

Regional Plan Association

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"HOW DO WE PLAN FOR BALANCED DEVELOPMENT?"

A panel discussion with John P. Keith

at the 17th Annual Long Island Planning Conference
(sponsored by the Long Island Business Development Council)

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Sag Harbor, New York

The program for the 17th Annual Long Island Planning Conference contains an assumption and a presumption. The assumption is that Long Island wants to grow: all the panel titles ask how to achieve balanced, attractive development. Let's take that one first.

Certainly the Tri-State Region (Connecticut-New Jersey-New York) is growing again, after an unexpected and precipitous economic turndown in the 1970s. In fact, the current rate of growth in the Region could add 2.8 million people over the next 25 years. Long Island's own projections for its share of that growth are a little larger than ours. And that difference relates to whether you really want and can accommodate substantial growth.

The presumption of this conference is that perhaps you don't have the energy, the transportation, the housing and the trained personnel to achieve such growth. At least, the panel titles ask how to provide for these needs. If Long Island is indecisive in responding to these questions, Regional Plan Association would be cautious about assigning large further growth to the Island in our projections. You like the economic advantages of growth: more work, more pay, more leisure; but what about the housing, energy, transportation, waste disposal that accompanies growth? The possible threat of growth to enjoyment of more leisure?

In the 1950s and 60s, Long Island had the land, the resources and the zoning to accept massive growth; and you led the Region. Today, your pace and numbers have slowed with respect to other sectors of the Region. Others like New Jersey and the Mid-Hudson have the virgin land. Now, you have to out-compete to pursue a growth strategy.

You will have to find answers better than they as to how you provide for energy, for public transportation, for water, for waste, for housing--if business is to bring large additional employment to the Island.

The ways of accomplishing such objectives are not as difficult to find as the determination to do them.

Long Island needs a constituency in support of planning, one that understands the trade-offs and is willing to accept the sacrifices that trade-offs imply to achieve agreed upon goals. Meetings such as this are helpful to initiate the process; so is the Long Island Association's 2000 undertaking.

Regional Plan's view is that the largest possible public needs to be brought into the process so that they go through the decision-making and end up as advocates of their decisions, i.e., a constituency in support of planning.

The burden of my message to Long Islanders, then, is to review, your assumptions about growth, your presumptions about how to achieve it, decide collectively about what must be done to accomplish your ends--and then go ahead and do it! And, in my judgement, the most important of these steps is to create a constituency for planning by involving the public in the process.

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