

Green Glen Cove

My name is Eileen Rita Coles. I am a National Merit Finalist; a third generation Veteran who served in the US Air Force during Operation Desert Storm; a small business owner and lead system engineer for an IT consulting firm called Brisingamen Technical Solutions; and the Founder of Green Glen Cove. We are an organization of over 500 environmentally concerned citizens of the City of Glen Cove and the surrounding communities, and in the process of pursuing (501)3c non-profit status.

I founded Green Glen Cove the day after it was announced that Carter Suozzi, the youngest son of Glen Cove's Mayor Ralph Suozzi and his wife Jane, had been diagnosed with cancer at the age of nine. This was the second child under the age of ten to be diagnosed with cancer in the City of Glen Cove that was publicly known within a year. Another child, Nicholas Pedone, had passed away the year before from cancer at the age of six. We may never know how many other children in the Glen Cove community have been diagnosed with cancer, but even those two were two too many. It does not take a rocket scientist to understand that when children under the age of ten are regularly coming down with cancer in a municipality, something is extremely wrong with the environment.

The next few things I have to say provide a background for how this relates to the current situation with LIPA. It will sound at first like I am going off on an unrelated tangent. Please be patient and bear with me, because this actually becomes extremely relevant to the reason we are all here today, which is to fix what's broken about Long Island's electrical power infrastructure.

Some time before Carter was diagnosed, I was living near the former 22 acre campus of a DoD contractor, Photocircuits, that had been in operation from 1959 until 2007. I did an investigation and found the area to have extremely porous security and that there were numerous unsafe conditions in and around the buildings of the area. I emailed Mayor Ralph Suozzi about this and he responded swiftly, having the area fenced off. During my initial investigation, I discovered that the basement of the oldest building on the corporate campus was flooded up to the ceiling. Someone was running a compressor to pump the basement out, but that was clearly not working. It appeared that the creek that runs through the corporate campus had breached the basement. The upper management at Photocircuits quickly evacuated the campus when this happened before it could become common knowledge, covering up the situation on paper by saying the company had gone bankrupt. There was discussion of the emergency on white boards in the offices of upper management that told the real story. The suddenness with which the campus was evacuated showed in workers who had not even been allowed to clean out their personal lockers, and half eaten lunches and coffee cups on tables in the cafeterias. It was a scene out of the Andromeda Strain.

I attended several DEC hearings about Photocircuits and let them know that I knew about this. The chemicals used to make circuit boards, which was the primary function of Photocircuits, are extremely toxic and carcinogenic. The DEC obviously knew about the breached basement situation, as well as the resulting pollution plume. They were and are actively remediating the property, but the damage had been done to the groundwater and existing land. Photocircuits is now a 22 acre cancer farm for the City of Glen Cove, and not much else. Giving people - even their children! - cancer in their own backyards. With "defense" like this, who needs hostile foreign governments or terrorists?

My Father, William James Tronolone, was an electrical engineer who worked for Sperry Gyroscope, later Unisys, for most of his adult life. I grew up hearing the concerns of a high level Department of Defense engineer, and so I am familiar with the systemic pollution issues attached to DoD contractor sites on Long Island. Recently I inspected the former corporate campus of Sperry Gyroscope, and I am here to tell you that, sadly, "Lake Success" has become both a travesty and a misnomer. In something right out of a Joni Mitchell song, Sperry's Great Neck campus - once home to the United Nations and the birthplace of the State of Israel - was capped with a parking lot for what is now a shopping mall. However, the multitude of sins that this covered up are still visibly manifesting today, and can be clearly seen in the polluted lake and the otherwise unexplained line of dead trees surrounding it as you drive around Schenk Avenue. The really frightening thing is that Northwell Health's Manhasset Hospital is located very close to this heavily polluted site, as well as the Great Neck Fire Department and Police Department. I really hope that they all have good water filtration systems. Again: with "defense" like this, who needs hostile foreign governments or terrorists?

The pollution plumes attached to former military bases and DoD contractor sites are one of the reasons Long Island has THE worst incidence of breast cancer in the entire United States. I can name entirely too many sites across the entire length of Long Island that fit the same profile: Dead Horse Bay in Brooklyn, Wardencllyffe in Shoreham, Mitchell Field in Garden City, Grumman in Bethpage.

You may certainly ask what does any of this have to do with LIPA, and you would be right to ask. As the founder of Green Glen Cove, I would like to present a solution to both this endemic pollution problem and our broken electrical power infrastructure. The answer is to take these established sites which are now unsafe brownfields and repurpose them as solar power plants.

Long Island's numerous DoD contractor sites and former military bases were chosen with care to be relatively far from densely populated residential areas at the time. The people who built them were strategists who chose them for defensibility from the ground and air should an invasion ever have taken place. Many of them are still excellently located to become part of the electrical power grid which would support solar power.

Solar power infrastructure is generally safer than a lot of the existing alternatives out there. It's a technology that can stay resilient in the face of super storms, acts of war or terrorism. When your source of electrical power is not based on fossil fuels and has minimal ways of going "boom", it becomes that much harder to damage or sabotage. Community safety and ease of security have already been designed into these former DoD sites, and thus are perfect to consider for this use.

Large scale battery farms could be easily assimilated into the existing infrastructure at many of these sites, which with a few exceptions are still safely located away from densely populated residential and commercial areas. Once they are implemented, these solar power plants would require minimal human interaction; and can be monitored from safe and remote locations that would not endanger the health of their workers.

Here's the best part – these solar power plants would not only pay for themselves within five to ten years with the savings they would generate; they could also be structured to actually DIRECTLY pay for the continued remediation of the associated pollution plumes on the same properties. The savings as well as the health benefits that could be passed on to the end consumer would be enormous. If sufficient ethical thought is put into implementing this solution, Long Islanders could end up paying pennies on the dollar for electrical power that is sourced this way.

Hopefully others here will be presenting the points that we need to examine the ways other communities have addressed the solar power initiative, and that we need to increase the quotient of our sustainable energy infrastructure in order to catch up with the rest of the United States and the world. My intent is to bring attention to a way that Long Island can leverage our unique, specific resources; and find a way to sustainably fund the remediation of these legacy brownfields while simultaneously using the same properties to serve the existing community's energy needs. This is a win-win, and an opportunity we would be foolish to ignore.

Bringing LIPA fully public can ensure that this infrastructure improvement and others will truly serve the needs of Long Island. We dare not fail to learn from the atrocious, painful example of Shoreham, where an unwanted facility was built on the backs of a public who neither wanted nor needed it, and that we are still being made to pay for generations later. My Father said to me in the 1980s, "Eileen, your Mother and I are going to be dead and in the ground decades from now, and YOU are still going to be paying for Shoreham!" That he was not wrong should bother every single person within the sound of my voice. The defunct Shoreham nuclear power plant represents a great shame, and a great failure. It was a terrible series of decisions that were imposed on the taxpayers and rate payers of Long Island without our full consent, and that is very far from how a Democratic Republic is supposed to work. It is saddening to think how many families and communities have been held back from becoming the best they could have been because so many of us could have been using that money for other things - college educations, better quality housing, community improvements – the American Dream.

We can not allow ourselves to continue to be exploited by this obviously corrupt system which does not truly serve the public good. It does not merely endanger the prosperity of our current and future generations, but our health itself. Those making the decisions need to be informed, educated, honorable, and answerable to the scrutiny of the public.

Long Island is tired of being exploited – and if decision makers ignore this now, they are very likely to learn it in a more painful manner later. Sure, you can arrest noisy, pesky activists. You can arrest Greenpeace. But there's only ONE way to arrest climate change, and that's to truly step up and engage our responsibility as the stewards of our planet. Mother Earth is done playing; and we have seen by now that there is no door, not even a billionaire's, that can be closed to Her if She decides to get notional and uppity. The human race ignores this at its own peril. The voters of New York State have spoken and passed the Clean Air, Clean Water and Green Jobs Bond Act of 2022. We have the backing of bipartisan legislators and the available funding. There are no more excuses. It's time to fix this.

In closing: as a Gulf War 1 Veteran, a minority small business owner, an Information Technology professional, a lifelong resident of Long Island and on behalf of my over 500 fellow environmentalist members of Green Glen Cove, I strongly urge the Advisory Committee to:

End the private-public model which no longer serves the public good, and re-create LIPA as a fully 100% public utility;

Establish genuine and ethical oversight over this utility that allows for the public's full involvement;

Conform to the NY State goal of reducing electrical rates to no more than 6% of a rate payer's income as is reflected across many other communities nationwide;

Aggressively increase local sustainable energy sourcing, to include my suggestion of repurposing of Long Island's former DoD contractor and military base brownfields as solar energy power plants;

And dedicate a portion of the profits generated from these solar power stations toward the cost of remediating pollution on the same sites.

I will be happy to provide my contact information if you have any questions or concerns. I hope you will seriously consider what I have had to say, and I thank you for your time.

Respectfully,

Eileen Rita Coles
Founder, Green Glen Cove
24 November, 2022