

Local Officials Seek Federal Funds to “Reclaim” Lower Hempstead Harbor

Landfilling of Lower Harbor Seen as Providing Many Benefits

April 1, 2018 by BULL BREYER / bull.breyer@newday.com



Harbor reclamation in the early 1900s (courtesy AP)

MANHASSET, NY. If the Town of North Hempstead and three of its local villages succeed in obtaining federal infrastructure funds, Hempstead Harbor will be greatly reduced in size. The project would involve filling in the relatively-unused lower portion of the harbor with clean dredged materials from other parts of Long Island Sound and from material excavated for the proposed cross-Sound tunnel.

According to Town spokesman Kevin Brown, the project, which would take about five years to complete, would have numerous economic benefits. “By reclaiming this land, we will not only restore it to the tax rolls and bring in revenue from those wishing to dispose of fill materials, but we would be able to cut back on Bay Constable patrols, decrease water quality monitoring, and reduce storm water permit requirements for reducing pathogens.

The harbor, which is currently 5.3 miles long and 0.6 miles across in the lower harbor, would be reduced to about 3 miles long. "There would still be plenty of room remaining to accommodate boaters, fishermen, and other users" said Mel Latham, the Town's Harbormaster. "Besides, very few people use the lower harbor. It is too shallow to do anything down there and mother nature would have eventually filled it in over time. We're just helping mother nature to do it faster".

While the Town owns the underwater land, the reclaimed land would be divided between the Town and the Villages of Flower Hill, Roslyn, and Roslyn Harbor. While none of the villages have announced any plans for the new land within their borders, several residents and local officials offered suggestions.

P.D. Shore, a resident of Roslyn and overseer of a nearby park, suggested that her village leave the new land as open space. "With all the condos being built these days, it would be nice to get some open land again".

Village of Flower Hill Trustee Frank Genovese felt that this could enhance the entrance to his village. "Up until now, we have had only a small presence on the Hempstead Harbor side. This would give us much more land. It would be most appropriate to create a series of hills on our portion and plant them with wildflowers. That could serve as an appropriate welcome to our village".

On the eastern side, Village of Roslyn Harbor resident Ah Bee felt that this could provide land for a public park, something that the residential village now lacks. "All of our shoreline has been privately owned up until now. We should get our Planning Commissioner to work on this right away".

The project could also improve transportation by providing the means to create a highway that would connect Shore Road in Glenwood Landing to West Shore Road in Port Washington. This would relieve congestion on nearby Northern Boulevard (NYS Rt. 25A) and may benefit local downtowns. Said Sea Cliff resident Tom Powers, "I would be much more likely to run to Port Washington to shop with a highway across the harbor and perhaps Port Washington residents would come and shop in Glenwood Landing".

Environmental officials expressed lukewarm support for the proposal. Adrian S. Poozito, Executive Director of Citizens Campaign for Anything Environmental, stated that "With less surface water, there would be fewer areas where harmful algal blooms could occur and that the remaining portion would be much easier to manage". At the same time, he expressed concern for diamondback terrapins, a protected species that has been documented in the lower harbor. "We have to make sure to shoo those turtles north and give them time to get there as they don't move very fast".

Eric Swenson, Executive Director of the Hempstead Harbor Protection Committee pointed out that "Manhattan and other parts of New York City and elsewhere have thrived in part due to filling in their waters. Much of lower Manhattan was once water. It has just taken longer for this approach to reach the suburbs." He quickly added, "April Fools. Have a nice day".