

2.0 INTRODUCTION



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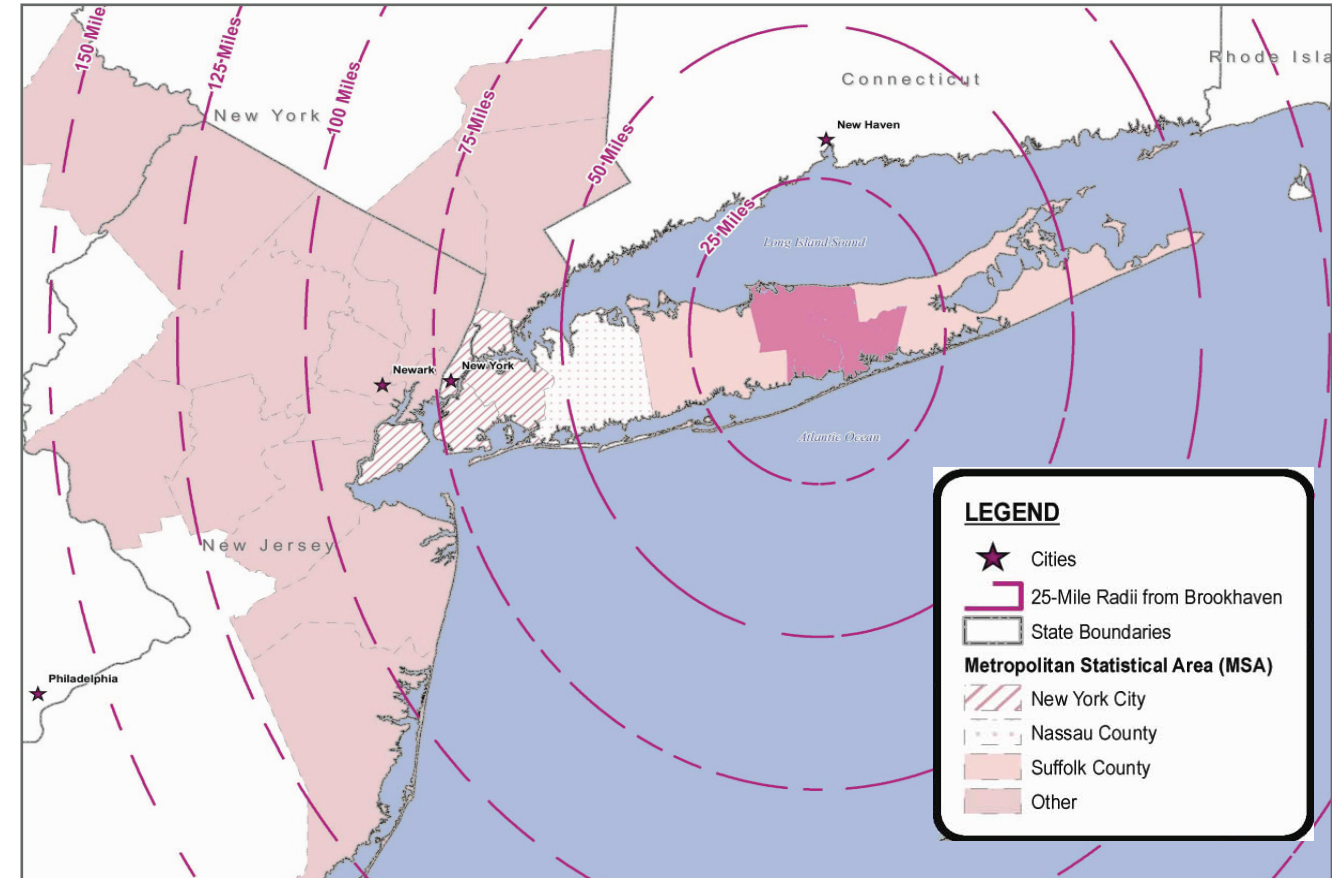
BACKGROUND

The Town of Brookhaven is located in central Suffolk County, New York and extends from the Long Island Sound along the North Shore to Fire Island, a barrier island located off of the South Shore, as identified in *Map 2-1, Regional Context*. The Town is bordered by the Towns of Smithtown and Islip to the west and Riverhead and Southampton to the east.

Brookhaven is located approximately fifty miles from New York City and is part of and influenced by the New York Metropolitan Area. As designated by the U.S. Census Bureau, Brookhaven is part of the New York-Northern New Jersey-Long Island (NY-NJ-CT-PA) Consolidated Metropolitan Statistical Area (CMSA), the largest MSA in the country. According to the 2000 US Census, Brookhaven has a total area of 531.52 square miles, which is composed of 272.23 square miles of water and 259.29 square miles of land, making it the largest town in the State of New York. However, as *Section 4.0 Land Use Analysis* will discuss, this figure varies depending on the source.

Since the 1950's, Brookhaven, as well as greater Suffolk County has evolved from its former makeup of rural communities with agricultural lands to a highly suburbanized geography, built on subdivided farmland, transected by busy county roads and highways. The suburbanization of Long Island continues to have both positive and negative effects, and brings planning challenges and opportunities. Suffolk County and various organizations on Long Island have been engaged in a number of planning efforts over the past fifty years to address the monumental growth that has been occurring on Long Island, particularly in Brookhaven.

Brookhaven's comprehensive and land use master planning efforts began with the 1963 Brookhaven Town Master Plan. Since then, the Town has engaged in significant planning efforts, from regional to local levels, focusing on hamlets, sensitive environmental areas, roadway corridors and Main Streets, many of which can be viewed on the Brookhaven 2030 website. Within the past ten years, these planning efforts have shifted to community-based vision plans that inform and direct larger scale planning efforts which have been reviewed by the Brookhaven 2030 team and will be utilized in this Comprehensive Plan. See *Appendix A* for a review of these planning efforts.



Map 2-1: Regional Context

HISTORY

The history of Brookhaven, and subsequently, its pattern of growth and development from a land use, transportation, economic, environmental and cultural perspective, goes back to the founding of the United States. In the 17th century, both the Dutch and the English began settling on Long Island. A 1654 peace agreement between the two countries resulted in a north-south boundary transecting Long Island from the westernmost part of Oyster Bay, with the west end belonging to the Dutch and the east end to the English.¹

After six men, John Scudder, John Swesie, Jonathan Porter, Thomas Mabbs, Roger Cheston and Thomas Charles, purchased approximately 30 square miles from the Native Americans in April 1655, Brookhaven became the fifth English town to be settled on Long Island following Southampton, Southold, Huntington, and East Hampton.² The purchased area, which constitutes the north shore of today’s Brookhaven, running east to Mount Sinai, was purchased for various commercial goods including 10 coats, 100 needles, 6 kettles, and 1 pair of child stockings.³ At the time the Town was known as Cromwell’s Bay and as part of the purchase agreement, the Native Americans and colonists agreed to live in peace with one another and to warn one another of any threats.

The town continued to grow with people “seeking land, the wealth of that century, and freedom from oppression in their home life and choice of their church.”⁴ As evident today, Cromwell’s Bay was a desirable place to settle with its great soil and trees, abundance of marine life and game animals, access to fresh, potable water, and ease of travel through the many harbors and bays (*Image 2-1, 2-2*). Early settlement patterns, which follow the geography of the land are still evident in these early north shore neighborhoods, in areas such as East Setauket.

In July 1657, a second, major tract of land was purchased from the Native Americans. Located on the south shore, encompassing Brookhaven to Smith Point, this land met the boundaries of the first purchase along Middle Country Road. With other additional, smaller purchases, the Town of Brookhaven was composed of approximately 323 square miles, including 20 miles of shore on the Long Island Sound and 30 miles of Atlantic coast by the end of the 1660’s.⁵

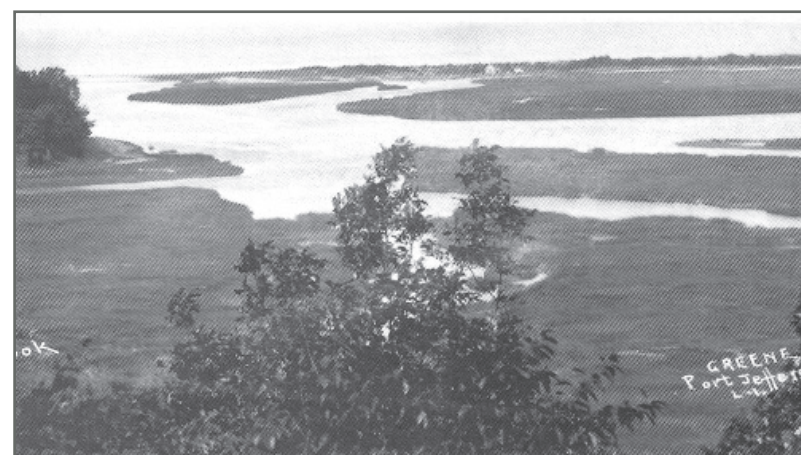
Establishing an Organized Government

In the thirty years preceding its founding, Cromwell’s Bay began developing a more organized form of government. On August 6, 1659 Cromwell’s Bay petitioned to be part of the Colony of Hartford, under the Confederation of Colonies, in order to receive the protection of their armies.⁶ Hartford accepted, while changing the Town’s name to Setauket and the Bay’s name to Conscience Bay for political reasons.⁷ Attendance at Town meetings was very important, and consequentially a fine for being late or absent was established at the first recorded town meeting on December 1, 1659.⁸ Setauket residents also started paying taxes to the Colony on May 16, 1661 based on their individual wealth, which was determined by the number of cattle they owned.⁹

In 1663 Setauket’s name was temporarily changed to Ashford after the English birthplace of Brookhaven’s new magistrate, John Scott; however after being arrested in 1665 under a number of various charges, the Town reverted back to the name Setauket. The Town’s name changed one last time when Governor Richard Nicolls approved the Town’s patent on March 7, 1667 giving the “Town of Brookhaven” the right and title to all the lands within their current boundaries.¹⁰ A second patent was issued by Governor



Images 2-1, 2-2: Early residents settled where there was easy access to water resources as shown in this image of a pond and mill in Yaphank (above) and Mt. Sinai Harbor (below).
Sources: Thomas R. Bayles Collection Longwood Public Library (above) Arthur S. Green (below)



Thomas Dongan in 1686, serving as the foundation for Brookhaven Town government, by establishing an early representative form of government, with a board of trustees and annual elections.¹¹ The Dongan Patent also granted the Town public lands, the rights to all waterways, the power to raise tax and sell or dispose of Town lands, and established the town seal.¹² This historic, legal document is still used today to address many issues regarding the Town's natural resources and use of its waterways.

Revolutionary Roles

Due to its strategic location and valuable views of the harbors of the Long Island Sound and the Atlantic Ocean, the Town of Brookhaven was forcibly occupied by the British during the Revolutionary War.¹³ The Redcoats used Setauket Presbyterian Church, which still stands today as both a place of worship and of historic significance, as a fort to house their supplies and horses, placing guns in the upper windows of church, and upending graves to build a protective berm around the church (*Image 2-3*). Some residents fled to safety in Connecticut or Westchester County as soldiers lived in the residents' homes and took their food, blankets and animals.

Despite British occupation, the Town assisted with the Patriot's ultimate victory. Residents served as spies for the Patriots and under General George Washington's orders Benjamin Tallmadge and the Patriots attacked, burned and destroyed the British fort, St. George's Manor, in Mastic on November 23, 1780 killing or wounding seven British and capturing fifty-three others.¹⁴ The Patriot army then rode on to Coram and burned 300 tons of hay, the entire winter supply of food for the British's horses.¹⁵ A boulder and plaque memorialize the victorious spot at the corner of Middle

Country Road and Route 112, and Tallmadge trail tracks the route the Patriot's took from Mt. Sinai to Mastic to Coram.¹⁶ Additionally, the first Purple Heart recipient, Sergeant Elijah Churchill, fought at Fort. St. George.¹⁷

Transportation, Industry and Technology

Throughout the 1600's Long Island towns separately established highways to suit their individual needs, resulting in poor connections and a difficult time traversing the Island. Legislation passed in 1704 required collaboration in laying out a direct route from Brooklyn to East Hampton.¹⁸ By 1714, three parallel roads, which are still important transportation routes in Brookhaven today, were established on Long Island - North Country Road (Route 25a), Middle Country Road (Route 25) and South Country Road (Sunrise Highway/Route 27).¹⁹ These roads were often constructed out of logs or clam shells and gravel, and travelers paid tolls at some locations.²⁰

Advances in transportation made it possible for Brookhaven to move beyond its agrarian roots. In addition to the developing road network, the Long Island Rail Road opened on April 18, 1836, running from South Ferry in Brooklyn to Jamaica, Queens, extending out to western portion of Long Island by 1837 and finally to Port Jefferson in 1872 (*Image 2-4*). The railroad was instrumental in transitioning parts of the Town, including Lake Ronkonkoma, Bellport, Rocky Point and the Moriches, into popular summer vacation destinations for many New York City residents (*Image 2-5*).²¹

Travel by ship and railroad allowed manufacturing, including gravel farming and rubber manufacturing,²² to successfully take root in the Town through the last

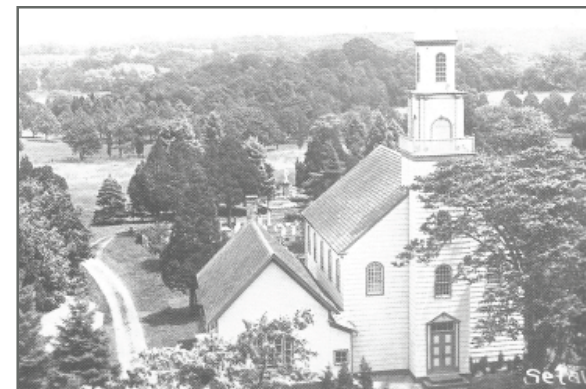


Image 2-3: Setauket Presbyterian Church circa 1930. Source: Thomas R. Bayles Collection Longwood Public Library



Image 2-4: The Long Island Rail Road Shoreham Station circa 1897-1913. Source: Arthur S. Greene, courtesy Kenneth Brady

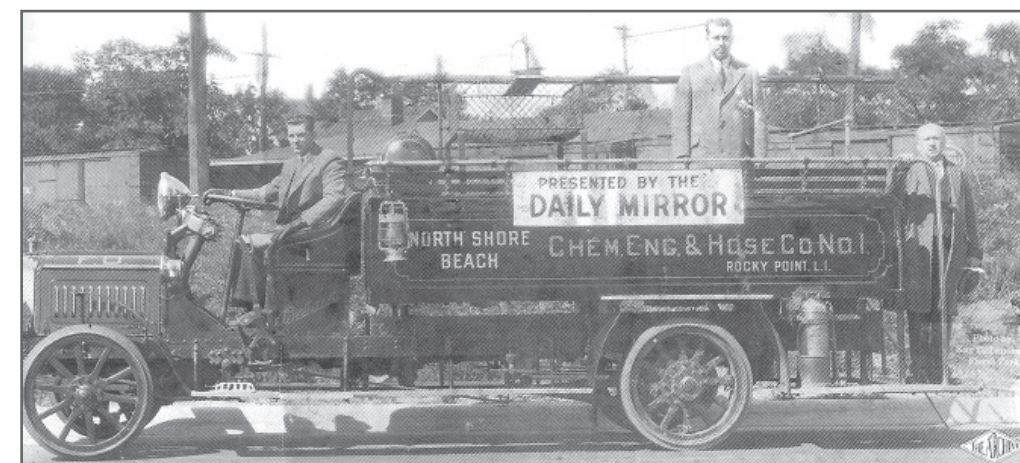


Image 2-5: A New York newspaper and the LIRR advertised land for sale in Rocky Point, geared towards City dwellers seeking summer refuge. Source: James R. McNamara

few decades of the 19th century. By the early 1900's Brookhaven was becoming a haven for inventors and technological research. Nikola Tesla, a famous inventor, researched wireless transmission from his lab in Shoreham and held patents for alternating current motors and electric power transmission.²³ The RCA Corporation, built in the Rocky Point Pine Barrens during the 1920's, was the largest radio facility in the world and was credited with many radio and television innovations until it closed in 1961.²⁴

To support the United States' entry into World War I, 19,000 acres of woodlands were cleared from the Town from 1917 through 1918, to create Camp Upton (*Image 2-6*). The military base was an important source of economic growth for both Brookhaven and Suffolk County, and resulted in a doubling of the County's population. After the war, Camp Upton was decommissioned, but was reactivated with the threat of WW II and later converted to a hospital for injured soldiers. Once the facility was decommissioned at the end of the second war,²⁵ nine major universities including Harvard, Cornell, MIT and Yale, established a nonprofit corporation in 1946 to study nuclear science at the Camp. The facility was transferred to the US Atomic Energy Commission in 1947, as the Brookhaven National Lab, a place to research peaceful uses of the atom, and is still in operation today.

On March 27, 1954, Governor Thomas E. Dewey approved plans for a 70-mile-long, six-lane highway between Manhattan and the east end of Long Island, in order to alleviate current and future traffic problems. Furthermore, officials feared economic impacts, due to the loss of business and industry, if this speedier and more direct means of transportation for Long Islanders was not built.²⁶ The LIE did not reach Brookhaven's borders until 1970, but its arrival was an important

catalyst in the fast-paced growth of Brookhaven throughout the 70's 80's, 90's and today.²⁷

The Changing Landscape

Since the post-war boom of the 1950's, Brookhaven's landscape has rapidly changed. New farming techniques meant less land was needed to yield greater amount of crops, while returning soldiers sought affordable homes for their new families. Agricultural land was subdivided, and the Town began to transition from a rural to suburban community. The increased affordability of the private automobile and the beginning of commercial air travel, meant vacation-seekers could easily travel to destinations further away, and consequentially the tourism industry slowed down and many summer homes were converted to year-round homes.

Although many valued natural resources still exist, much of the diversity has been lost due to habitat destruction. Wetlands along the Peconic River were altered to serve as cranberry bogs,²⁸ large portions of woodlands were clear-cut for the profitable cordwood industry, and at times the government offered bounties for each wolf and fox killed.²⁹ Overpicking, pollution and uncontrolled hunting resulted in a loss of certain plant, marine and animal species. Suburban sprawl led to, and continues to lead to, habitat destruction, the loss of sense of place and a dependency on automobiles resulting in air and water quality issues. However it is important to note that not all of these losses were due to negligence, but a very different value system relevant to land and natural resources in the past. Land was thought to be purely for human cultivation and exploitation, as an 1888 Brookhaven history book noted that the Town has "more waste land"³⁰ than other Long Island towns as the "greater part of the best farming land of this town is yet unreclaimed and almost

worthless woodland."³¹ At the time there was little value, economically, aesthetically, ecologically, and culturally, in conserving the area's natural character, flora and fauna.

Looking Ahead

As this historical review has discussed, the mixture of abundant natural resources, historic colonial villages, late 19th-century vacation communities, post-WWII suburban developments, and the expansion of the Long Island Expressway into Brookhaven, has resulted in a very unique and diverse Town, with a colorful past. Now, in the early part of the 21st century, as we reflect

on Brookhaven's remarkable social and cultural past in relation to its fragile, yet vital environmental context, we will continue to make history together. Planning for the future of the Town through Brookhaven 2030 gives us the opportunity to collaboratively define our values, as we transition towards a more sustainable society; one that recognizes and takes great steps towards preserving our cultural heritage, reclaiming and protecting our valued environmental resources; fostering economic and industrial growth, and providing a safe, healthy and equitable home for our diverse and growing population.



Image 2-6: A view of Camp Upton during World War II.
Source: Brookhaven National Laboratory's Camp Upton Historical Collection.

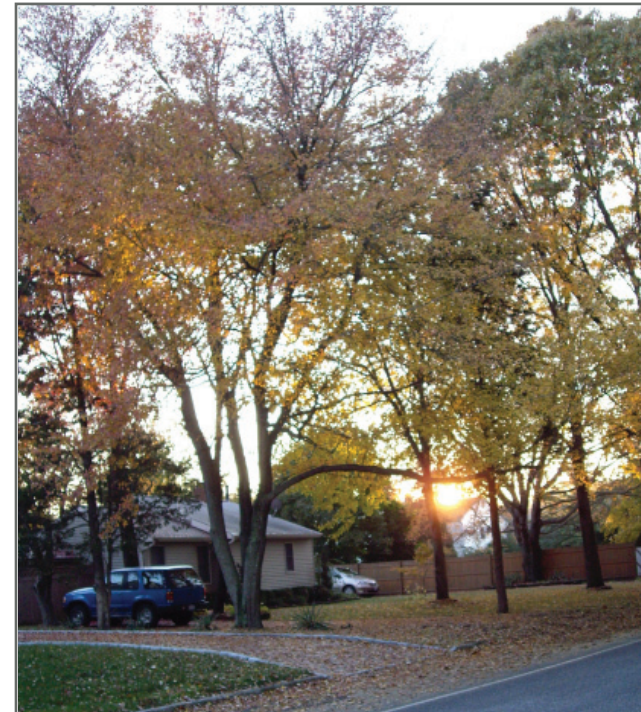
PHILOSOPHICAL APPROACH TO SUSTAINABILITY

As part of Brookhaven 2030, this Comprehensive Plan will establish goals and recommendations to guide the community to a more sustainable future by holistically considering social, economic and environmental factors that influence the development of land, and the provision of infrastructure and public services. Sustainable development and building sustainable communities is an integral part of Brookhaven’s future and therefore this Comprehensive Plan will not contain a separate section on sustainable development, as the entire plan, including all goals and recommendations are based upon and will reflect these principles.

Part of the Department of Planning, Environment, and Land Management’s (PELM) mission is “to enhance the quality of life for all its residents, through excellence in community planning, environmental stewardship, education, and citizen empowerment,” reinforcing the fact that issues of sustainability and stewardship are prominent within the Town’s planning philosophy. Furthermore, the Town, through the actions of the Town Board, and as implemented by the PELM have adopted a set of principles to encourage more sustainable building practices which include:

- Outstanding architecture
- Superior site layout
- Innovative building and materials
- Enhanced landscaping
- Green building technology

This Comprehensive Plan builds upon the work of PELM and incorporates policies, strategies and specific tasks which will provide a framework to support sustainable development for the next two decades. This Plan will guide elected officials, PELM staff and the residents of Brookhaven into a more sustainable future.



Images 2-7 - 2-10: Brookhaven 2030 will provide a framework for sustainable development, balancing economic, social and environmental needs.

ENDNOTES

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- 7 Ibid. 46.
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- 15 See the Brookhaven 2030: ECOS Report, for more information on Brookhaven’s important historic and cultural resources.; Ibid.
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- 24 When the facility closed, RCA donated 5,000 acres as a preserve to New York State. The Rocky Point Historical society. 2005. Rocky point: from farm country to summer colony. In *Brookhaven Voices*, 39.
- 25 Brookhaven Voices, 149-152
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- 29 Bayles, R.M. 1888. Brookhaven. In *History of Suffolk*, 14.
- 30 Ibid., 1.
- 31 Ibid., 1.