



September 22, 2009

Town of Hempstead
Lighthouse Project Public Comment
One Washington Street
Hempstead, NY 11550

Dear Supervisor Murray:

I grew up at Mitchel Field, next to the proposed Lighthouse Project. I remember the sense of Long Island pride at the parades down Hempstead Turnpike to celebrate the Islanders winning the Stanley Cup. In the years since, I've seen family and friends move off Long Island because of taxes, traffic, and the gradual erosion in the quality of life. I became a planner to make Long Island a better place – a place where people of all ages and backgrounds can live and work and attain the American Dream. The Lighthouse is among the most important projects in this region that begins to create a brighter future for all Long Islanders.

Sustainable Long Island supports the development of the Lighthouse, and encourages the Town of Hempstead to consider the ways in which this important project can advance economic development, environmental health and equity for all Long Islanders. With careful attention to environmental sustainability, local job training, better access to public and alternative modes of transportation, and equity in housing, we believe the Lighthouse will be a revitalized 24/7 suburban center.

Sustainable Long Island is a regional not-for-profit organization promoting sustainability through social equity, economic development and environmental health for all Long Islanders now and for generations to come. When evaluating projects of regional significance, Sustainable Long Island looks carefully at several criteria: community engagement and support; transportation and walkability; character and design; location and infrastructure; housing; environment; and economic development. Among the stated principal goals of the Lighthouse project are “to create a new, efficiently-designed, distinctive mixed-use community...” (DGEIS, Executive Summary, p. 1-1), to “provide a regional economic stimulus and significant additional tax revenue” as well as to “provide a development which encourages energy efficiencies and reduces dependence on automobiles” (DGEIS, Executive Summary, p. 1-1). While the proposed Lighthouse development meets these and other goals, Sustainable Long Island urges the Town of Hempstead and Lighthouse Development team to be a regional and national model project in advancing environmental, social, and economic opportunity for Long Islanders.

Community Engagement

At Sustainable Long Island we believe that solutions to creating a more sustainable region must come from the bottom-up. Residents of all ages and backgrounds must be actively engaged in the decisions being made in their communities. We applaud the Lighthouse project for undertaking what is the single largest outreach effort of any development project on Long Island and the Town for weighing the input of the community.

Sustainable Long Island recommends that as the project moves forward, the Lighthouse Development Group and the Town of Hempstead will continue engaging the community.

Transportation and Walkability

As a project with such a regional draw, it is critical that the Lighthouse incorporate and accommodate a variety of transportation options. The Lighthouse project has made good effort toward this end by providing for connections to the Long Island Bus and the Long Island Rail Road.

The Metropolitan Transportation Authority recently set a goal to capture 2/3 of additional vehicle miles traveled in the region by public transit. The report includes a list of possible places to pursue this goal and specifically mentions, “the integration of public transit components into the Nassau Hub project, including the examination of a reactivation of the LIRR Garden City spur into the hub.”¹

Although the project proposes a shuttle to the Mineola LIRR station and an internal trolley system, Sustainable Long Island recommends that the connectivity of the Lighthouse development to existing (and new or future) transportation options could be improved upon and phased-in as the project is built out. For example, the existing spur of Long Island Rail Road that exists within the site should be utilized to enhance intra-island travel, and to accommodate the 75% of Long Islanders who live and work on Long Island, improving transportation between significant employment centers and alleviating traffic along major nearby corridors.

Character and Design

The inclusion of pedestrian and streetscape amenities, public open spaces, and the adaptation and reuse of existing structures all contribute to the environmental sustainability of the Lighthouse project as well as attract visitors from throughout the region.

To enhance the environmental quality of the project, Sustainable Long Island recommends that site plans reflect the latest in sustainable site design, by minimizing building setbacks from streets, limiting surface parking and keeping a compact development pattern.

Housing

Long Island generally suffers from a lack of affordable and rental housing necessary for truly diverse communities that include homeowners and renters of all ages and backgrounds. The Lighthouse proposes to fill some of that gap by including a mix of lofts, condos and townhouses available at a range of prices. Sustainable Long Island supports the inclusion of mixed income housing options geared towards both the younger student population and older seniors. Offering housing units at a range of prices will help diversify existing housing stock and satisfy some of the current housing needs on Long Island.

Rather than limiting these options to renters only, Sustainable Long Island recommend including ownership or for-sale units at a range of prices, including “affordable” rates, so as to make ownership options more equitable and available to people of all income ranges.

Infrastructure and Environment

Sustainable Long Island recognizes and commends the Development team’s efforts to become a LEED-certified development, including green amenities such as low-flow devices faucets, toilets, urinals, and showers. Sustainable Long Island recommends pursuing the installation of green infrastructure such as bioswales, green roofs, renewable energy and pervious pavement.

¹ Metropolitan Transportation Authority. 2009, Greening Mass Transit & Metro Regions: The Final Report of the Blue Ribbon Commission on Sustainability and the MTA. page 38.

We encourage the developer and the Town of Hempstead to minimize the impact of this development on the environment by minimizing waste through the reuse of materials as well as the use of rail in the transport of materials. Reducing auto-dependency is among the stated goals of the project. The location of the Lighthouse project makes it a prime candidate for creating a multi-modal development; however, careful attention should be paid to the connections provided and how visitors arrive at the site. It is not enough simply to provide sidewalks, bike trails, and roadways within the site, but networks should be created that leave open opportunities for extending beyond the site, allowing residents, employees and visitors to reduce car travel, and increasing access to the surrounding community. This project presents a unique opportunity to enhance transportation across the Island by taking advantage of its location and creating connections to existing systems and networks.

Economic Development

A project of the Lighthouse's scale will certainly have an enormous impact on the local and regional economy, creating new jobs and businesses, increasing the tax base, and drawing an increased number of tourists to the area. In order to ensure positive economic growth in the long-term economic impact on the region, it is imperative that new jobs are here to stay and that they go to Long Islanders now and in the future.

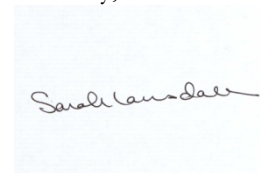
Sustainable Long Island recommends the creation of job training programs that can expedite local hiring processes and support local businesses. Hiring practices should give opportunities to Long Islanders, particularly local workers from the surrounding area. Apprentice programs and job training should start as soon as possible so that workers have an opportunity to receive proper training and can begin to get the experience necessary to move forward smoothly and accurately. Additionally, there needs to be a coordinated effort with the surrounding communities so that the Lighthouse Project supports, extends and further develops the local downtowns and business districts. The Lighthouse Project cannot be at the expense of the local shops but rather a way to enhance and stimulate our downtowns.

Conclusion

The Lighthouse at Long Island has the potential to truly transform underutilized property and become a destination for Long Islanders. Sustainable Long Island supports the Lighthouse project, and encourages the Town of Hempstead to ensure that it will provide long-term benefits for all Long Islanders and thereby set a precedent for future development on Long Island and throughout the nation.

We thank Supervisor Murray and the Town of Hempstead for the opportunity to provide input on what promises to be one of the most significant developments on Long Island. Sustainable Long Island looks forward to working with the Town of Hempstead and other communities across Long Island to continue to promote environmental sustainability, economic development and social equity for generations to come.

Sincerely,

A light blue rectangular box containing a handwritten signature in cursive that reads "Sarah Lansdale".

Sarah Lansdale
Executive Director