

## A green plan

By: LIBN Staff    May 2, 2008    Comments Off

For generations, Long Island has been the beneficiary of some of the most passionate environmental advocacy in the country. We have preserved thousands of acres of open space, engineered and constructed state-of-the-art pollution control plants, passed tough laws on the county and local levels, and fiercely guarded our drinking water supplies.

But if we are going to confront the most important environmental challenge of this generation – climate change – we have to first broaden the very definition of “environmental protection.”

Preserving wetlands and endangered species is important, but no longer enough. The solutions, like the problem, are more global. We have to rethink how our communities are planned, how we get around, how we power and heat our homes and how we consume natural resources. And we have to do that and more while encouraging and supporting economic growth. If we are not financially secure, we will be ill equipped to preserve our natural environment and enhance our treasured quality of life.

Improving transportation is a great way to start. The Long Island Rail Road is the busiest commuter rail line in the country, but its aging infrastructure and limited capacity have led to overcrowding and delays. Adding a third track to the main LIRR line will not only create more frequent service and less crowded trains, it will make commuting by train far more convenient for people who now drive. Less road congestion, in turn, will also save businesses time and fuel but will also reduce greenhouse gases.

Energy is another big concern. Many Long Island environmentalists were focused on the Broadwater LNG proposal, which Gov. David Paterson rejected on April 10. But that same day, Paterson made an even more important announcement related to sustainability: the creation of a state energy planning board. Right now, New York has no comprehensive energy plan that projects our future needs and proposes ways to meet them while making environmental sustainability a top priority. While the board tackles its mandate, local governments here in Nassau and Suffolk can complement the program by adopting Leadership in Energy and Environmental Design green building standards, setting energy-efficiency requirements and ensuring the development of alternative energy programs.

Even issues like affordable housing that appear unrelated to the environment are, in fact, vital to a more sustainable Long Island. If we can create economical apartments and condominiums – particularly in already developed downtown areas that are close to transit, shopping and nightlife – we can stem the exodus of young people from the Island and help the environment at the same time.

John D. Cameron Jr. is the acting chair of the Long Island chapter of the New York League of Conservation Voters and chairman of the Long Island Regional Planning Board.