



YEONG-LUNG YANG

Density Tier 1 zone under Gov. Hochul's negotiations.

The goal is OK but details are a problem, the plan needs local input

BY LAURA CURRAN
Guest essay

Like many Long Islanders, I support transit-oriented development — mixed-use projects around transit hubs that bring more housing, retail and excitement to our downtowns.

We've all seen TOD success stories in communities like Farmingdale, Patchogue, and Lynbrook — and more are in the pipeline. These projects revive moribund main streets, create much-needed housing, attract a talented work force, increase diversity, and get cars off the road. Surveys show Long Islanders support vibrant downtowns and more housing.

So why has Gov. Kathy Hochul's new housing plan, which encourages mixed-use density around transit stations, gone over like a lead balloon — at least on Long Island?

The plan, included in the governor's 2023-24 budget, would override local zoning to allow 50 housing units per acre within a half-mile radius of all Long Island Rail Road stations up to 15 miles from New York City's borders.

I'll save you the math: The new zoning would allow 25,000 housing units within a 10-minute walk of just about every LIRR station in Nassau County. It would allow a village like Cedarhurst — one square mile with an LIRR station right in the middle — to more than triple its population.

Forget the political ramifications of stripping local zoning control from Nassau's 64 villages, three towns, and two cities. There are practical concerns that make this one-size-fits-all approach inappropriate for many communities. The governor says she is open to changing aspects of her plan; I hope she and her team listen to Long Islanders to understand our environmental and infrastructure vulnerabilities.

I know the NIMBY mindset can be frustrating, but I've also learned that working with local officials and civic groups not only gets you local buy-in, it helps avoid pitfalls you may not have known about.

A few examples:

Some 50,000 Nassau homes, mostly on the North Shore, are served by cesspools, not sewers. That means you cannot dramatically increase density in a community like Manhasset, with its train station a half-mile from Hempstead Harbor, without serious risks to human health and the coastal ecosystem. A recent feasibility study found sewer-ing communities around the harbor would cost about \$500 million; the governor includes \$250 million for statewide infrastructure to support her zoning plan.

More severe storms and flooding brought by climate change are also a problem, and much of the South Shore is riddled with antiquated drainage systems that barely accommodate the current population. The Five Towns, built on marshy land, has just two evacuation routes. One of them, Peninsula Boulevard, already floods when there's a full moon at high tide.

Drinking water, nonnegotiable for any community, is also a concern. Long Island relies on its sole-source aquifer. Before authorizing dramatically higher density, the state should await the completion later this year of a groundwater sustainability study, conducted by the state and federal governments, to assess the threat of saltwater

intruding into the fresh groundwater along our shores. The study will also map how groundwater shifts as you pump more water. The more people, the more pumping, the greater the shifts. We need to be confident there will be sufficient water for all our communities before making big changes.

There will always be people who don't want change. So I suggest the governor and her team talk to the many Long Islanders ready to embrace more TOD. Here are just a few:

"This is a great first step," Erase Racism executive director Laura Harding said. "I am hopeful that in the negotiation process, tweaks can be made to make this more suitable for more Long Island communities."

"It's like we are flying and trying to change the engines as we fly," said Democratic State Sen. Kevin Thomas, whose proposed changes to the plan include more infrastructure funding.

"Transit-oriented development is all about ground-up community visioning," said Mindy Germain, a sustainability consultant and civic leader who worked on a Port Washington TOD plan. The governor's plan "is the opposite of that. This is someone coming in and drawing a circle on a map."



This guest essay reflects the views of former Nassau County Executive Laura Curran, host of the "Cut to the Chase with Laura Curran" podcast.

The plan should take a gentler, incentivized approach

BY KEITH P. BROWN
Guest essay

Gov. Kathy Hochul's housing plan will not have the effect of "liberating Long Island to be the best that it can be," as she was quoted in Newsday. Rather, it will forgo state environmental laws, bind Long Island to unrealistic housing goals, and take away the ability for local communi-