

## 2005 Suffolk County Legislative Scorecard Introduction

Most members of the Suffolk County Legislature talk a good talk on the environment, but when it comes down to it, how do voters know whether their legislator has really been performing on those green promises?

NYLCV tracks all bills related to the environment that are introduced in the legislature. For this session alone, there are hundreds of bills in the system. NYLCV's Environmental Scorecard is designed to hold legislators accountable by identifying key bills and providing objective numbers that tell the real story on our elected officials' environmental commitment.

The bills were chosen with the advice of a task force of leading environmental, public health, and civic organizations, and they cover a range of environmental concerns – from open space protection to water quality to numerous energy-related issues.

Legislators were notified of which bills would be scored and received a score based on the percentage of the bills they voted for.

Once again this year, the percentages are high, reflecting the fact that environmental concerns rank highly for our legislators. We are particularly pleased to see that the Suffolk Legislature has shown leadership in establishing new policy directions. The Legislature has long played an important role in advancing the County's open space program and efforts to protect water quality. But this year saw the introduction of numerous bills aimed at shaping the County's energy policy. NYLCV, along with our partner organizations and much of the electorate, recognizes that developing a comprehensive energy plan has taken on increasing urgency for Long Island. The energy-related bills included in our Scorecard, are good first steps – now we hope to see the Legislature work closely with the Administration to craft a more comprehensive approach to meeting today's energy challenges.

### “Green” Power

In view of the fact that power generation from polluting non-renewable resources, such as oil and coal, results in serious human impairments, negative impacts on wildlife, plants, and the natural environment as well as a desire to foster the development of the renewable energy industry in New York State, the Legislature passed three “green” power bills.

**IR 1092** (Cooper, Caracciolo, Bishop, Vilorio-Fisher, Schneiderman) stipulates that the County purchases a growing proportion of its energy from renewable sources (i.e., wind, hydro-electric, biomass or solar energy), with a goal of no less than 25% by 2010. Not present was Tonna. This bill was passed 16-1.

**IR 1118** (Schneiderman, Carpenter, Losquadro, Binder, Bishop, Viloría-Fisher), ensures that the time-table to reach this goal is on-track by directing the County this year to purchase 5% of the County's usage by joining LIPA's Green Choice Program. With this green power purchasing, Suffolk will be setting an important example for other municipalities, businesses and private citizens, as well as giving a boost to the renewable sources sector market, which in turn will bring down renewable energy pricing. Not present was Tonna. This bill was passed 17-0.

**IR 2001** (Caracappa on request of County Executive Levy, Carpenter, Cooper, Viloría-Fisher, O'Leary, Losquadro, Alden, Caracciolo, Schneiderman), complements New York State legislation that granted homeowners an exemption from sales and use taxes on the purchase and installation of residential solar energy systems by providing an exemption from County taxes. This bill was passed unanimously.

#### Hybrid Cars

After electricity, automobiles are the largest source of green house gas emissions that contribute to global climate change. Therefore it is vital that government takes a leadership role in promoting the adoption of vehicles that conserve energy and use less-polluting fuels. **IR 1440** (Cooper, Bishop) is a bill that would have Suffolk County lead by example by requiring the Legislature to purchase the most fuel-efficient hybrid vehicles available to replace its sedans as the need for replacement vehicles arises. Unfortunately this bill has never passed through the Public Works Committee. When the sponsors attempted to have it considered through a discharge motion, this motion failed in a vote of 8-9-1. For our Scorecard, a Yes was the pro-environment vote.

#### Bio-Diesel

Another bill **IR 1461** (Viloría-Fisher, Cooper, Losquadro, Mystal, Nowick, Alden, Binder) directs the County to establish a policy to encourage the manufacture, use and promotion of bio-diesel within the county. Bio-diesel is a vegetable based fuel that runs in diesel engines of cars, buses, trucks, construction equipment, boats, generators, and also in oil home heating units. The manufacturing process can utilize vegetable oil, either straight from a farm or recycled waste oil and fat from restaurants. This bill was passed unanimously.

#### Open Space 1

Last year, Suffolk passed groundbreaking legislation that established a workforce housing transfer of development rights program in connection with the \$75 million Save Open Space bond. Some environmental and housing advocates worked closely with the Administration and Legislature to craft a Transfer of Development Rights (TDR) Plan that would both protect environmentally sensitive lands while also promoting the creation of affordable housing in areas where development is appropriate. **IR 1359** (Viloría-Fisher) ratified this Plan, enabling the County to begin implementation of this important program. Not present was Tonna. This bill was passed 17-0.

## Open Space 2

One of the largest and most significant purchases of open space in Suffolk this year was the acquisition of the Amsterdam Beach property in East Hampton. The parcel includes more than 122 acres of prime oceanfront land on the bluffs of Montauk Point and is one of the last remaining significant tracts of undeveloped land in Montauk. The County collaborated with the State and the Town of East Hampton on the purchase of Amsterdam Beach, which will now become State Parkland. **IR 1770** (Caracappa on request of County Executive Levy, Schneiderman) authorized this long sought acquisition. Not present was Tonna. This bill passed 17-0.

## Land Preservation

Suffolk draws on several funding sources to finance important environmental work including open space preservation and drinking water protection. One such fund, the Multifaceted Land Preservation Program, which includes purchases of open space, hamlet parks and farmland, is a critical component of the County's effort to preserve greenfields and deter sprawl. The 2006 Land Acquisition capital budget (**Res 563-Line item number 7177**) recommended by the County Executive maintained funding at the existing level of \$13.3 million. However, the Legislature amended the bill cutting it to \$5 million. County Executive Levy vetoed the line item that cut this source of environmental funding and the legislature unsuccessfully attempted to override the veto 5-13. **A NO vote to sustain the veto is the pro-environment vote.**

## Invasive Species

The problems associated with invasive plant and animal species –from the loss of native species to negative impacts on agriculture, industry, recreation and human health -- are well documented in the United States. Suffolk County faces its own problems with invasive species such *Cabomba caroliniana* (Fanwort), used extensively in aquariums, that has already caused severe damage to Yaphank Lake, interfering with the recreational and aesthetic uses of that lake, and will cost hundreds of thousands of dollars to ameliorate. The County will need to foster a comprehensive regional public/private effort to effectively address this pervasive issue. **IR 1968** (O'Leary), which establishes a water and land invasives control task force to develop and implement an invasives control program for Suffolk is a good first step. Not present was Carraciolo. This bill passed 17-0.