

A New County Should Bloom In Brookhaven

By Victor John Yannacone Jr.
and R. E. Watson

RECENT HISTORY shows that Suffolk County is essentially unmanageable and almost ungovernable. The twisted, inscrutable political processes that characterize Suffolk government have failed to balance the interests of the urban west and the rural east. Brookhaven, as the frontier, has become a political battlefield.

There is no longer any serious doubt that an independent Brookhaven County is economically feasible. Brookhaven Town is geographically larger than Nassau County and makes up one-third the land area of Suffolk. If Brookhaven were a city, its population would make it one of the largest in the state and one of the top 50 in the United States.

The natural geopolitical division of Suffolk County would establish the Island's four western towns — Babylon, Huntington, Islip and Smithtown — as Suffolk County and allow the five eastern towns of Riverhead, Southampton, East Hampton, Shelter Island and Southold to become the Peconic County they have always wanted to be.

Long Island is more than a bedroom community supplying an endless stream of weary commuters trekking and schlepping to and from midtown Manhattan on an aging, decrepit mass transit system and choked highways that misanthropic planners euphemistically called "parkways" or, with more optimism than common sense, an "expressway."

The decision-makers in Albany and Washington must recognize that the interests, concerns and needs of New York City and Long Island are not necessarily the same.

County government is merely a political convenience for a region as large as Suffolk. When a county ceases to be of real public service to the people who live in its towns, it is time to restructure the county. Rewriting a county charter and reorganizing the bureaucracy of the Suffolk County government is not enough.

An independent Brookhaven County would bring officials closer to the taxpayers they serve and should allow more responsive interactions between the county and volunteer organizations such as fire and ambulance services. Duplicate services could be eliminated and efficiency gained if we merged, for example, town and county highway departments.

Water epitomizes the issue of local control. The western towns and the East End already have contaminated drinking water. They intend to rely primarily on Brookhaven as their fresh-water reservoir. As an independent county, Brookhaven could better protect water quality for the benefit not only of its own residents, but for all the people of Long Island. It is Suffolk County permits that have allowed the groundwater contamination.

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The geopolitical integrity of the incorporated villages within the present town would not be compromised within an independent Brookhaven County. In fact, the incorporated villages would have another opportunity to vote on whether to provide for local village police services, in addition to the county police.

Central to any consideration of establishing Brookhaven County is the question, "How much will it cost?" A study by the nationally respected accounting firm of Ernst & Whinney shows that if Brookhaven had been an independent county in 1986, the typical homeowner would have paid almost the same total tax they actually paid that year.

The issue confronting all the people of Suffolk County is whether it is time to restructure Suffolk and restore government to the people.

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