

A30

Newsday

"Where there is no vision, the people perish."

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OPINION

EDITORIAL

LI needs New York's help to protect shores, water

Every year, Long Island officials compile a list of properties that should be preserved and cite the essential role open space plays in keeping our underground aquifer clean. This year, they identified an equally vital reason to protect undeveloped land: coastal resiliency. Open space, the officials correctly noted, helps absorb the impact of severe storms and sea level rise.

A plan developed by three state agencies listed as worthy of protection hundreds of acres on the North and South shores and in the Peconic Estuary. But the economics of land preservation are daunting.

The plan requests that the state set aside \$15 million a year for 10 years in the Environmental Protection Fund to purchase open space on Long Island. But EPF money for buying land has been cut by two-thirds since 2008 to about \$22 million — for the whole state. Only \$5 million has been spent on Long Island since 2009. Suffolk County's aggressive preservation program also has slowed. Seven years ago, the county began borrowing against future revenue to complete a spate of purchases, but debt service now eats up two-thirds of that revenue. This year's available revenue to buy land is an estimated \$7 million. All this comes as concerns grow that developers have renewed interest in properties as the economy improves.

Suffolk could get a one-time boost of \$20 million from a public referendum this fall and has worked creatively with towns, private groups and the federal government on some preservation deals. Some East End towns — notably, Southampton and East Hampton — are flush with preservation money and could be future partners.

But the state must do its fair share and begin to restore funding for the EPF. Our drinking water — and the safety of our shoreline communities — depends on preserving land while we still can. **N**