

Comments for Final Round of LIPA Commission Public Hearings

I offer my thanks to the Commission on the Future of LIPA for holding these 2nd round of hearings to receive public comment on its draft report. My name is Jim Brown and I am a resident of Island Park. I am a retired librarian and longtime LIPA ratepayer. I am also Secretary of the Green Party of Nassau County. Both I and the Nassau Green Party support the work of the Commission. We hope that the work of the Commission and the legislation eventually adopted will lead to the abandonment of the public-private utility model now in force, and that LIPA will become a completely public utility.

Two issues are critical as LIPA is changed and municipalized: accountability and electric rates. LIPA must have greater accountability and oversight, and electricity costs for ratepayers must be lowered. Accomplishing both is necessary in the fight to halt climate change.

Long Island and Rockaways ratepayers deserve a responsive, elected LIPA board of trustees and an empowered LIPA Advisory Council. Elected boards tend to be the highest rated among municipal systems and are also the most pro-consumer, compared to appointed boards. Unlike the current LIPA CEO-appointed Community Advisory Board, a legislatively mandated and independent LIPA Advisory Council will act as an advocate or “watchdog” for ratepayers, dealing with issues as broad-ranging as day-to-day LIPA activities to ensuring that the utility adequately and efficiently reaches state legislated climate goals.

LIPA ratepayers pay among the highest rates in the nation. The price of electricity must be reduced. The LIPA Commission Draft Report estimates that full municipalization will only save about 1-2% in the cost of electricity. More must be accomplished as LIPA is restructured. Borrowing by the Authority should be curtailed. Payment in Lieu of Taxes and taxes themselves, should be sunsetted by the Legislature. There should be a legislative mandate to move LIPA towards obtaining a nonprofit power supply, no longer having to pay a premium for purchasing from for-profit power suppliers like National Grid. These measures, as LIPA becomes increasingly public, would go way beyond the small projected savings projected in the report and create significant reductions in the cost of electricity for ratepayers on Long Island and the Rockaways.

In addition, LIPA should, on behalf its ratepayers, initiate a Climate Lawsuit against the fossil fuel industry—Exxon-Mobil, Shell, Chevron, BP, and their trade organizations. Fossil fuel companies, like the tobacco companies, have known for over 50 years that their products were dangerous. In the case of fossil fuels, the companies, through their own studies knew their products were damaging the environment, causing global heating, and having negative health impacts on people. This information was suppressed, covered up, and propaganda released that denied the negative impacts of fossil fuels on health and the environment. Fossil fuel companies have consciously spread messaging that denies the reality of human-induced climate change. The behavior of the industry amounts to consumer fraud.

LIPA has identified that it has spent over \$70 million in “resiliency” spending in 2023, improving infrastructure to address climate change threats, e.g., elevating substations and re-engineering circuits to better handle outages. LIPA estimates that as of this year it has spent more than \$930 million on “storm hardening,” critical expenditures to combat increasingly damaging impacts of severe and chaotic weather events linked to climate change, due largely to fossil fuels. LIPA and its ratepayers deserve redress and compensation from the fossil fuel industry for these costs. LIPA should join other plaintiffs around the nation and initiate its own lawsuit to hold these companies accountable for the price we’ve had to pay.

Thank you,

Jim Brown
Secretary
Green Party of Nassau County
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