

**Acceptance Remarks  
Regional Leadership Award  
Vision Long Island  
June 9, 2017**

Thank you, Eric, and congratulations to you, the Board and staff of Vision Long Island for another fantastic event. As a former Vision Board member, I would also like to personally salute you, Eric, for all your hard work and achievements over these many years in making Vision Long Island a respected voice and serious player in the land use planning process here on Long Island

I also offer my sincere gratitude to Vision for being recognized with this year's Regional Leadership Award. I am deeply appreciative.

I am a firm believer that in life, no person accomplishes anything of significance solely by themselves. For me, I give thanks to my family, my Cameron Engineering partners, associates, staff and clients and my fellow Board members and staff of the Regional Planning Council for contributions which have made my recognition possible. But most importantly, above all, I give thanks to Almighty God, without whose Divine Grace and Providence, I would have nothing and I would be nothing.

Like many of us here, I have tried in my professional and personal life to make this Island a better place – a better place for my children and grandchildren and those of my fellow Long Islanders. As someone who has thoroughly enjoyed what is most touted as the best of what Long Island has to offer – from its schools to beaches and bays to parks and open space to ready access to the cultural and financial capital of the world, I have thoroughly availed myself of these gifts.

But frankly, I believe Long Island’s greatest asset is none of these physical attributes, but rather a more important and critical one – its people. As someone who started and built a business here on Long Island from the ground up, I can firmly attest that I would not have had the confidence to embark upon such a venture, nor the degree of success without the support of the most productive, capable and dedicated work force in the world.

We Long Islanders, the products of the nation’s first suburb, owe so much to our forebearers. We have derived much of our ancestral roots from the immigrant families who settled in New York City and moved to “the country” for a better quality of life for their families.

Our parents and for many, grandparents, focused on what they knew to be critical for their children to be able to attain the American Dream – a quality education. In addition to a vaunted education system, they built an infrastructure network of roads, rail, an energy grid, waste management and communication systems, hospitals, churches and synagogues, police and fire departments, public parks and natural beaches. They understood what was necessary to build a viable, vibrant and sustainable society and made the personal sacrifices necessary to make it all happen.

We, as successors to “America’s greatest generation”, have a collective responsibility as custodial stewards to this Island entrusted to us, to ensure that the physical, social and financial investment made by those that came before us, does not end as an unsustainable model that successor generations failed to uphold.

While this celebration today of achievements made on Long Island’s journey toward a sustainable future is a testament that progress is being made, it is an indisputable fact that we still have much more work to do.

Municipal governments including school and other districts today face enormous financial challenges burdened by legacy costs of prior administrations' overly generous labor contracts which resulted in skyrocketed salary, pension and health care costs. Those expenses have not only caused capital budgets to be underfunded thereby postponing necessary upgrades of our aging public infrastructure, they have also caused our property tax burden to grow to the point of becoming unsustainable, an issue our Planning Council is addressing right now.

With these accruing and growing off-balance sheet liabilities, we no longer have the luxury of addressing the problem "du jour", leaving the remaining pernicious ones to our children and children's children to resolve. Unfortunately, they will not be here to address them.

This capital spending plan however need not be a "zero sum game" where we choose to do "either / or". It is not that we elect to fight global terrorism or climate change. It is not that we address our lack of educational global competitiveness or our health care crisis. It is not that we fund expansions and

upgrades to our antiquated rail system or our deteriorated highways, bridges and tunnels. It is not that we invest in renewable energy or repower 50-60 year polluting, base load power plants. It is not that we build affordable housing for our young workforce and seniors or protect our cherished environment.

Indeed we must do them all. But many will say, we cannot afford to do that. To the contrary, I posit that we cannot afford not to do it!

The solution lies in the nexus of smart land use and financial planning where the public and private sectors work together collaboratively as joint partners sharing a common goal of growing our local economy so that the tax base from which we derive our municipal revenue expands. Fortuitously, government has the power of zoning control and a regulatory approval process and the private sector has the funding capital and a streamlined efficiency that a public entity cannot incorporate into its bureaucracy. President Trump's plans for massive infrastructure funding and economic growth not too coincidentally are also focused on public – private partnerships along with an expedited governmental approval process.

It is essential that this growth be done smartly, partly with the assistance of civic leaders, such as Vision Long Island, to ensure that our environment and the quality of life that makes Long Island special to all of us is preserved and protected for years to come. Frankly, we do not have time on our side. Our population on the Island is not growing. We need to not only think creatively, but also to act decisively and with a sense of urgency.

No one ever said that this job was going to be easy. Nothing worthwhile ever is. It will take the knowledge, experience, determination and fortitude of all of us if we are to succeed.

Future generations of Long Islanders are depending upon our success. Let's not let them down. Thank you and God bless you all.

John D. Cameron, Jr.,  
Chairman  
Long Island Regional Planning Council