



SEARCH [Advanced Search] [input field] [submit button]

April 21, 2007, 1:17 pm

DOCKSIDE DOWNTOWNS

Aging Harbor Towns Navigate The Redevelopment Course

By Adina Genn 04/05/2007 2:33 pm

LI Press Google

- Local News
- Education News
- Web In Review
- Features
- Business News
- Columnists
- This Week's Cover Story
- Sports
- Lifestyle
- Arts & Entertainment
- Movies
- Event Listings
- Entertainment Guide
- Food Reviews
- Dining Guide
- Fashion
- Letters To The Press
- Real Estate
- Subscribe Now
- Wedding Guide
- Automotive
- RSS
- Contact Us



The proposed waterfront of Glen Cove

Walk along the Glen Cove waterfront, and you'll quickly grasp its potential. Never mind that this is a designated Superfund site with ongoing cleanup of old manufacturing pollutants. On a recent sunny March morning, Long Island Sound glistened, and a fresh-sea scent permeated the air.

Some consider this spot along Hempstead Harbor's coastline an ideal place for a nature preserve, with an esplanade for enjoying the outdoors; others pine for a marina for city residents. Then there are those who want to link the waterfront's future to the restoration of the economic health of Glen Cove's aging downtown.

Creating a water's-edge community that could boost local businesses by bringing steady traffic directly into Glen Cove's ailing center is the current vision of Glen Isle Partners, LLC. Michael Posillico, a principal in this LI firm slated to develop the 52-acre site as Glen Isle, says that economic growth is a key component of his plan. A mixed-use project, Glen Isle would include residences, offices, restaurants and museums, adorned by landscaped public parks, plazas, cycling and pedestrian paths, a beach and theater. It's conceived to be a place where people would live and work and families would play, embodying smart-growth development. An anti-sprawl environmental movement, smart growth locates homes near destinations, so people use public transit or travel on foot.



With a possible price tag of \$1 million on some of Glen Isle's 16th-floor deluxe penthouse models, though, not everybody's buying in. Then there's the developers' push for a possible 1,120 residential units, with 10 percent designated as workforce housing.

Welcome to the crossroads of Long Island politics and development, where developers and smart-growth proponents advocate mixed-use properties, while a vocal group of residents decry high-density buildings, fearing horrendous traffic, overtaxed infrastructure and environmental pollutants that will plague their hamlets.

A Shore Thing

Glen Cove is hardly alone in its growing pains, especially in the context of the region's older waterside business districts. From Riverhead to East Rockaway to Greenport, these communities—whether they are along the Sound, oceans, rivers, bays or inlets—possess natural resources for which Long Island is known the world over: small villages, accessible communities and, the big fish: harbors.

Once sites for lumber mills, shipbuilding, whaling and ports of entry, LI waterfronts spawned settlements, bringing about the region's first downtowns. But with manufacturing now a shadow of its former self, our shores hold the key to revitalizing many aging central areas, which some visionaries argue are still the lifeline of our communities.

It's a remedy that can't come too soon. High taxes are "an extremely serious problem" for 84 percent of Long Islanders, according to a recently released Long Island Index study. Waterfront revitalization is popular because it could bring the foot traffic entrepreneurs like. As they open new businesses in these communities, entrepreneurs contribute to the tax base, ideally alleviating some of the tax burden residents have been carrying.



A sketch of the Greenport Waterfront

"Water is a definite draw," says Martin R. Cantor, director of the Long Island Economic and Social Policy Institute at Dowling College, and a consultant to Glen Isle.

"To support economic development in downtowns where there is riverfront, you've got to link them," he says.

While some insist that the downtown is a concept whose time has come and gone, because of the advent of malls and Internet shopping, Cantor believes that such areas need to be reconfigured as destinations providing theaters, galleries, coffee shops and bookstores.

The more a downtown offers, the more people it will draw, agrees Eric Alexander, executive director of Vision Long Island, in Northport.

Ever think you could make \$20,000 playing Sudoku?

Su|do|ku

			4	0			8
4	5	6					1
1			6			3	5
7	5		3				6
4	6		2	0			
3						7	2
5		1	0				

NEW YORK LOTTERY

Hey, you never know™

Ever think you could make \$20,000 playing Sudoku?

Su|do|ku

Even



Greenport, from above

communities with tried-and-true formats are pushing forward. Long Beach—which Alexander points to as a spot where visitors enjoy the beach, shops and restaurants, and then hop on a train to another destination—is gearing up for its 6-acre "superblock," featuring a hotel, meeting rooms, boardwalk restaurants, health club, shops, a day spa and more. Freeport projects an \$8.5-million rebuilding of its central business district to complement the village's revamped Nautical Mile. And, after 10 years, picturesque Port Jefferson is in the final stages of completing its Harborfront Park. A 5-acre property that was once a shipyard and Mobil Oil terminal, the park includes a promenade, a Landmark Sculpture of seamen and a ship, a garden and skating rink.

This kind of renewal is seen in other communities that tend to their waterfronts. In Port Jefferson, Danfords on the Sound emerged from bankruptcy and was purchased by Westport, Conn.-based DF Marina. Danfords was bought from Oaktree Capital Management, a Los Angeles firm, for an undisclosed amount, and a major renovation is planned, said Stewart Weiner, the hotel's general manager.

The new revitalization formula typically does not include chain stores. "You don't want Gap there," Glen Isle consultant Cantor says. "People will just go to buy clothes and then take off."

It Takes A Harbor Village

Saving our harbors and Main Street requires time and money. It also takes guts. And a lot of soul-searching. And, above all, perseverance.

Got five, 10, 15, 20 years, not to mention millions of—or even a billion—dollars? We need to rid our shores of chemical contaminants and the dumping and spill-off of pollutants. But that's not all: Rotting bulkheads need replacing, floating docks have to be rebuilt, and new landscaping must be added. Daunting, yes, but the end result could turn out to be the region's next Greenport, a success story aspired to by local mayors and planners. That kind of achievement literally takes a village.

"No one person can do everything," says Dave Kapell, who just stepped down from a 13-year stint as mayor of Greenport. "I take credit for getting and promoting the ideas of other people in a manner that got the job done."

Back in 1979, Greenport was, in Kapell's words, "a wreck." A wreck, that is, with huge potential. Once a bustling harbor village, Mitchell Park, formerly an active marina, was sullied by oil and arsenic; its downtown was riddled with empty shops and an eroding tax base.

"We were basically dying as a municipality," he said.

So the village acquired Mitchell Park and began a 13-year process to arrest the blight. The entire project, a 4-acre park including a harbor walk, totaled \$10 million; Kapell pegged cleanup costs at \$600,000. Much of the costs were paid by state, federal and local money.

The revitalization sparked investment, prompting the building of a new hotel and buildings and boosting the tax base, which is growing. The marina today welcomes 60 transient boats, plus cruise ships, tall ships, and even vessels from the U.S. Naval Academy, Kapell said.

Greenport's revitalization put it on the map as a tourist attraction, now home to an antique carousel, donated by Northrop-Grumman, that provides 130,000 rides a year—not bad for a village of 2,500 residents, Kapell notes. It also boasts an outdoor amphitheater, freestanding camera obscura, and a seasonal skating rink that serves as a "mist plaza" in warm weather.



Former Greenport Mayor Dave Kapell

For Kapell, the emphasis was on family activities. The village rejected plans for waterfront parking or new harborside shops that could compete with existing stores. This philosophy worked, drawing foot traffic into the village, where pedestrians patronize waterside shops, enhancing the downtown's economic health.

But Kapell faced frequent opposition from naysayers who questioned his vision, asking why the village needed the proposed features. He recalls, "You can never satisfy everybody," but adds, "If you wait around to see which way the wind blows, you'll never get anywhere."

One Move Forward, Two Back

Ralph Suozzi, Glen Cove's mayor, is of a different mindset. In March 2006, his administration adopted a moratorium on minor and major subdivisions. He says, "There was so much work to be done. And we had 50 years of aged zoning." Recently, on March 27, the moratorium was extended another six months, so that the city could try to figure out which kinds of projects would best serve its people and surrounding communities.

As a result, development has not moved forward; though Glen Isle has worked on its plan since 2002, the project is still not off the ground. As remediation is completed, the firm's recently revised environmental impact study must get approval from the Glen Cove Planning Board.

Already, however, downtown Glen Cove is starting to buzz, especially since the opening of Avalon at Glen Cove, a rental apartment building with more than 240 apartments, and another building with 111 apartments about to open, says Gabor Karsai, Glen Cove Chamber of Commerce and Landmark Realtors president.



The Greenport Carousel

Not everyone is a fan of the luxury rental development, though. Critics call the buildings too tall for LI and too close to the major thoroughfare. Rumors even floated that in order to fill vacancies the property accepted tenants with subsidized housing vouchers from the

federal government. Both Suozzi and Avalon management said the rumors were unfounded.

Karsai says that Glen Cove's moratorium may prove worthwhile if the revitalization "is done right," by complementing downtown businesses, at a pace the city can sustain.

"That project will bring millions of dollars of economic development to Nassau County, and specifically to Glen Cove," notes Rich Bivone, president of the Nassau Council of Chambers of Commerce, which represents nearly 50 chambers. Glen Isle predicts that the development, once built, could add 700 permanent jobs.

Meanwhile, the city is striving to complete its master plan by September, Suozzi says. He likens the strategy to playing "chess instead of checkers, thinking multiple moves ahead." Developing for the sake of developing, he said, is not a good equation.

Suozzi says the contract with Glen Isle to build 860 units—the original number of units approved—would be honored. But many of the details are still to be determined, such as "where they sit, how big, how high and other aspects."

"The people of Glen Cove have to agree to the scale," notes realtor Karsai, who worries about the moratorium's effect on property taxes, which recently rose an average of \$330 per household.

"The development would help us with the tax burden," Karsai pointed out, citing an influx of new business, and Glen Isle's promised payment to the city of \$25 million upon sale of the land. This cash infusion would offset Glen Cove's deficit of nearly \$28 million and could keep the city from having to raise taxes in the coming years.

Suozzi says, "For the first few years it will be good for the city," but that it won't save it in the long run. And what happens when the city runs out of waterfront to develop? The question has prompted Suozzi to explore other revenue sources, in a quest to stop spiraling taxes without looking at Glen Isle as the only entity that could save the city. Karsai says that Glen Cove's moratorium may prove worthwhile if the revitalization "is done right," by complementing downtown businesses, at a pace the city can sustain.

More Important Than Money

Glen Cove resident Pat Tracy is unconvinced of the necessity for the Glen Isle development, asking, "Why do we need it?" She points out that in Nassau and Suffolk, "there are approximately 25,000 homes for sale."

And although the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) has for 19 years been working on decontamination of the site, Glen Isle nevertheless is proposed for a place marred by radioactive materials dumped by the metal-processing plant that operated there. The EPA unearthed large amounts of laboratory chemicals and PCB-contaminated waste and asbestos, along with asbestos and mercury spills, from the property.

Tracy worries about toxins that might have seeped underground and could later cause "sick building syndrome" (SBS). The EPA describes SBS as situations in which building residents experience acute health effects that appear to be related to time spent in a building, but no specific illness or cause is identified.

But Glen Isle's Posillico, who also owns Blue Water Environmental, which specializes in industrial remediation, says he could "adjust the plan or advance the remedy. I don't see any showstoppers here."

And Pat Carr, spokeswoman for the EPA, says that she expects that by the end of 2007, the agency would have "completed all excavation and disposal on all clean-up work to address contamination with our goal of future residential use."

But Tracy remains skeptical. "Twenty years down the road, the developer will be long gone," she predicts.

Tracy's skepticism is shared by Adrienne Esposito, executive director of Citizens Campaign for the Environment, a statewide nonprofit, nonpartisan environmental advocacy organization with offices in Farmingdale. She says that this Superfund site has received a great deal of investigation and remediation, while most others—and there are more than 130 state and several Superfund sites on LI—are not receiving such clean-up attention.

"The sad truth is that no Superfund site will ever be totally risk-free," Esposito explains. "Volatile organic chemicals, heavy metals and radioactive elements will be present at this site and across Long Island for a long time."

Esposito adds that the area is ready for redevelopment, then asks and answers some hard questions: "Is it perfectly safe? No. Is it the best that we can hope for? Perhaps."

Tracy remains skeptical. "Twenty years down the road, the developer will be long gone," she predicts.

The positive aspects of smart growth—pedestrian-friendly neighborhoods and attractive communities featuring museums, coffee shops, and the like—are touted by many, including Cantor.

He says that these kinds of structures are inviting to the public, and when they're scattered along walkways leading to Main Street, they provide a strong impetus to meander into local shops. Downtown, spaces between stores should be filled with gazebos and benches, where pedestrians can sit, rather than turn around, he adds. These tactics increase dwell time; they work for malls and casinos, and they can prove successful for Main Street too, Cantor explains.

On the East End, Riverhead Town Supervisor Phil Cardinale says, "We want to re-create downtown as a renaissance, or rebirth it as a tourist Mecca and specialty retail draw." Thanks to \$2 million in state and federal funding, Riverhead has replaced its bulkheads, extended its boardwalk, refurbished its riverfront park and added picnic tables and gazebos. In 2004, Vail Leavitt Music Hall, a National Register Landmark site, reopened its doors there.

Riverhead's master plan includes a smart-growth concept wherein Manhattan-based Apollo Real Estate Advisors, which has more than \$2 billion to invest, will develop the town's downtown, Cardinale says. Included will be a structure with a specialty grocer, cineplex, Marriott Garden Hotel and modest-sized condos that would run in excess of \$350,000, Cardinale says, adding that Apollo would likely start building in late 2007 or early 2008, with build-out taking at least two years.

East Rockaway's revitalization is further along in its decade-long,

\$1.5 million waterfront voyage. The project included restoring its dilapidated marine area to make it a centerpiece, with a boardwalk, fishing pier, gazebo, plantings and boat slips for residents of the incorporated village, says Mayor Ed Sieban. East Rockaway shop owners talk of adding parking and a trolley to transport pedestrians from one end of downtown to the other.

Though he hopes the additions will bring more visitors, Sieban maintains that the village won't lose the feel of being a "quiet, sleepy community."

Suozzi, too, wants Glen Cove to retain its character.

"The goal is that our future city will be recognizable to the people who live here and the people who used to be here," Suozzi says. "You don't want to lose the thing that makes life worth living."



**DISCUSS ON
MESSAGE
BOARDS**

[About Us](#)

[Contact Us](#)

[How To Advertise](#)

[Terms of Use](#)

[Privacy Policy](#)



[Designed, Developed, Hosted](#)