: Oakland Food Retail Impact Study. Public Health Law & Policy in collaboration with Food First Institute for Food and Development Policy.

² The Reinvestment Fund. Supermarket Study of Low Access Areas for Brookings Institution, <http://www.policymap.com/maps>, accessed November, 2010.



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at the community and regional levels, recommends that planners “integrate recommendations emerging from community and regional food planning into comprehensive plans and supporting ordinances, strategic plans, economic development plans, environmental plans, neighborhood or area plans, and plans for specific agencies such as transportation and parks and recreation.”³ Regional plans and policies can strengthen markets for food producers and improve regional health by supplying local retailers with produce and reducing long-distance transportation of products.

According to the USDA if a food system in a community of 150,000 people could capture five percent (5%) of the total food markets, it could generate up to \$13.5 million in annual sales.⁴ Money spent at farmers’ markets and local grocery stores generates additional dollars elsewhere in the economy, generating direct and indirect income for employees, farmers, and jobs for local residents. Sustainable Long Island urges the County to prioritize economic development opportunities that also improve access to nutritious, affordable food.

Recommendations:

- Promote development of job training programs that prepare workers for jobs in growing sectors - it is critical to ensure equity, that all Long Islanders have access to job opportunities.
- Provide a range of housing options in terms of type and price-point: ensure ownership and for-sale units are available at a range of prices, including “affordable” rates, to make options more equitable and available to people of all ages and income ranges.
- Encourage private investment – offering abatements, expediting or streamlining regulatory requirements – to attract desirable development in targeted locations.
- Acknowledge the importance of access to fresh, healthy, affordable produce in community health and incorporate elements of food system planning into local, regional and Master planning and policies. Several Nassau communities lack adequate access to supermarkets and are at a disadvantage when it comes to living healthy lives.
- Prioritize economic development that also improves access to nutritious, affordable food. Strategies to improve access to healthy foods can positively impact economic development through business attraction and development and by redeveloping underutilized commercial spaces and blighted properties.

Land Use

Sustainable Long Island supports the county’s focus on downtown and transit-oriented development and the focus on key properties such as the Nassau Hub, the Grumman site, brownfields, and underutilized commercial corridors. These properties present opportunities for targeted development that will take pressure off of other areas, including precious open space. Not only will focusing development on such sites enhance aesthetic character, provide space for workforce and other rental housing, and accommodate mixed use development as stated in the Master Plan, but it will also put properties back on the tax rolls and improve and protect environmental health, including Long Island’s drinking water. Strategic, concentrated development, especially near public transit, will reduce the impacts associated with growth, such as traffic congestion, energy consumption and carbon emissions while improving downtown and neighborhood conditions.

Sustainable Long Island praises the inclusion of priorities developed through community visioning and planning processes in the Master Plan. Continuing to sponsor local planning initiatives, as recommended in the Action Items, will ensure Nassau residents have a voice in planning for their futures. It can help residents understand the planning process and how to advocate for changes they do want rather than resist what they do not want. The key is to ensure that community plans are looked at holistically and that they are implemented.

As the nation’s oldest suburb and currently home to almost three million residents, Long Island is among the first suburban communities faced with aging infrastructure, threats to its sole source aquifer, a complex municipal structure and history of segregation. The region faces environmental justice and social issues which hinder integration and act as hurdles to redevelopment and could benefit from a coordinated strategy to remediate and

³ (2007). Specific Policy #1A, p. 8.

⁴ USDA. (2007). *Adding Values to Our Food System: An Economic Analysis of Sustainable Community Food Systems*.



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redevelop brownfields. Sustainable Long Island supports an area-wide approach to redevelopment of brownfield sites, such as the Brownfields Opportunity Area program.

Recommendations:

- Follow through on recommendations to focus on development and redevelopment of strategic sites, including downtowns, brownfields, and underutilized commercial properties.
- Continue to engage community members in planning processes, giving them meaningful opportunities to participate, review and provide comments on plans and projects going forward.
- View planning holistically: ensure that Regional Plans, local Master Plans, Community Plans and others build on and reflect one another.
- Implement an area-wide BOA program that effectively and efficiently ties resources and programs together working across governmental entities and disciplines to redevelop brownfield sites throughout the county.

Infrastructure

Transportation

More than half of Nassau residents live and work in Nassau, commuting within the County, and more than 75% of Long Islanders now live and work on Long Island. Long-term sustainability requires an increase in both public transportation services and ridership. With ridership recently at its highest levels on Long Island bus and given the tough financial conditions many Nassau residents are experiencing, it is critical to ensure sustainability of an accessible transportation system so that residents can get to and from work, school, and essential services like the grocery store. All Nassau residents ought to have access to affordable and functional public transportation as well as improved intra-island travel, particularly between significant employment centers and along major corridors. This can be accomplished through many of the recommendations included in the draft Master Plan.

Last year, prior to recent service cuts, the Metropolitan Transportation Authority released a report and set a goal to capture 2/3 of additional vehicle miles traveled in the region by public transit. The report includes a list of possible places to pursue this goal and specifically mentions, “the integration of public transit components into the Nassau Hub project, including the examination of a reactivation of the LIRR Garden City spur into the hub.”⁵ Despite serious budget shortfalls, capturing vehicle miles traveled is still a worthy goal and Nassau County should encourage transit development around the Hub and other key sites. When combined with strategies such as downtown and transit-oriented development, increased freight rail, pedestrian and bicycle networks, these recommendations will go a long way towards making Nassau a more livable place for all.

Recommendations:

- Prioritize regionalization of the transportation system – particularly bus service in Nassau County
- Encourage transit development around key sites and promote alternatives to automobiles such as freight rail, networks of sidewalks, bike trails and transit-oriented development
- Continue to improve intra-island travel including increased north-south connections, bus rapid transit, creation of a 3rd track on the LIRR main line, increased reverse commuting service, and improvements to traffic flow

Energy, Stormwater & Wastewater

The synergy between livability, energy production and consumption, and transportation is clear: reducing consumption of fossil fuels and other non-renewable energy by providing public transportation and enhancing existing networks makes Nassau County more livable. Increasing public transportation options and promoting alternatives to single-occupant vehicle travel will reduce carbon emissions, improve environmental health, reduce dependence on fossil fuels, and may encourage people to be more physically active.

⁵ Metropolitan Transportation Authority. (2009). Greening Mass Transit & Metro Regions: The Final Report of the Blue Ribbon Commission on Sustainability and the MTA, p. 38.



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Sustainable Long Island applauds the County's call to reduce energy consumption and to increase energy efficiency to achieve reductions in utility costs and emission of greenhouse gases. Promoting development of renewable energy sources will not only reduce dependence on non-renewable energy sources but will also help offset the costs of providing energy to customers. Encouraging the use of green building techniques and strategies such as high-efficiency HVAC systems, Energy Star appliances, minimizing site disruption during construction, and on-site stormwater collection will have positive impacts on cost of living, quality of life, and environmental health across Nassau County.

Long Island's agricultural and suburban lifestyle has an impact on our water; sprawling development patterns, the state of sewer systems, and use of pesticides jeopardize our drinking water quality. Today, nearly every plan to improve Long Island's environment, provide for sustainable growth, advance economically and in terms of social equity is challenged by the problem of inadequate waste water infrastructure. A 2000 study cited by the 2008 US Conference of Mayors Water Council, indicates that for every dollar of water and sewer infrastructure investment, long-term private GDP output increases by \$6.35, over a 9% return on investment.⁶

Recommendations:

- Promote development of renewable energy sources on Long Island
- Invest in waste and storm water infrastructure and upgrade outdated waste water treatment facilities
- Consider incentives to promote installation of green infrastructure such as bioswales, green roofs, and pervious pavement, as well as reuse of materials whenever possible to reduce solid waste

Implementation

Sustainable Long Island encourages the county to adhere to the recommendations put forth in the Draft Master Plan. As stated in chapter five of the Plan itself, the plan "is only the first step in achieving Nassau's goals for its future. ... The County must implement the recommendations of the plan and put them into action"(p. 2). When put together, principles of equity, access to jobs, improved transit options and alternatives to cars, access to healthy, affordable food, a range of housing options near downtowns and nodes, and green development practices, can make Nassau County a more equitable, sustainable place to live, work, play, and do business.

Recommendations:

- Ensure equity – carefully review policies and projects so that they prioritize equity for all Long Islanders in terms of access to transportation and services, jobs, environmental health, and housing
- Consider including information and funding opportunities that may be available through the newly created Interagency Partnership for Sustainable Communities, between the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA), Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD), and the Department of Transportation (DOT). It aims to coordinate federal housing, transportation, and infrastructure investments to improve access to affordable housing, promote equitable development, more transportation options, and lower transportation costs while protecting the environment and addressing the challenges of climate change in communities nationwide. (<http://www.epa.gov/smartgrowth/partnership/index.html>)
- Expand the role of the Nassau County Planning Commission so that it functions as a convener of Cities, Towns and Villages in Nassau (including representative not just of Nassau's three towns, but also villages and unincorporated areas) to develop and recommend policies and codes that will streamline and promote best practices occurring at local municipalities throughout the County and across Long Island.

Thank you for the opportunity to provide comments on this important planning document.
Respectfully submitted,

Sarah Lansdale

⁶ Pereira, A.M.. (2000). Is all public capital created equal? *Review of Economics and Statistics*, 82:3, 513–518, in Krop, R. A., Hernick, C., Frantz, C. (2008). *Local Government Investment In Municipal Water and Sewer Infrastructure: Adding Value to the National Economy*. United States Conference of Mayors.



Executive Director