



Founded by Walt Whitman

SINCE 1838, NOBODY COVERS HUNTINGTON NEWS BETTER THAN THE LONG-ISLANDER.

The Long-Islander

Online at www.LongIslanderNews.com

THURSDAY, JULY 1, 2010

TOWN OF HUNTINGTON

State Passes Smart Growth Law

Governor Paterson likely to sign legislation promoting stronger economic centers

By Mike Koehler

mkoehler@longislandernews.com

State officials appear poised to finally support smart growth, but one legislator said better planning earlier on would have drastically changed Long Island's identity.

"I think if we had taken some smart growth principles into consideration when Long Island was being formed, we might have a much better public transportation system. We'd probably have less crowded roads. We'd be utilizing resources better," Assemblyman Andrew Raia (R-East Northport) said.

Both the state Assembly and Senate easily passed the Smart Growth Public Infrastructure Act last Friday. Designed to create economic centers and downtowns instead of urban sprawl, the legislation is awaiting Governor David Paterson's approval.

While Paterson typically would not comment before making a decision, spokeswoman Jessica Bassett confirmed the governor's smart growth director Paul Beyer was involved in creating the legislation.

"Governor Paterson has said smart growth should be regular protocol in government, not just in theory," Bassett said, adding that he was still reviewing it.

The state government, however, has not always been so supportive of smart growth. Eric Alexander, executive director of Vision Long Island, confirmed his agency helped create the law in 1999. Back when they were Vision Huntington, they submitted their concepts to then State Assemblyman Tom DiNapoli. The current comptroller championed the bill, but it failed then, as well as in 2003 and 2006, typically because the senate shot it down.

"[Former Governor George] Pataki never liked the term smart growth. The senate was in Republican hands for a number of years. When Spitzer took over, he formed a smart growth cabinet. We knew he wanted to do smart growth. There was a feeling the cabinet would move forward some initiatives," Alexander said. "The governor [Paterson] wanted to get in the act, so they passed a scaled-down version of the infrastructure act. The governor vetoed it, saying he wanted something stronger."

Sam Hoyt, a state assemblyman from Buffalo, has since taken over as the champion of Alexander's effort. And over the years, the bill has evolved, often for the better.

Assuming it goes through this time, all state business would be required to incorporate smart growth ideals in all future capital budget projects. That includes roads, sewers and other infrastructure, Alexander said, but does not require additional funding.

The original proposal did not require impact statements examining the data and how it relates to smart



Smart growth legislation that would encourage walkable downtowns has been passed by the state legislature and awaits the governor's signature. Executive Director of Vision Long Island Eric Alexander, pictured above in Huntington Village, supports the bill.

growth principles.

"Dollars would be invested in economic centers instead of roads to Ridge, roads to nowhere," he said. "The bill's point is you don't have to spend more money, but what you do spend, spend it in the right places."

State officials pretended to embrace smart growth in the past, the executive director said, referencing downtown Patchogue.

"Here are the couple of examples we'll do to satisfy those downtown people. Everything else, development will send further and further east, or away from downtown centers," he said.

And like Raia said, Alexander argued that Long Island suffers from urban sprawl. Downtown centers were not supported, while development was moved further east, and a template for governmental policy was created 50 years ago.

If approved, several communities could benefit from the emphasis on smart growth. Huntington Station, Alexander said, is one example, although East Northport could also use a stronger downtown.

"You have a good working class neighborhood. You don't have a framework yet; where's the center?" he said. "I think they all have their strengths and weaknesses. Every community is different. Some need roadwork, Northport needs sewer improvements."

The change is coming at a critical time, Raia added. Nassau County is all but completely built up, and Suffolk County will be in the same predicament in a few years.

But the future may be salvageable, Alexander said.

"A direction back towards investing in our historical downtowns, and also if new downtown centers could be created with the new principles. That bill has been phenomenal," he said.