

## OPED

# No project funds without critical regional planning



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In a recent opinion piece ("Smart Growth: Local leaders overcoming obstacles," LIBN, June 13), Vision Long Island Executive Director Eric Alexander calls out "excess regional planning" as one of the "pitfalls making revitalization so difficult."

While Vision Long Island does a notable job of advocating for downtown revitalization and smart growth, and it convenes interested parties a few times a year to discuss our regional problems and celebrate our minor victories, it should recognize that the grander problems we face will not be resolved by our all-too-parochial society without addressing the overarching regional challenges that plague Long Island and threaten our economic vitality and quality of life.

A few years back, the Long Island Regional Planning Council penned the "LI2035: A Sustainability Plan," in an effort to provide a comprehensive plan for dealing with the Island's most vexing and pernicious problems. The plan, developed with the aid of hundreds of stakeholders and dozens of Island leaders, actually identified the lack of diversity in housing options (i.e. rentals) and an unsustainable tax burden as the two greatest impediments to the Island's long-term sustainability.

While some housing projects have been developed since the release of the plan, some of which have been vetted by Vision Long Island, they are a fraction of what

is actually necessary if we're going to retain our young workforce and empty-nesting baby boomers. Our tax situation – including federal, state and local taxes – places us in the unenviable position at the top in the nation for its backbreaking burden upon the working person.

The only way our tax burden can be contained is by controlling our costs of government and growing our tax base. That will not occur unless we deal with many of our regional challenges, including issues or projects with regional significance: public sewers in Suffolk County, improved sewage treatment and disposal in Nassau County, expansion of Long Island Rail Road service with the Second Track from East Farmingdale to Ronkonkoma and the Third Track on the Main Line from Floral Park to Hicksville, repowering of our electrical power-generating facilities, improved storm protection and resilience (including our regional emergency management system), a

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plan to address our unsustainable public-defined benefit/pension costs, an expanded and more cost-effective healthcare delivery system, upgrades to our roadway and bridge system, a more efficient and environmentally superior method of managing our solid waste (rather than trucking 40 percent of our garbage off-island) and the re-



mediation and cleanup of thousands of inactive groundwater-polluting and non-tax-generating properties on Long Island, just to name a few of our regional needs.

While we all know that our home-rule system of governance is valued highly on the Island, one must also recognize that the "just not here" response to any of our proposed regional solutions doesn't bode well for actually solving our collective problems. While Eric talks about the need for us to get our fair share of funding for sewers, transit and infrastructure projects, he should be apprised that public money follows plans – intelligent plans which are multijurisdictional (also known as "regional").

To do otherwise is to hope for pork and member items, something that the Washington and Albany commissaries have reportedly removed from their menus.

Cameron is the chairman of the Long Island Regional Planning Council.