Build a Better Burb

an ideas competition to retrofit Long Island downtowns

The time for cautious thinking is over. New visions are needed for the next generation of suburban centers.

Presented by:

LONG ISLAND

INDEX

Submission deadline: June 21, 2010

Suburbia is not as built out as it seems. Consider the mapping of *8,300 acres* of opportunity – vacant parcels and parking lots – in the many small downtowns of the country's "first suburbs" on Long Island. On the occasion of the release of these revealing new interactive maps, the Long Island Index invites all architects, urban designers, planners, students, visionaries and everyone else interested in shaping our suburbs' future to help us "Build a Better Burb." This ideas competition seeks bold design proposals for retrofitting underutilized asphalt in suburban downtowns into innovative and surprising new uses, forms and urbanisms.

Roughly equivalent to the area of Manhattan south of 50th St., 8,300 acres is a lot of land. It is still, however, only 1.1% of the land mass of Nassau and Suffolk Counties. By building in a new way on *this* land, rather than elsewhere on Long Island in the old way, there is tremendous opportunity to address the contemporary challenges of suburbia, by shifting focus to the prewar landscape of small towns and mass transit that languished during decades spent constructing highways, shopping malls, dream-home subdivisions and far-flung office parks. How might Long Island's existing downtowns be creatively retrofitted – redeveloped, reinhabited and/or regreened – in ways that are economically productive, environmentally sensitive, socially sustainable, and aesthetically appealing?

Building suburbia in the old way is no longer working. Statistical indicators show that Long Island is facing several pressing challenges: to build affordable housing and greater housing choice, especially for rentals; to reduce car dependency and congestion; to bring Long Island's diverse communities together in a shared public realm; to improve equity and access to opportunity for all; to meet the needs of retiring baby boomers who wish to age in place; and to fight the "brain drain" of younger residents who don't see a future here and leave.

There has been a crisis of imagination, and your bold new ideas are urgently needed. There should be no preconceptions about what is or is not possible. What would you do on these acres of opportunity? Build a car-free community for thousands? Plant an oasis of urban agriculture? Produce renewable energy and provide well-paying green jobs? Use landscape systems to repair ruptures in regional ecologies? Introduce armatures to enhance public space and the civic realm?

The best ideas, designs, images and videos will be selected as finalists by a diverse jury of distinguished academics and professionals and exhibited on the website. An important goal of "Build a Better Burb" is to widen the debate about Long Island's future; therefore, finalists' projects will be publicized in a broad media campaign over the summer of 2010 to encourage the public to vote and comment for a "People's Choice Award." Other exciting initiatives to disseminate the work of the finalists are in the planning stages. Cash prizes totaling **$22,500** will be awarded.

The "Build a Better Burb" competition is sponsored by the Long Island Index, a project of the Rauch Foundation.

THE CHALLENGE

With assistance from the Regional Plan Association and the CUNY Mapping Service at the Center for Urban Research, the Long Island Index recently added a new layer focused on the downtowns to our interactive online map of Long Island – the only publicly available, comprehensive source of mapped data for the two counties, home to almost 3 million residents. A couple of examples of the 156 downtowns and train stations that were identified, surveyed and mapped give a sense of the opportunities for good design to make a real difference:

What would you propose for the 69 available acres along Hempstead Turnpike in iconic Levittown, where only 3% of the housing units are multi-family, 21% of the population is over 55 and virtually no new housing has been built in decades?
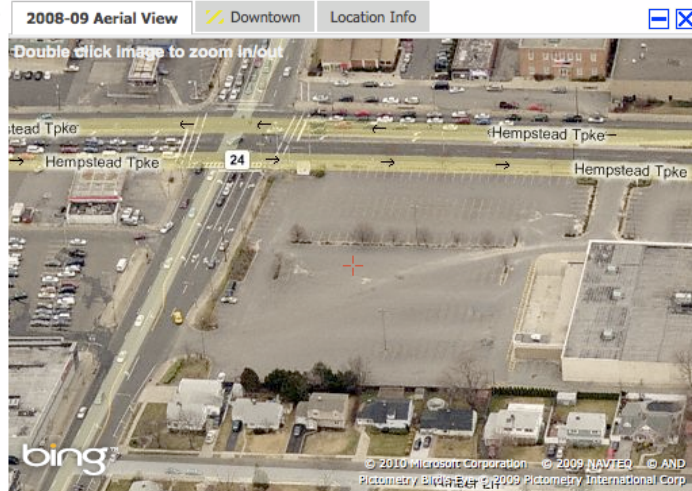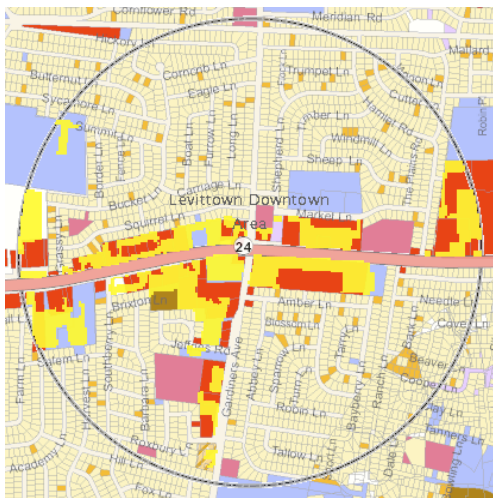
Map of downtown Levittown, Nassau County, NY, showing land use within 1/2-mile radius of the center. Bright yellow indicates acres of opportunity along Hempstead Turnpike. Source: Long Island Index Interactive Maps

Or what about the 74 acres in downtown Huntington Station, where the Long Island Rail Road station serves an average of over 10,000 riders per day?
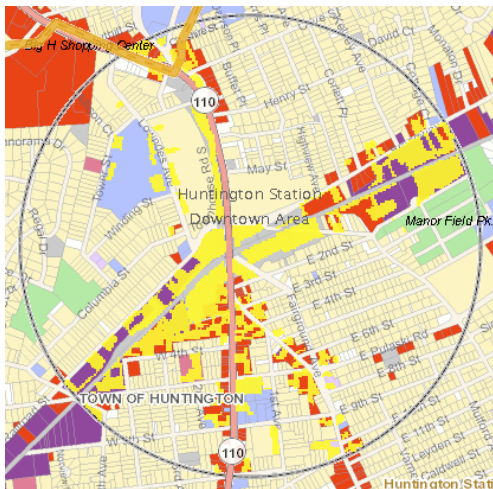
Map of Downtown Huntington Station, Suffolk County, NY, showing land use within 1/2-mile radius of the center. Bright yellow indicates acres of opportunity around the railroad station. Source: Long Island Index Interactive Maps

Successful solutions may range widely in scale, although you are asked to site your proposal in one of the 156 mapped downtown areas. You can propose something *small*, such as an energy-producing bus shelter or a repurposed parking spot. You could propose something *medium*, such as an innovative infill building or a small urban farm on a vacant lot. A big box store could be adaptively reused as intergenerational housing while the parking lot is co-opted as a civic park, or a bicycle station. You could think *big*, and design a mixed-use plan for

an entire block, strip shopping center, or historic downtown. Or you could think *extra-big*, and design at the scale of regional infrastructure: to introduce new mobility systems, to manage water, habitat and sewage, to generate renewable energy, or to engage in environmental repair.

Proposals may be prototypical, or customized to a particular downtown. Use your imagination, skills, insight and creativity to help Long Island, and other similar aging suburbs throughout the North American continent, to boldly envision a future that is exponentially better! (A reminder: this is an open call for bold new ideas, not an awards program for actual Long Island projects in process, of which there are many commendable examples.)

BACKGROUND

A Very Brief History of Long Island
In the late 19th and early 20th centuries, Long Islanders lived in hamlets, villages and suburban towns throughout the island, linked to New York City primarily by the Long Island Rail Road. Many worked in agriculture and fishing; others operated local businesses or commuted to the city by rail. There were also numerous large private estates, belonging to wealthy New York industrialists. The downtown commercial districts were small but vibrant community hubs, with shops, cinemas, a variety of businesses, and stations for train and streetcar lines. By the 1930s Nassau and Suffolk Counties had a combined population of less than 500,000 residents.

But the island's boosters imagined a far different future. In preparation, Robert Moses had begun the construction of thousands of miles of parkways and bridges, later followed by interstate highways. In the postwar era of mass suburbanization, lubricated by federal loan insurance programs, farms and large estates were bulldozed and subdivided for residential development, creating a new, dominant landscape of tract homes while providing entrée to the American Dream for hundreds of thousands families leaving urban immigrant enclaves in Brooklyn, Queens and the Bronx. In Levittown, the most well known of these communities, more than 17,000 houses were constructed between 1947 and 1951. The locus of commerce and entertainment shifted from the old downtowns to new shopping malls and strip centers.

The population of the two counties swelled to 2 million by 1960 and is now approaching 3 million, with most of the growth in the past 50 years occurring in Suffolk County. More farms, private estates, and large airfields were converted to residential subdivisions and office parks. Industrial plants, once a source of good jobs for thousands, like Grumman in Bethpage, builder of the legendary Apollo Lunar Module, are now largely a thing of the past.

Problems and Potentials of "First Suburbs"
Like suburbs across North America, especially the so-called "first suburbs" that were built out in the post World War II period, Long Island is facing several pressing inter-related needs. The best submissions will find creative potential in addressing these problems through better use of the land assets of the historic downtowns and train station areas:

Providing Housing Choice and Affordability
There is a severe shortage of affordable housing on Long Island. In 2000, home values were *three times* household incomes; today, even with the bust of the real estate bubble, they are *five times* household incomes. What about renting? On Long Island, only 17% of the housing stock is for rent. And what of the baby boomers, who may wish to downsize from larger homes, without leaving their communities?

Stemming the "Brain Drain"
Lack of housing choice is contributing to an exodus of young people, aged 25-34. Where are they going? Anywhere but here, it seems. Without a young, educated workforce, businesses are leaving too. What might bring back the younger workers – Richard Florida's "creative class" – or help them stay? Revitalized downtowns, with places to live, work, socialize, and walk, are sure to help.

Car-free Mobility
Long Island already has an extensive commuter rail system, the Long Island Rail Road. Largely built out by 1900, it has a "spoke and hub" organization, with a main terminus at Penn Station in New York City, and does

not service north-south trips across the island. Over time, downtown buildings adjacent to stations were demolished to increase parking for commuters. Can these downtowns be reborn to encourage Long Islanders to leave their cars at home or better yet, not need to buy a car, because everywhere they need to go is within easy access on foot, bike or by public transit? Can the surviving pre-automobile historic built fabric in these downtowns—mixed in use and walkable—be better leveraged to achieve this goal?

Equity, Access and Public Space
One of the most intractable problems on Long Island is the degree to which it remains segregated by race and ethnicity along boundaries drawn in the 1940s and 1950s. The US Census has found that Long Island is the third most segregated suburban region in the country. It is a region of strikingly separate and unequal communities. Can good design help to bridge these divides? We believe it can; shared public and civic space in downtowns can bring people together across lines of age, race, ethnicity and class.

The problems facing Long Island are severe and timid ideas won't help to turn the tide. By no means are we suggesting the bulldozing of what exists. Instead, we encourage tapping the underutilized land capacity in the downtowns and revitalizing the historic built fabric that is already there. Long Island is and will remain suburban, with much land fixed in stable residential neighborhoods of detached homes. However, suburban form needs added flexibility to adapt to future needs. So, with this competition, we wish to focus on what we can add, remodel, and repurpose to realize the latent potential of Long Island's many downtowns. Change is the only way forward.

The time for cautious thinking is over. We invite you to begin your process of envisioning and designing the next generation of retrofits for Long Island downtowns!

Opportunities in Long Island Downtowns
Where to begin? If you are familiar with Long Island, delve into the Long Island Index's Interactive Maps to locate the acres of opportunity in the downtowns of Nassau and Suffolk Counties. In addition to mapping vacant land in the downtowns, the maps include layers on land use, population, housing, and education, as well as orthophotos.

View Map of Long Island Downtowns

For those less familiar with Long Island, this topic-based guide will get you started. What are you interested in?

From Park-n-ride lots to TOD (Transit Oriented Development)
Hicksville
Port Washington
Ronkonkoma
Smithtown

Adding public/civic space to a traditional, historic downtown
Babylon
Mineola
Amityville
Westbury

Retrofitting a postwar strip shopping center
Elmont
Levittown
Port Jefferson Station
Medford

TIMELINE

Registration opens	March 31, 2010
Q&A period ends	June 14, 2010
Submission deadline	June 21, 2010
Finalists announced	July 6, 2010
Online voting ends	September 15, 2010
Winners announced	September 21, 2010

PRIZES

At least 20 Finalists will be selected in July 2010 by the jury; these projects will be posted to the competition website and widely publicized in a broad media campaign over the summer to encourage online voting for a People's Choice award.

The jury will award a guaranteed first prize of **$10,000** and **$10,000** in additional prizes, to be announced in September 2010. In addition there will be a **$2,500** prize awarded to the top project submitted by a student currently enrolled in an undergraduate or graduate program (proof of enrollment status required).

Other exciting activities to publicize the work of the Finalists and Winners are in the planning stages, and may include a publication, a museum exhibition, and a traveling video exhibition to be shown in libraries, schools, and other public forums throughout Long Island.

JURY

Allison Arieff, design journalist, contributor to the *New York Times* "Opinionator" blog and GOOD Magazine

Teddy Cruz, principal of Estudio Teddy Cruz, San Diego

Daniel D'Oca, Interboro Partners, New York, and assistant professor, Maryland Institute College of Art

Walter Hood, professor of landscape architecture, UC Berkeley, and principal of Hood Design*

Rob Lane, director of the Design Program at the Regional Plan Association

Paul Lukez, principal of Paul Lukez Architecture, Boston, and author of *Suburban Transformations*

Lee Sobel, real estate development and finance analyst, U.S. EPA: Office of Policy, Economics and Innovation

Galina Tahchieva, partner at Duany Plater-Zyberk and Company, Miami, author of the forthcoming *Sprawl Repair Manual*

Georgeen Theodore, Interboro Partners, New York, and associate director of the Infrastructure Planning program, New Jersey Institute of Technology

Jury Coordinator
June Williamson, associate professor of architecture, City College of New York/CUNY, and co-author of *Retrofitting Suburbia: Urban Design Solutions for Redesigning Suburbs*

*invited

SUBMISSION REQUIREMENTS

There is <u>no</u> entry fee. Competitors, who we encourage to work in collaborative teams, must register on the website before the submission deadline. For full consideration in the competition, you or your team must submit the following:

<u>Title (required)</u>
Give your submission an appropriate title. If designing for a specific downtown, include the town's name in the title.

<u>Proposal Visualization (required)</u>
You may submit up to <u>five</u> image pages to describe and visualize your submission. These may be comprised of photographs, renderings, plans, diagrams, etc., composed in 11" x 17" format (A3 or tabloid), orientated horizontally. Each image must be in JPEG format at a resolution of 200 dpi (dots per inch) or 3400 x 2200 pixels. Each individual file should not exceed 10MB in actual file size.

In addition, you should compile your images into a single multi-page document in PDF format and upload that as well.

Two drawings are required to be incorporated into your submission:
- A 1/2-mile radius site plan of one specific Long Island downtown (selected from those highlighted on the online interactive map), to show your proposal in a context. This drawing should be drawn at a scale of approximately 1 inch = 500 feet (1:6000 meters).
- One eye-level perspective rendering of your proposal.

It is not necessary to design exclusively for a specific downtown, although you may do so. If your proposal is a prototype that could be suitable for many downtowns, to meet the drawing requirements we ask that you choose and identify one downtown in which to deploy it and illustrate it there. (Looking for an idea or downtown to pick? See *Opportunities in Long Island Downtowns.*)

It is important that you DO NOT include any personal identifying information in the images to ensure anonymity during judging!

<u>Short Statement (required)</u>
Provide a short statement of up to 250 words describing how your submission will "Build a Better Burb." Again, please do not include any personal identifying information.

<u>Video (optional)</u>
Include a link to a video, uploaded to a VIMEO account, to explain and illustrate your project, your design process, etc. Your video should be no longer than 5 minutes in length.

QUESTIONS AND ANSWERS

If a question arises, first consult the Frequently Asked Questions (FAQ) page on the competition website. Teams may seek additional clarification by submitting questions to info@buildabetterburb.org.

All questions must be received by the deadline in the timeline, June 14, 2010. Questions and answers will be posted to the FAQ page on the competition website at http://www.buildabetterburb.org.

CREDITS

TERMS & CONDITIONS

Eligibility

This is an international competition open to all architects, designers, students and members of the public either individually or as a team.

There is no age limit; the projects may be carried out individually or in groups, with no restriction on the number of members of the team. Each team project must be accompanied by a primary contact. Individuals may submit entries as individuals and/or as part of a team.

Restrictions

The following will not be eligible to take part in the competition:
- Any individual or organization related to the Rauch Foundation or the Long Island Index including members of the Advisory Committee or Technical Committee. Rauch Foundation grantees are eligible to participate.
- Any members of the competition jury or any person to whom a member of the jury acts as director, supervisor or adviser.

Copyright Ownership

By submitting an entry by a sole creator to a category, Competitor warrants that Competitor is the sole designer, creator, and owner of the artwork, including all visual and auditory components, or has permission to use copyrighted components, and further warrants that the artwork does not contain information considered by Competitor's place of business, university, college or any other third party to be confidential. By submitting an entry by a group of creators, the Competitors warrant that they jointly designed, created, and own the visual and auditory artwork or have permission to use copyrighted components, and further warrant that the artwork does not contain information considered by Competitors' place of business, university, college or any other third party to be confidential.

Disclaimer

The Rauch Foundation and the Long Island Index reserves the right to refuse any entry. The organizers are not liable for lost or misdirected, late or substantially incomplete entries, as well as any entries containing text/images that identify the Competitors to jurors. The decisions and opinions of the jurors represent their professional viewpoints, not the opinion of the organizers. All prizes will be awarded at the discretion of the organizers and all decisions are final.

All materials for this competition must be submitted in digital format, via the competition website. Competitors retain standard ownership of their intellectual property. It should be emphasized that this competition is purely conceptual, and the selection of finalists or prize winners in no way indicates intent of the property owners to implement the proposed schemes. Upon registering for this competition, all Competitors agree to waive any and all claims against the Rauch Foundation and the Long Island Index as a result of the competition. Also, by registering, the Competitors transfer unlimited use for publication, exhibition and electronic posting of all entries to the Rauch Foundation and the Long Island Index. The Rauch Foundation and the Long Island Index shall have the right to release any of the submitted materials to the media for public relations and will credit the Competitors responsible for authoring the work.

All images must either be created by Competitor or Competitors or sufficiently cited. Failure to do so will result in disqualification. This competition, headed by the Rauch Foundation or Long Island Index, has no intention to award or grant any building contracts for the designs submitted in this competition.

Announcements and Publication

Competitors may not release any images of their submissions until after July 6, 2010 when the Finalists will be announced. This includes all professional publications and media outlets, including blogs. Winners may be notified in advance of the official announcement date. Winners may not make an announcement about winning in advance of the official announcement date without permission from the Long Island Index and the Rauch Foundation.