

2013 East Hampton Green Guide

A primer on
sustainability policy
for candidates



NEW YORK LEAGUE OF CONSERVATION VOTERS
EDUCATION FUND
IN PARTNERSHIP WITH
EAST HAMPTON ENVIRONMENTAL COALITION

GROUNDWATER & SURFACE WATER

On Long Island, our economic prosperity, public health and safety, and quality of life rely upon a clean and sustainable supply of drinking water. Similarly, as an island blessed with bays, harbors, and beaches on every shore, the quality of our surface waters defines our outdoor experience.

Our underground aquifers store our only source of fresh drinking water for the 2.8 million people living in Nassau and Suffolk Counties. These aquifers are not static; they slowly flow from high ground to low, recharged by rainfall from above, and they supply the majority of fresh water entering our streams, lakes, and bays. Long Island water suppliers strive to pump the cleanest water they can find out of the ground, and yet more and more frequently, they must utilize expensive processing methods to meet federal safety standards before delivering it to our homes and businesses. In our homes we drink some, and the rest we load with detergents and solvents, we use it to flush our toilets, and we add fertilizers and pesticides to it while irrigating our lawns. We are at risk from 117 pesticides that are known to be in our water supplies, without a clear understanding of how this is affecting the health of our families. Recently published studies show clearly that much of Long Island's shallowest aquifer (the upper glacial) is simply no longer safe to drink. Nevertheless, it remains a major source of the fresh water flowing into the bays and harbors where we swim and fish.

Nitrogen pollution kills seagrass meadows in places like eastern Great South Bay and western Shinnecock Bay. That once-expansive seagrass habitat nurtured a long list of economically important fish and shellfish. Nitrogen pollution fuels and sustains harmful algal blooms in Peconic Bay. The collapse of aquatic ecosystems in these places is a serious threat, already affecting our fisheries and our water dependent economies in ways that regularly prompt public expenditures aimed at addressing symptoms. Unfortunately, we know for sure that there is no adequate plan, process, or agency protecting our waters; the quality of our water continues to get worse.

ACTION PLAN

- Prioritize the recently authorized Wastewater Treatment Plan and develop a specific implementation plan to effectively, enforcably and affordably achieve the clean water goals of the forthcoming plan.
- Support the creation of an island-wide entity as part of a wider regional need for water resources protection that impacts the bays and harbors of the town in order to ensure involvement in all East End communities.
- Examine a range of wastewater treatment technologies and consider a local septic system upgrade program to accelerate the deployment of advanced and decentralized treatment systems.
- Support completion of the Long Island Pesticide Management Strategy and work locally to provide education and outreach efforts to help homeowners and landscapers use fewer pesticides to maintain their property.
- Provide a formal examination of the Community Preservation Fund priorities list and identify the most important parcels that should be pursued to help protect drinking water, prioritizing potential acquisitions that lie within the Town's Special Groundwater Protection Areas including the East Hampton Morainal Forest, Stony Hill Woods and the Hither Hills areas of Montauk.
- Improve pharmaceutical disposal locally through take-back programs.
- Support the East Hampton Hatchery relocation and retrofit in an effort to mitigate excessive algae and restore coastal water bodies.

HAZARD MITIGATION & COASTAL ISSUES

As a coastal community, a primary concern for East Hampton is flooding. Beaches and water-oriented tourism and the most productive fishing fleet in the New York State anchor the local economy. Climate change and the resulting sea level rise will result in coastal storms of increased frequency and intensity and accelerated erosion. Recent projections by NOAA and other agencies estimate sea level could rise more than six feet by 2100. Coastal managers regularly calculate that each foot of sea level rise brings the ocean 75 to 100 feet inland, making waterfront development vulnerable to increasing erosion and low lying areas subject to submersion or recurrent flooding.

Utilities, essential infrastructure, energy sources, and commercial and residential development are concentrated in areas vulnerable to storm surge, coastal flooding and expected inundation. Development and redevelopment in the coastal zone continues apace without a process of assessment or adaptation for near and long-term impacts of sea level rise and catastrophic storms. The present Zoning Code has no provision for such eventualities. Community disaster response needs to be more self-reliant to support residents and visitors, especially during a prolonged emergency. Communities such as East Hampton are often in the position of reacting to stressful weather events, focusing on short-term recovery and restoration of status quo. Because of the area's seasonal fluctuation in population, planning for hazard mitigation has to account for larger populations, as current plans are limited and underfunded. Meaningful mitigation of potential damage from such eventualities is a critical planning issue, and the planning work needs to start in earnest today.

ACTION PLAN

- Update coastal flood zone maps and map and inventory potentially suitable lands where existing development may be relocated post storm disaster.
- Conduct regular baseline shoreline surveys with aerial photography to monitor shoreline movement and provide long term erosion data.
- Update and implement the Town Local Waterfront Revitalization Program (LWRP).
- Establish best flood-proofing structures, removing infrastructure from flood zones and preserving natural barriers like dunes and beaches.
- Coordinate with local community organizations to delegate responsibility for crisis management.
- Prepare a Local Hazard Mitigation and Resiliency Plan to identify and address short and long term threats.
- Encourage municipality, business, and citizen participation in community resiliency training through the University of Hawaii's National Disaster Prevention Training Center FEMA courses at Peconic Institute facilities.

DARK SKIES

East Hampton enacted an outdoor lighting regulation in 1984 that was amended in 2006 as the Smart Lighting Code in order to preserve the nocturnal environment, community character, and quality of life from the effects of misdirected, excessive, unnecessary and inefficient outdoor lighting. The Code specifies the types of outdoor light fixtures, light output, and procedures for review to ensure that light trespass, glare, and skyglow from poorly implemented lighting is addressed. This code was enacted as the result of broad community input and was generated from the recommendations made in the Comprehensive Plan by the Environment and Energy Subcommittees. The Town has declared the dark night sky a natural resource to be preserved and protected.

ACTION PLAN

- Revise and update the current 2006 Smart Lighting Code to include new technologies.
- Conform town lighting facilities for energy conservation, safety, efficiency, and effectiveness.
- Adopt and implement a town-wide Streetlight Policy to conform to national standards and dark sky principles.
- Appoint Town “Dark Sky” Advisory Committee to make recommendations to the Town Board for residential and commercial properties, and the municipality. The committee to be comprised of private citizens and environmental and civic group representatives with an interest in protecting the nocturnal environment along with officials from the Planning Department and Planning Board, and to include consultations with Building Department personnel, Code Enforcement, and the Town Electrician.

QUIET SKIES

East Hampton Town Airport creates noise and other environmental and human health impacts, including air and water pollution, which degrades quality of life and property values for East End residents. Imposing access limits, the sole noise abatement tool, becomes available to the Town on December 31, 2014 only if the Town no longer contracts with the Federal Aviation Administration (FAA) for more grant monies for development projects. Matching expansion and maintenance project grants are available to municipal proprietors, but are conditioned upon surrender of the Town's proprietary rights to control its own airport.

Even with current contractual obligations to the FAA from a previous grant award, noise data must be collected and efforts made to impose reasonable access limits until such time as the Town's rights as proprietor may be exerted under controlling federal law.

The airport generates revenue surpluses most years and can be financially self-sustaining, obviating the need for FAA funding and their encumbrances on local control. The Town Board has failed to develop a proper business plan to ensure safe operations at the airport, while maintaining independence from aggressive FAA control of the facility. Additionally, a single-event noise standard, required by the Town Code has not been applied to airport capital improvements, most notably the recent seasonal control tower.

ACTION PLAN

- Allow the remaining months of the applicable grant assurances restricting the Town's rights as proprietor to limit access to the airport to expire without further obligation to the FAA. These rights are absolutely contingent upon avoiding further contractual obligation to the FAA.
- Conduct a thorough analysis and devise a business plan of airport finances. Such a plan must:
 - ❑ Reflect present day airport revenues and expenses,
 - ❑ Incorporate projected capital improvement and repair project costs and the prudent scheduling of the same, and
 - ❑ Demonstrate additional and possible new revenue streams to inform the potential of the airport to be financially self-sustaining, including new and more lucrative revenue streams to provide for airport operation and maintenance costs to be passed along to airport users as part of a fiscally sustainable airport.
- Set reasonable, non-arbitrary, nondiscriminatory access restrictions for our airport in accordance with controlling federal case law including enforceable nighttime and weekend curfews, hours of operation, limits on numbers and concentrations of flights, fair and equitable distribution of air traffic and limiting access to the noisiest aircraft.

HABITAT PROTECTION & STEWARDSHIP

Wetlands, woodlands, grasslands, dunes, fresh water ponds, kettle holes, creeks, bays, and beaches are natural ecosystems abound in East Hampton, but are becoming increasingly rare nationwide. These ecosystems are not only a major draw for tourism and the area's economy, but are also valuable and vulnerable habitats that provide food, shelter, and breeding grounds for a wide array of creatures. Because of new development, the incursion of invasive species, the use of chemicals for fertilizers, pest and weed control, and increasing stresses of extreme weather and rising water levels, our native flora and fauna are depleting. Each species depends on other plants and animals to survive; that includes us. If we lose our bees, what will we do for fruits and vegetables? How will our farmers survive? If we lose the eelgrass beds that are the nursery for scallops and finfish, what will our bay-men do for a living? The protection and stewardship of natural habitats is not something we can assume the non-profit sector can take on alone. Serious attention must be paid by our elected representatives to ensure the continued health and success of our lands, waters and native creatures.

ACTION PLAN

- Educate our citizens about the significance and complexity of healthy habitats and how to best maintain them.
- Study how climate change and sea level rise will impact local habitats and species.
- Community Preservation Funds need to be used for stewardship of preserved properties to maintain the diversity of habitat.
- Enforce restrictions on fencing, paving, building, clearing, mowing, and lighting to express purpose of protecting habitat.
- Communicate the importance of coastal habitat protection in the protection and resiliency of our built system.

ABOUT THE EAST HAMPTON GREEN GUIDE

The Town of East Hampton has a long record of sustainability leadership, particularly on the issue of open space. But there are many steps the town can take to continue to improve its environmental performance – and the town's elected leaders will play a critical role in this effort.

For this reason, the New York League of Conservation Voters Education Fund and the East Hampton Environmental Coalition are pleased to present the East Hampton Green Guide as a resource for all candidates running for town office in 2013.

The East Hampton Green Guide is a one-stop-shop for candidates, policy makers and current elected officials to learn about new opportunities and approaches to persistent sustainability challenges. The Green Guide was developed by NYLCVEF and the 13 other member organizations of the East Hampton Environmental Coalition, in order to embrace a wide range of views and objectives. We trust that the present document will inform and inspire the town's elected leaders to continue and strengthen its commitment to sustainability progress.

EAST HAMPTON ENVIRONMENTAL COALITION

Accabonac Protection Committee ■ Amagansett Springs Aquifer Protection (ASAP)
Clearview Beach Association ■ Concerned Citizens of Montauk ■ Dark Sky Society
Group for the East End ■ New York League of Conservation Voters Education Fund
Northwest Alliance ■ Peconic Baykeeper ■ Quiet Skies Coalition
Surfrider Foundation ■ The Garden Club of East Hampton ■ Third House Nature Center



ABOUT THE NEW YORK LEAGUE OF CONSERVATION VOTERS EDUCATION FUND (NYLCVEF)

NYLCVEF engages and educates New Yorkers on environmental issues and the environmental decision-making processes at the local, regional, state and federal government levels. NYLCVEF fosters open, nonpartisan discussion on environmental policy and empowers New Yorkers to be effective advocates for the environment. To learn more, visit www.nylcvef.org/easthampton.