



**New York State
Senate Standing Committee on Environmental Conservation
Clean Water Hearing**

Submitted by Sustainable Long Island
45A Seaman Ave. Bethpage NY, 11714 www.sustainableli.org

September 30, 2009

Honorable Antoine M. Thompson
Senate Standing Committee on Environmental Conservation
Legislative Office Building, Room 902
Albany, New York 12247

RE: Testimony in support of Clean Water and Related Infrastructure Improvements

Good Afternoon Chairman Thompson, Members of the Committee, and other Senators.

Thank you for this opportunity to speak in support of ensuring access to clean water for all New Yorkers. My name is Erin Thoresen. I am a Community Planner at Sustainable Long Island, a regional not-for-profit organization whose mission is to promote community and economic development, social equity and environmental health for all Long Islanders now and for generations to come. I am here today representing our Executive Director, Sarah Lansdale, Deputy Director Jennifer Rimmer, and all the staff at Sustainable Long Island.

I come before you today to talk about the importance of preserving clean water and ensuring that future generations of Long Islanders have access to water that is at least as clean as it is now. I brought this water with me from Bethpage -- home to our office and to the best tasting drinking water in the State according to taste-tests held over the past several years¹ -- as an example of the safe, reliable drinking water we should be working to preserve.

At Sustainable Long Island we want to ensure that the nearly 3 million people who call Long Island home have access to a healthy environment, including water of this high quality. Our agricultural and suburban lifestyle has an impact on our water; sprawling development patterns, the lack of sewers, and use of pesticides jeopardize our drinking water quality.

Long Island drinking water comes from a sole source aquifer, which means that upholding safe, clean water standards is particularly important, as runoff, dumping, and inadequate waste, salt water intrusion or storm water treatment can adversely affect the water we all depend on.

¹ Erikson, R. and Moritz, O. (2008, July 10). New York City loses out to Bethpage in drinking water taste test. The Daily News. http://www.nydailynews.com/ny_local/2008/07/10/2008-07-10_new_york_city_loses_out_to_bethpage_in_d.html and The Bethpage Water District Newsletter (Spring 2007) www.bethpagewater.org/2007%20newsletter%20final.pdf

While all of these factors impact our water supply, Sustainable Long Island believes that waste water infrastructure has the largest impact on our ability to create a sustainable future – one that can create jobs, rebuild downtowns, and protect our environment.

I would like to talk in a little more detail about the importance of waste water infrastructure.

As you may already know, economic growth and development on Long Island, and particularly in Suffolk County, are hindered by the sewer situation there. Only 30% of Suffolk County is sewered, which means that 70% percent of residents use cesspools or septic systems. Although most of Nassau County is served by sewers, facilities here, like many elsewhere in the State, are aging, outmoded and in need of upgrades. Long Island compares poorly with neighboring regions and, as a result, is at a competitive disadvantage for business. For example, Westchester and Rockland Counties are 88% sewered; New York City (all five boroughs) is 99% sewered.

A lack of coordinated planning, the timing of Suffolk's growth, and the slowed stream of funding for infrastructure, along with the rising costs of installing sewers and treatment plants has led to a fragmented system of small and frequently inefficient treatment plants owned by counties, towns, villages, and private entities.

The lack of sewers inhibits economic growth and development: it often prevents businesses from expanding or relocating; restaurants are unable to tap into existing systems and therefore cannot open new establishments; and housing can often only be built with one or two houses per acre in order to comply with existing density and sanitary code requirements.

Today, nearly every plan to improve Long Island's environment, provide for sustainable growth, advance economically and in terms of social equity is challenged by the problem of inadequate waste water infrastructure.

As our nation grapples with job losses and our troubled economy, investing in 'shovel ready' clean water infrastructure projects is a win-win for our economy and our environment. In fact, according to a 2000 study, of five public investment components, water and sewers had the third greatest impact with respect to GDP.²

The same study, cited by the 2008 US Conference of Mayors, Mayors Water Council,³ indicates that for every dollar of water and sewer infrastructure investment, long-term private GDP output increases by \$6.35, over a 9% return on investment.⁴ Additionally, every job in sewers and water creates 3.85 jobs in the national economy.⁵

However, demand for funding for sewer and water projects exceeds availability. Declining federal support has slowed critical upgrades and maintenance.⁶ The Clean Water State Revolving Fund (CWSRF)

² Pereira, A.M.. (2000). Is all public capital created equal? *Review of Economics and Statistics*, 82:3, 513–518.

³ Krop, R. A., Hernick, C., Frantz, C. (2008). *Local Government Investment In Municipal Water and Sewer Infrastructure: Adding Value to the National Economy*. United States Conference of Mayors.

⁴ Ibid.

⁵ US Department of Commerce Bureau of Economic Analysis. Cited in Krop, Hernick, and Frantz (2008), p. 11. *Regional Input-Output Modeling System (RIMS II)*. <http://www.bea.gov/region/rims/>.

⁶ Clean Water Act funding was reduced from \$2.4 billion in 1987 to \$687 million (nearly 70%) in 2008. NYSDEC. (No date). *A Gathering Storm: New York's Wastewater Infrastructure in Crisis*. <http://www.dec.ny.gov/chemical/42383.html>. Accessed September 28, 2009.

2010 Draft Intended Use Plan estimates that funds allocated will only cover about 20% of needs.⁷ Furthermore, current funding mechanisms and evaluation criteria continually place Long Island at a disadvantage when it comes to waste water infrastructure projects.

One of the criteria used to score projects to determine whether or not they make the annual and the multi-year priority lists is the Financial Need Criterion.⁸ This criterion is set up so that projects receive a higher score (and are thus more likely to be funded) if the project's service area has a median household income that is below the *statewide* average. Because of Long Island's history of segregation, incomes vary greatly from Town to Town and even from block to block in many cases. Therefore, candidate service areas for sewer projects often do not meet this criterion, despite the fact that many neighborhoods' household incomes are far below area-wide averages.

In addition to increasing funding overall, a revised approach to evaluating funding needs would help remedy this problem. The NYSDEC and the Environmental Facilities Corporation should adopt policies that take into consideration local context and evaluate funding needs in comparison with surrounding local or regional service areas, rather than statewide averages.

The current problem, however, goes beyond just funding: we must look holistically at clean water needs and identify efficient, sustainable solutions. Given the shortfall of available funding, projects ought to be spread more equitably throughout the region. The CWSRF Draft Intended Use Plan provides recommendations for future scoring systems that determine which projects receive funding. This system ought to give priority to projects that support principles of smart growth and sustainability, such as those in or near downtowns and transportation, as well as redevelopment projects.

Sustainable Long Island believes it is high time for a change. In order to advance social, economic and environmental sustainability, priority ought to be given to funding and installing efficient infrastructure to bring Long Island, particularly Suffolk County towns such as Babylon, Huntington, and Brookhaven up to speed.

Sewer installation in these and other areas would allow for increased density in target areas and downtowns like Wyandanch, allowing developers to build the additional housing needed to meet Long Island's current needs. Sewers can help reduce further sprawl by attracting development along sewer lines.

We call upon the State Senate and this Committee to see to it that future sewer planning and project preferences incorporate sustainable practices in meaningful ways and compliment on-site wastewater management systems that recycle water within buildings. It is critical to continue to raise awareness about the need for sewerage, reconsider mechanisms for funding waste and storm water infrastructure and to develop specific plans for the expansion of sewerage across Long Island in order to promote sustainable economic, environmental, and socially equitable growth.

Thank you for your time and consideration today.

Sincerely,
Erin L. Thoresen

⁷ NYS Department of Environmental Conservation and NYS Environmental Facilities Corporation. (July 2009). Draft Intended Use Plan: Clean Water State Revolving Fund for Water Pollution Control 2010, p. 3. http://www.entire_cwsrf_2010_draft_iup_7_30_09. Accessed September 27, 2009.

⁸ Ibid, Section D-9, p. 95.