

Statement to Town of North Hempstead Board

4/22/14

This Earth Day we are again facing dire warnings over the fate of our planet -- the oceans, the forests, agriculture, the glaciers, the sea level.

If there is any one country responsible for Global Warming it is the US. And in the US no place better illustrates our shameless energy-orgy than Long Island.

This summer again we will engage in an orgy of CO2 emissions -- air conditioning, traffic jams to the beaches and weekend getaways, dirty noisy and polluting boat engines, extremely low efficiency and polluting gardening machines, and of course the gluttonous and fetishized consumption of food.

North Hempstead's coming eco-fest is guaranteed to ask for none of the needed sacrifices of the excesses of the Long Island lifestyle.

(In fact, the center of the festivities appears to be a troubling mis-treatment of wild animals for the supposed education of children. That reptile show, which frenetically treats these sensitive animals as props and toys, shares the worst traits of now discredited circuses and should not be repeated again in this Town.)

I want to urge this new administration to commit to addressing two critical areas this Earth Day: (1) de-forestation, and (2) vehicular pollution.

(1) Tree Protection

In North Hempstead I have seen countless instances where developers are buying old homes, demolishing them, and completely clear-cutting the lots. This is in daily evidence across the Country Club area, which I often pass, but it is rampant elsewhere from what I have seen.

The tree protection law in North Hempstead is just a verbal fig-leaf that is bent to accommodate every such new building. Last year I outlined in a detailed letter many needed reforms, and I have re-submitted the letter to the new administration.

We desperately need to protect our trees for both global warming issues and to preserve the habitat for animals that live here. But we are not doing it.

Not only do trees sequester CO2 and convert airborne CO2 to oxygen and plant matter, but the shade they provide cools the air and reduces our need for air conditioning (for those who cannot tolerate summer without it).

Yet developers and residents seem unable to be deterred from destroying our

tree canopy and our remaining forests.

North Hills just countenanced the destruction of 17 acres of forest that was done abruptly in a blizzard around New Years this year -- an "Oak Tulip" forest that the state Department of Environmental Conservation had urged be preserved to the maximum extent possible. That was done by Scott Rechler -- who is the Vice Chairman of the Port Authority in his spare time.

This Board has even supported the reckless placement of Roslyn's proposed water-stripper in the public forest at Christopher Morley Park -- thereby sacrificing even more of our sparse remaining tree cover in Western Nassau -- as well as adding potent Freon greenhouse gases to the atmosphere.

I can tell you tonight that the Sierra Club LI Group has just voted to oppose the use of Christopher Morley Park for the water stripper and will be issuing a statement to that effect.

And the Green Party of Nassau County has issued a statement calling for a full Environmental Impact Statement, public hearings to include all Nassau County citizens, and a legitimate process of state legislative approval for any alienation of parkland.

But day in and day out, beautiful healthy trees are destroyed. In Mineola in the past three years the Village cut down 1,000 street trees, many of not most of them healthy based on a sample I observed and a review by a real arborist. In East Hills where I live our tree laws are almost useless to protect trees from developers. The most beautiful trees and properties have been gutted.

This has to stop and I urge North Hempstead to take a leadership role.

(2) Cars

We in North Hempstead are plagued with all the ills of the motor vehicle culture.

We have noxious air pollution, which anyone who stands along a major thoroughfare for a few moments can easily detect. Then there are CO₂ emissions. The danger and aggression of speeding cars, along with the higher emissions they create. And the incessant traffic jams we encounter daily on all major secondary roads in North Hempstead -- parts of Northern Boulevard, Glen Cove Road, Old Country Road, Jericho Turnpike, etc. To say nothing of the highways.

Massive amounts of unnecessary pollution and CO emissions result from this sclerotic transportation system. Meanwhile local public transit is a pathetic second-class system. And bicycles and pedestrians barely stand a chance. Ironically 10 miles west in New York City there is one of the most advanced

public and non-motorized transportation systems in the world.

You cannot palm this off on the Republicans in Mineola, because that gets us nowhere. North Hempstead citizens are bearing the brunt of these shameful transportation dysfunctions, and it is up to North Hempstead leaders to push for change.

You can start by reducing speed to 30 MPH throughout the Town. It is comical that even along the deadly stretch of Roslyn Road in Roslyn Heights the speed remains stuck at 40 MPH the "town" speed limit.

Beyond that the Town needs to start asking for next-generation solutions like light rail to connect the major shopping and population centers like Roosevelt Field, Great Neck, Manhasset, and Roslyn.

Immediate solutions to daily traffic nightmare could come in the form of human traffic controllers at major intersections that are subject to traffic issues -- for instance Glen Cove Road and Northern Boulevard; Marcus Avenue and Hillside Avenue; Community Drive and Northern Blvd, etc.

But getting people out of their cars is essential to making this area environmentally responsible.

I hope you can take some of these ideas and work with them.

Thank you.

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