

The shape of Long Island water

An idea whose time has come: reusing water to protect our aquifer, waterways

BY JOHN TURNER
AND ENRICO NARDONE

Long Island faces a water crisis, both to the fresh drinking water aquifers that sustain our daily lives and the salty coastal waters that enrich it. The crisis is reflected by what has been a steady, decades-long deterioration in water quality, from excess nitrogen fueled by human sewage, to toxic plumes and spills, all the while “mining” our supply by taking out more water than is being replenished.

Simply put, while several dozen laws and regulations provide the legal basis for a number of valuable water-protection programs, the evidence indicates that collectively we are failing to adequately protect Long Island’s waters and waterways.

Water reuse should be a key strategy to reverse this failure. Water reuse turns wastewater from a liability into an asset, improving quality while reducing pumping demands on the drinking water aquifers by using this water for another beneficial

purpose instead of dumping it into the nearest stream or bay.

Reuse can simultaneously achieve water quality and quantity benefits, as evidenced by one of two reuse projects on Long Island. This project involves Suffolk County’s Indian Island golf course in Riverhead and the adjacent Town of Riverhead sewage treatment plant. The initiative, which began last spring, sends highly treated effluent to the golf course to irrigate the grass. The benefits? Two thousand, four hundred fewer pounds of nitrogen discharged into Peconic Bay and 63 million fewer gallons of water pumped from the stressed underlying aquifers.

This project is a mere drop in the bucket regarding water reuse here. For example, in Suffolk County, there are several dozen sewage treatment plants and golf courses within one-half mile of each other, as well as many other possible targets for wastewater. The comprehensive implementation of reuse projects could significantly reduce nitrogen in



Suffolk County’s Indian Island golf course is irrigated with treated water from the nearby Town of Riverhead sewage plant.

BRUCE GILBERT

coastal waters and our drinking water aquifer and mean billions of gallons of fresh water never pumped from the stressed aquifers. That would protect the flow in streams and rivers.

To best guide this implementation, we’re calling on environmental leaders in the public and private sectors to fund a Long Island-wide feasibility study or road map that prioritizes reuse projects based on

financial, logistical and environmental criteria. This blueprint would allow us, in a thoughtful way, to advance the most effective reuse projects providing the greatest water-management benefits.

About 2.3 billion gallons of water are reused daily in the United States, most notably in California, Florida and the arid Southwest. Let’s take a major step forward in managing and protecting our vulnerable

coastal waters and drinking-water supply by adding Long Island to that list.



John Turner, top left, is the conservation policy advocate for the Seatuck Environmental Association in Islip,



where Enrico Nardone is the executive director.

EXPRESSWAY

Feeling nostalgic about New York

BY ANNE DONLON ACHENBACH

One afternoon at my senior living community in Michigan, someone asked me, “What do you miss about New York?”

Without hesitation, I replied, “Everything.”

The quick response surprised me more than the questioner.

I hadn’t realized that I missed the noise, the traffic, the rapid pace, the crowds, the all-consuming activity.

I knew I missed my friends, the weather, the restaurants and the churches. But I hadn’t allowed myself to dwell on the entirety of what I relinquished when I moved from Long

Island two years ago after more than 50 years.

There isn’t a day when I don’t count my many blessings, and I do give thanks for the joy of being close to family in the Midwest, the luxury of my new apartment and the serene reassurance of no longer living alone. And yet, I wondered, how could I miss “everything”?

Still, to my own surprise, that is true. Familiarity equals comfort, and expectation allows a degree of ease. I remember when I found the sounds of traffic outside my small home in South Farmingdale not disturbing, but rather soothing.

I enjoyed hearing car doors close when the sun came up

as joggers arrived to run along a Bethpage park across the street from my bedroom.

I savored the anticipation of waiting for the first act in a crowded Broadway theater.

I found crowds reassuring when I shopped. I never felt alone as I window-shopped the length of the Walt Whitman mall or marveled at the selections at the Tanger Outlets in Riverhead and Deer Park.

I cherished the pleasure of seeing the skyline of my beloved city when the Hampton Jitney approached Manhattan.

I recalled how my friend Alice and I enjoyed quiet conversations while waiting for a table at the Massapequa Diner

on Saturday evenings. We chatted on the porch while watching the Long Island Rail Road trains come and go.

I loved the Village of Farmingdale, which I think of as hometown USA. Main Street provided not only the choice of shopping for a gourmet dinner entree at the meat market, but also the pleasure of unexpectedly meeting friends and neighbors at restaurants.

While other areas of our country have their own unique beauty, the beaches on Long Island cannot be duplicated. The roar of the ocean and the smell of the saltwater never ceased to provide comfort.

I remembered how the fren-

zied activity that consumed my Long Island life always prodded me not to slow down, but to keep pace. All of the words, both negative and positive, that describe New York remain quietly tucked into my heart.



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