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**CULTIVATING CHANGE:**

# The quest for thriving Long Island communities

By Victoria Leistman

1 2 3 4 5 [Next page >](#)



Nancy Rauch-Douzinis founded the Long Island Index to increase awareness of matter in the area among residents.



Following a 20-year career in the corporate world, Dr. Ann Golob came to the Long Island Index seven years ago looking for a change of venue. With a Ph.D. in Anthropology from City University of New York Graduate Center and years of management experience at companies including Chase Manhattan Bank, AXA Client Solutions and Guardian Life Insurance Company, Golob turned to the non-profit sector, now serving both as the Long Island Index's director and an enthusiastic player in the challenge to better Long Islanders' knowledge of their region.

"I was very drawn to the type of research that the Index carries out every year and felt strongly that this was an effective way to begin to educate Long Islanders about our region," she said.

Now in its tenth year, the Long Island Index works to collect and present information to make positive changes in the area. Developed in 2002 as a project of the Rauch Foundation, the organization was created with the aim of providing information that could make Long Island a sustainable area.

The Rauch Foundation, which was founded in 1961 and provides grants for programs that aid children and families in need, is the financial underwriter of the Index. Nancy Rauch Douzinis, president of the foundation, decided to start the Index after discovering that projects on Long Island were not growing in the same way that they were in other areas.

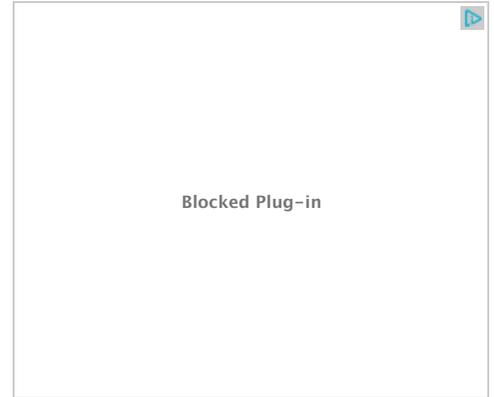
According to Golob, the foundation supports an early childhood program called the Parent-Child Home Program, which promotes the social and cognitive development of disadvantaged children. It began on Long Island and has now spread across the country, being particularly successful in Massachusetts. However, its growth on Long Island has been disappointing due to fragmentation in the region, including independent school districts and a lack of centralized authority, Golob said.

"[Douzinis] wanted people to understand what was happening on a wider scale across the two counties," Golob said. "Nancy really is a visionary."

Earlier this year, Douzinis was named to the Long Island Press's Power List Hall of Fame for her leadership position in the two organizations.

1 2 3 4 5 [Next page >](#)

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## The quest for thriving Long Island communities

[< Previous page](#)   [1](#)   [2](#)   [3](#)   [4](#)   [5](#)   [Next page >](#)

(Page 2 of 5)



Nancy Rauch-Douzinis founded the Long Island Index to increase awareness of matter in the area among residents.



act as liaisons between the advisory and technical groups.

Lastly, surveys are conducted to relate the material to residents. The results of the surveys have been largely instrumental and reveal much about what Long Islanders are concerned about, Golob said.

The Index releases one major report every January that includes survey results and the new indicators of focus, while outlining what the organization believes the most important issues that need to be addressed are. Smaller supplementary reports are released online throughout the year.

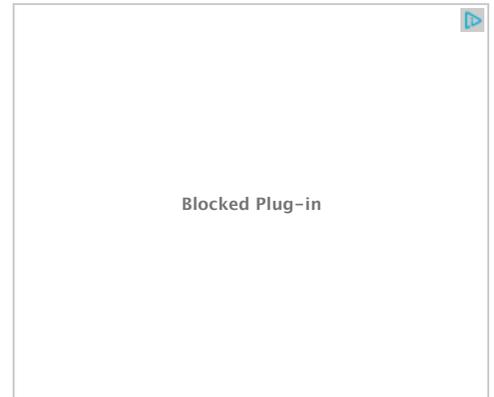
The survey results published in the Index's first report highlighted the significant and growing concern about young people leaving Long Island.

"This finding helped to shape the conversation over the next decade," Golob said, "and has been a major impetus to driving changes in our building patterns."

[< Previous page](#)   [1](#)   [2](#)   [3](#)   [4](#)   [5](#)   [Next page >](#)

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## The quest for thriving Long Island communities

< Previous page 1 2 **3** 4 5 Next page >

(Page 3 of 5)



Nancy Rauch-Douzinis founded the Long Island Index to increase awareness of matter in the area among residents.



According to Golob, the most dramatic change the Index has experienced occurred three years ago when major adjustments in information presentation were made. Efforts were carried out to make their website and reports more visual, resulting in accessible displays including monthly infographics published in Long Island Business News and a series of three videos (including one narrated by Brian Dennehy).

“We have worked hard to make the facts and issues facing our region compelling and comprehensible to all Long Islanders,” said Golob.

Recently, the Index has developed two new online tools: an interactive map and the Build a Better Burb website, which developed out of the idea competition the organization held in 2010. The competition asked participants to imagine innovative solutions for community development and improvement, serving as a launch pad for conversation about what may be possible in the future. The site attempts to inspire viewers to consider the region’s potential while comparing it to other areas where positive change has been successful.

For example, one particularly successful Index report compared the governmental structures on Long Island to northern Virginia, finding that Long Islanders pay more in taxes to multiple layers of government than in the similar suburban region in Virginia, while being less satisfied with the service, Golob said.

“If they can do it, why can’t we?” Golob asked. “The materials on the new website go beyond the competition. We wanted to create a website that really spoke to the individual resident on Long Island.”

Many of the ideas presented through the Index’s Build a Better Burb are congruent with the principals behind another organization, Vision Long Island.

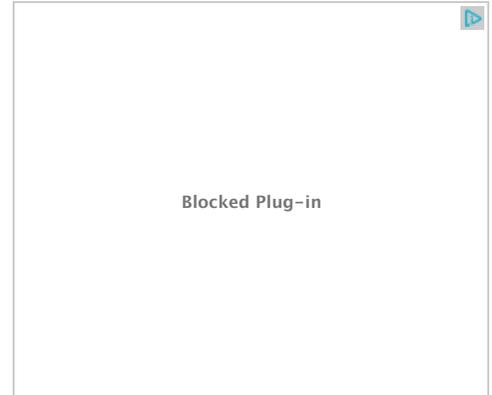
Created in 1997, Vision Long Island strives to implement the goals of the national smart growth movement on the island. The Smart Growth Network partners with groups across the country to improve the economy, protect the environment and revitalize communities.

Like the Index, Vision Long Island seeks to make positive change possible. However, its focus is less on providing statistical information and more on taking steps towards action.

< Previous page 1 2 **3** 4 5 Next page >

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[< Previous page](#) [1](#) [2](#) [3](#) [4](#) [5](#) [Next page >](#)

(Page 4 of 5)



Nancy Rauch-Douzinis founded the Long Island Index to increase awareness of matter in the area among residents.



“I think it’s more of an academic role that they play,” Vision Long Island Executive Director Eric Alexander said of the Index. “They provide valuable information. We stay in communication with Index staff.”

Vision Long Island is comprised of a Course Task of six core experts in community development, marketing, art design and planning, as well as a board of directors, which includes a staff of 30 professionals not dissimilar from the Index’s Advisory Board.

The organization works to apply smart-growth principles and provide resources to communities that contact it with the desire for change. Its function is tailored to best suit specific local projects. It share intentions with the Index, but ultimately the two organizations have different approaches, Alexander said.

Golob agreed, explaining that the Index is centered on the task of providing data in an accessible manner. Organizations like Vision Long Island can then apply the information to on-the-ground tasks of devising and executing plans for change.

“I think anything that can raise awareness of design and improvement of our local communities is definitely a good thing,” said Alexander.

Vision Long Island is also working on downtown development designs in towns including Hicksville and Farmingdale. According to a recent study

conducted by the Index, Long Island has 8,300 acres of potential buildable land within a half mile of is downtown areas.

“[The report] was ground breaking in that it made it absolutely clear that we have the ability to build differently, Golob said. “We just have to decide that that’s what we want to do.”

In the past two years, Vision Long Island has worked on the Long Island Coalition, playing a role in the approval of both the Complete Streets and Sewer Infrastructure legislations. They are currently involved in the Nassau Hub transportation study, plans for road improvement in Suffolk County and a parks project in Islip. Project updates are sent in their e-newsletter every Friday to a list of 20,000 people who have demonstrated interest in or support their work.

[< Previous page](#) [1](#) [2](#) [3](#) [4](#) [5](#) [Next page >](#)

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[< Previous page](#)   [1](#)   [2](#)   [3](#)   [4](#)   [5](#)

(Page 5 of 5)



“The bottom line is that there is a lot going on and we’re happy to be a part of it,” Alexander said. “It’s not really about one organization right now. It’s a movement.”

[< Previous page](#)   [1](#)   [2](#)   [3](#)   [4](#)   [5](#)

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The Long Island Index is a very important institution for Long Island. However, a significant problem with the Long Island Index is the homogeneity of its board and, thus, the conclusions that its projects' produce.

The board is biased toward Government control over land use and commerce. The board needs more diversity among political persuasions.

A case in point is the study several years ago comparing Long Island with Northern Virginia. This was a critical report and very relevant, in my view. However, the most significant excessive variable distinct

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