



Going up and going wide shouldn't be a pipe dream

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Ronald Reagan used to win over audiences by joking: "I'm from the government and I'm here to help you!"

No one laughed harder than real estate crowds. Unfortunately the joke's been on us. The triple whammy of high taxation, irrational regulations and anti-growth mindset began stifling economic growth on Long Island long before Reagan was elected president, and continues to this day.

Case in point: Hauppauge Industrial Park.

One of the first planned commercial communities in the country, the complex - built on a former ITT satellite field - was constructed by various developers, including the Rechlers, the Racanellis and Walter Gross. Robert Moses extended Northern State Parkway to the edge of the park, opening the park to employers and employees from a wider radius.

In time, over 1,300 companies took up residency, employing more than 55,000 people. Recognizing a jobs creation machine and cash cow, town governments in Smithtown and Islip welcomed the newcomers at tax and election times, but otherwise kept their distance. Fear of angering neighborhood activists - whose objections to "big business" include even Mom-and-Pops - resulted in political leaders distancing themselves from the very sources of most community tax revenue and many local jobs. As a result, regulations seemed to feed on themselves, while needed infrastructure improvements went begging.

Instead of helping, government officials made things worse. They imposed a series of parking restrictions, building setbacks and coverage restrictions that ranked among the most onerous in the nation. That distinction remains intact after more than half a century.

This pattern of regulations thwarted growth, and the absence of political will in the years to follow exacerbated the situation. Suffolk County, home to the Hauppauge Industrial Park, lacks a commercial sewage infrastructure. As a result, it is effectively impossible to lease space to employers in most fast-growth economic sectors in today's economy, including pharmaceuticals, biotech and robotics.

I do see signs of change. The developers behind the Heartland Town Centre just a few miles away continue to pound on government doors, seeking permission - delayed for many years - to open a major industrial space and employment center. Addressing an audience filled with tenants and landlords from the Hauppauge park, Patrick Vecchio - supervisor of Smithtown, where most of the park is located - promised in early January to reduce government restrictions. This change will increase short term construction jobs and long term permanent ones, in addition to creating a soon-to-be-realized expanded tax base.

"The laws will be changed in 2013," Vecchio said. "You will be able to go up. You will," he said, "be able to go wide."

Additionally, it should not be so difficult to obtain basic infrastructure services such as sewage. It

should not take an endless series of time-sucking "variances" and grassroots political activism to accomplish what should be routine, common sense. Building a modern sewage system should not be a pipe dream. It has proven easier to end apartheid in South Africa, and broker peace in Northern Ireland than to bring sewage pipes to Suffolk County. It's time we insisted our government officials do what they are elected to do. If they will not help support economic growth, we must insist they stop contributing to economic stagnation.

It's time to reconsider the codes, rules and regulations that stifle economic growth, and replace them with common sense guidelines that balance environmental health and quality of life with the infrastructure needed for business growth and job creation. It's not an impossible dream.

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