

**VICTORY GARDEN TASK FORCE**

**OF THE**

**SUFFOLK COUNTY LEGISLATURE**

A public hearing of the Victory Garden Task Force of the Suffolk County Legislature was held in the Little Theater at Farmingdale State University, Farmingdale, New York, on March 31, 2010.

**MEMBERS PRESENT:**

Legislator Vivian Vilorio-Fisher - Chairperson  
Richard Myer  
Tom Lyon  
Susan Wilk  
Carolyn Kiang

**ALSO IN ATTENDANCE:**

Sylvia King-Cohen - Newsday  
Maria J. Maier - Southampton High School  
Ann Rathkopf - Slow Food Huntington  
Lawrence Foglia - Long Island Agriculture Network  
Lisa Mitten - Long Island Community Agriculture Network  
Regina Dlugokencky - Long Island Community Agriculture Network  
Faith Groody - Vanderbilt Volunteer Gardeners  
Vincent Cirasole  
Terry Daniels  
Linda Lieberman  
Carolyn Hannan  
Regina Montemurro  
Pat Montemurro

**VERBATIM TRANSCRIPT TAKEN BY:**

Donna Catalano - Court Stenographer

(\*THE MEETING WAS CALLED TO ORDER AT 3:26 P.M.\*)

**CHAIRWOMAN VILORIA-FISHER:**

Ann Rathkopf. Hi. Can you just stand right here and talk to us?

**MS. RATHKOPF:**

In order to keep it brief and to the point and not ramble, my name is Ann Rathkopf, coleader of Slow Food Huntington, a chapter of Slow Food USA, a nonprofit organization with approximately 25,000 members nationwide. Slow food strived for good, clean and fair food for those who eat as well as those who produce it. Our local chapter includes about 100 active members. We support our local farms, our green markets, improved food in our school cafeterias and sustainable food ways.

Slow Food Huntington supports Suffolk County's initiative to provide residents with lots of land to grow their own vegetables. We know that community gardens not only produce local food resulting in better nutrition and healthier people, but they also steward environmental awareness, they preserve open space and contribute to a positive sense of place. Community gardens are where young and old, new and seasoned, experimental and traditional gardeners work, meet and exchange knowledge, ideas and recipes. It's an important part of the food system that fosters self-reliance.

For these reasons, we urge Suffolk County to maximize its investments in establishing and supporting victory gardens, not only for present and future gardeners, but for the community at large. Thank you.

**CHAIRWOMAN VILORIA-FISHER:**

Thank you very much. By the way, Ann just outlined a lot of the reasons why I put this task force together, which is we want to provide food, healthy food, for folks, we want to support environmental education, and there's nothing more educational than a kid getting his or her hands in the dirt and then seeing the product. Thank you. Thank you very much, Ann.

**CHAIRWOMAN VILORIA-FISHER:**

It's hard for people to hear Ann, okay. And we don't have a mike. So if you could kind of face a little at an angle so that the audience can hear you as well. Okay. Thank you. Lawrence Foglia.

**MR. FOGLIA:**

I want to thank you for putting this task force together and seriously addressing the need that we're looking into here. My name is Larry Foglia, I represent the Peconic Land Trust and the Nassau Land Trust as well as a new organization called, we call it LICAN or Long Island Community Agriculture Network.

This organization -- you have a lot of the stuff from other meetings in terms of the benefits of community gardens where people are not going to address that, access to food, kids seeing where their food comes from, nutrition and awareness of nutrition way down on the list. But what I want to address here is how a group of dedicated and interested and diverse people in the community representing larger organizations like Unitarian Fellowship, St. Hugh Church, other civic organizations and just interested people put together in one year, less than a year now, Long Island Community Agricultural Network doing that as a template for what can take place in different parts of Long Island. Our goal is to establish community gardens on private or town-owned property where people with incomes below --

**CHAIRWOMAN VILORIA-FISHER:**

Don't forget county-owned properties too.

**MR. FOGLIA:**

We'll get to that one, it's right here. To have access to land and access to food. Some of them

depend on community pantries for food, which are suffering themselves with access to food. I myself am an environmental educator. I work with the land trust and farmland preservation. I've also been a farmer for 40 years. In the '50s, I remember coming here when this was an Ag School and getting licked in the face by a cow. This University has come a long way. I'm not sure the right way, but it's come a long way.

Long Island CAN is days away from develop -- signing the license agreements with the Town of Huntington where we decided to set up our initial community gardens on land that's established as a community garden, but not necessarily managed appropriately and on another parcel of land, which will become, years hence, a park time, but for the time being, it can be a community garden. And it's right in the middle of the poorest section of the Town of Huntington. We were welcomed in by the town, we set up license agreements, we are umbrellaed under a not-for-profit that has our mission as part of their mission. And this thing has just taken off. We are recipients of a grant, sub grant from a grant that Stony Brook University received from the Department of Health. So we are -- what are they called?

**AUDIENCE MEMBER:**

Community roots grant.

**CHAIRWOMAN VILORIA-FISHER:**

The other was Hobbs Farm.

**MR. LYON:**

There's one out east.

**CHAIRWOMAN VILORIA-FISHER:**

Sorry to interrupt.

**MR. FOGLIA:**

That's okay. Any questions, just interrupt. So this is really taking off. And we've developed a partnership with the town, and the town is eager for this to take place. They see the value of it. This is a national movement. The same as reconnecting children with nature, we're reconnecting people with the sources of their food and we're allowing them to take part in the production of their food. And it fits in with Sustainable Long Island's Food Equity Project. This whole thing is kind of coming together. And just as you said, we're not reinventing the wheel, it exists in other parts of the country and other parts of the world.

What I would like to add are two concepts that I would encourage the County much as the Green Thumb Program --

**CHAIRWOMAN VILORIA-FISHER:**

The Green Thumb Challenge? Yes. I've been trying to get that in schools.

**MR. FOGLIA:**

The Green Thumb Program in the city which is staffed by New York City employees that are running or assisting over 600 community gardens. So I would encourage Suffolk County to do the same thing; to set up some office either partnering with an organization like Long Island CAN that is trying to do the same thing from the grassroots level or taking staff that you already have and dedicating it to this kind of a facility.

**CHAIRWOMAN VILORIA-FISHER:**

We don't have a lot of staff. That was a little inside joke. Sorry.

**MR. FOGLIA:**

So to seriously look into making this a true priority and following through on the research that you

garner from the meetings. I have copies of a full statement that I will give you and I have a history of Long Island CAN that is attached to it.

The other thing I want to address is the Peconic Land Trust is the oldest land trust in the country. It has been preserving farmland for 25 years. It sets the mark for the rest of the country. Suffolk County with the quarter percent tax has preserves a tremendous amount of land, sometimes very large tracks of land or rainwater reclamation and groundwater resources.

Organic farming is a compatible use of some of these pieces of land that have been preserved. I would encourage the County to reexamine existing license agreements on those pieces of property to see how they are managed now and how they could be managed. Case in point, this is a 1997 Suffolk County Planning Department Master Plan for Froehlich Farm Preserve in the Town of Huntington. It was a big deal. CEQ is still complaining about having spent all that money, but we still have 200 acres preserved. Since 1997, it has done almost nothing other than go into succession. There's a small project there run by a group of people.

But there's a national movement to get young people back on farms. You have 200 acres. I used to pick pumpkins for Charlie Hendrickson who farmed it for Froehlich. I know what this looked like when it was a full-tilled farm, and that was in the '70s. I've had Christina Grace New York Ag and Markets down there to take a look at this and other parcels in Nassau County and Suffolk County. And it's like -- there's 200 acres of land there. It takes a lot of community gardens to come up with 200 acres of arable land. And part of this was previously community gardens and was slated to be community gardens.

**CHAIRWOMAN VILORIA-FISHER:**

That was the Legislative intent, you're right.

**MR. FOGLIA:**

And it's just back in succession. The kicker is you have a grammar school on one side of it and you have a junior high school on the other side. And it's just an example of a piece of land owned by the County now that could be reclaimed as farmland, and the administration of it could be done by the town, and organization like us contracted through the town, a non-for-profit, a license agreement with an organization that will do with the piece of property what the County intend to be done on that piece of property when it was referred.

**CHAIRWOMAN VILORIA-FISHER:**

Just a question on that. Part of it is community gardens, isn't it? Isn't part of it --

**MR. FOGLIA:**

There are no community gardens on there. There is an organization that has the license agreements -- two organizations that have license agreements; the Audubon and -- which would probably give up their license agreement, because they're having difficulty with their own funding, I think they're merging with another one; and the Friends of Huntington Farmland. And the Friends of Huntington Farmland are managing about five acres. There's several people, you know, involved in that. They try to do the best they can. They're all in their 70s and 80s. It's somewhat of a closed group. They are -- we're dealing with 200 acres here. Their five acres, even if they expanded it to 15, would not be impacted if we did something with 100 or 150 acres. And some of it could be left in perimeter nature preserve. But it's really going to eventually become just a sight for invasive species probably. It is usable as farmland.

**CHAIRWOMAN VILORIA-FISHER:**

Thank you. Any questions? I know I have a few, but does anybody else? Could you just tell me more about LICAN, because you mentioned UU was part of that? Was there a Veatch Grant on that?

**MR. FOGLIA:**

We're applying for grants. Here is my statement -- well, written by my executive director who is a prolific reporter. And the second half of that is a history of Long Island CAN. And I joined it as representing, you know, a local interested person, but also I represent the Peconic Land Trust on that.

With the Nassau Land Trust, I am working with three farms in Nassau County. One that the Nassau Land Trust will take over in Malverne, Grossman's Farm. You might have seen that in the newspaper. We will manage that as an educational farm. And I'm working with two private landowners who want to hire farmers or have -- lease to farmers who will farm on their land for which they can eventually get a tax deduction. But they're also very interested in integrating with the local school system in farm to school programs.

Do you know about the centric stone barns in Tarrytown?

**CHAIRWOMAN VILORIA-FISHER:**

Yes.

**MR. FOGLIA:**

It's a former Rockefeller Estate.

**CHAIRWOMAN VILORIA-FISHER:**

Yes.

**MR. FOGLIA:**

Right. So there are conferences there in farm education, conferences there for young farmers. I was up there with some of the other people from LICAN, there were 300 young farmers there looking for land.

**CHAIRWOMAN VILORIA-FISHER:**

Yeah, stone barns came up when I had my Nitrogen Reduction Task Force and how to -- best practices.

**MR. FOGLIA:**

It exists to disseminate information, provide workshops and conferences to encourage people to garden and farm from backyards to significant scale.

**CHAIRWOMAN VILORIA-FISHER:**

Thank you very much, Mr. Foglia. Oh, I'm sorry, there is a question.

**MR. LYON:**

As far as Long Island CAN for funding right now, just in general, what kind of sources are you getting?

**MR. FOGLIA:**

We have the Stony Brook grant.

**MS. MITTEN:**

I'm Lisa Mitten, I'm one of the founding members of LICAN as well with Larry. I'm the Director of Development, so I'm working on fundraising for that organization. We are in the process of approaching a number of different foundations on Long Island to apply for funding other than the Stony Brook. We haven't officially applied for any yet. We're just waiting to network with them know about the process.

I guess our main concern this coming year is just realizing how many efforts it takes to establish

community gardens; all the planning, recruiting gardeners, dealing with the town or county, figuring out what you are signing with the license agreement. Right now, we're all volunteers doing that. And we have many people who are working very, very hard on that. I guess our hope with funding is to strengthen our reorganizational capacity to be able to someone do this as their job or have multiple people do it as their job.

**MR. FOGLIA:**

If I can address more of that in other way. One thing we just got a grant from Students for 60000 that are supporting us. And we just finished actually literally two days ago a plan for a large section of an existing community garden, it was an outreach garden. So we are taking over what's now the Cliff Soergel Memorial Outreach Garden. And we are going to revamp it and make about 100 different -- it's about 50 plots with 100 beds in it, each plot gets two beds, so people could get half of that. Once that plan is in place and we do our takeoff on that plan to see what it's going to cost, this project is supported by the Park Improvement Section of the Town of Huntington's Open Space Farm Fund. So we will approach them for -- I'm looking at probably 30 or \$40,000 over, you know, the next two years to actually put this in place. And eventually, from what they tell us, they want us to take over the management with funding of this larger community garden. This is a 15 acre community garden. This is 400 plots.

**MS. KIANG:**

It used to be the largest one in the country. This one is also in the Town of Huntington, right?

**MR. FOGLIA:**

It belongs to the Town of Huntington.

**CHAIRWOMAN VILORIA-FISHER:**

What is the irrigation like at Froehlich? Is there an existing irrigation system, because that's usually a pretty big investment when you're looking at irrigation?

**MR. FOGLIA:**

Well, yes and no. I'm dealing with that on farms in Nassau County, overhead irrigation where you have to pump with a lot of pressure. That is issue if you're dealing with smaller farms and community gardens and you did trickle irrigation. Charlie came off the hydrants. A lot of farmers will come off hydrants because water in the South Huntington/Dix Hills area is actually still fairly inexpensive. I use city water on my farm, and I do 10 acres and I do overhead water. And my bill is, you know, \$150 for the season. It's not an expense in that way. And if you increase the organic matter in the soil and you mulch, you don't want to over water, because it can cause you more disease problems than you would ask for.

**CHAIRWOMAN VILORIA-FISHER:**

Thank you very much. Any other questions? Lisa. Go ahead, Lisa.

**MS. MITTEN:**

So I'm one of the founding members of LICAN. I'm working on those two gardens we're starting in the Town of Huntington. I just want to tell a little story about that process. We applied for a grant through Stony Brook. We applied on behalf of LICAN. And I also applied on behalf of my Yoga Center, the Inner Spirit Yoga Center in East Northport.

So we put together that application. We had a whole entire plan. We had 50 people signed up, we were already to go and do it. We didn't get the grant. However, we did all the work ahead; all the budgeting, all the recruiting, and our organization had enough strength and enough initiative and enough energy toward this project to actually do it on our own on private land with our own funding. So grant can help make things happen beyond the people that you just give grants to.

Just a couple of other comments. Across the country, there's lots of energy in this area. And

many different communities, especially planning departments, they're actually -- in partnership with private developers, they're developing suburban communities that are surrounded by a farm or surrounded by a community garden. So as Suffolk County continues to develop one potential for community gardens and agricultural projects is to have community gardens within suburban development that people can walk to. So they are actually community centers as opposed to just doing in your own backyard.

From my experience of starting LICAN and also the yoga center's community garden, I just want to stress how much access to equipment we need in order to prepare the soil. It's a big thing to overcome. We were able to use the support of local landscapers for part of our community to do it for free, but that's just one definitely challenge to making it happen. I think it would be really -- for, like, this movement to grow, it would really be helpful to have a list of all different properties Suffolk County that the County is willing to use as community gardens.

From my experience in Nassau County -- I also work with Larry Grossman Farm project. And, like, Nassau County right now is putting out RFPs to allow people to do things on land. As much advanced notice for that as possible is really helpful. For example, Nassau County originally sent notice for the East Meadow Farm, about, like, a one-acre property. And one of the opportunities for that is for it to be a community garden. However, we don't have enough time to gear up to apply for that. So a lot of advanced planning is really helpful for organizations and community groups like us to really get on board and to get our ducks in order.

And finally, just, like, how complicated it is finding all the sourcing material; just trying to figure out how to start community gardens on Long Island, how to make them -- like, how to strengthen them. Like, a lot of people in our group are very passionate about organic gardening. And we're trying to figure out well, what are the sources of organic materials on Long Island, where can you go to get good compost at a good price; how well are our municipalities preparing their mulch that they're giving out for free; what is the quality of their compost; what is the input that, has pesticides been on it.

And so, for example, in the Town of Huntington, I know it's a town thing, not a County thing, I don't know if the County does -- collects waste material and gives it back to the communities. But the Town of Huntington and Smithtown does not have a composting project. And they have a big mulching operation, but I don't know if that mulch is good. But there needs to be better coordination and communication between users and the agencies that are producing these things so we know they're good and so you guys know that we want good quality products. So I think that's all I have for now.

**CHAIRWOMAN VILORIA-FISHER:**

That's a really good question. Nobody had brought that up before. I don't know the answer to it.

**MS. MITTEN:**

To which one?

**CHAIRWOMAN VILORIA-FISHER:**

To the compost and what quality of mulching is done by the different municipalities, composting. I know that Joe Gergela, who is a member of our task force, you know, from the Farm Bureau, has said that he knows someone who is donating some compost to some East End community gardens. But you can't rely on one source. We need to know systematically what each municipality is doing and the quality of what their providing. And that's something that I don't think we've talked about before.

**MS. KIANG:**

But we do have -- I mean, most of the town have composting facilities. Like, I know Islip Town and the Town of Brookhaven --

**CHAIRWOMAN VILORIA-FISHER:**

But we don't know the quality.

**MS. KIANG:**

-- and Southold Town. Some of the -- some of the towns, they do have a list. You know, like, they -- like what constitutes, you know, the compost. And I don't know if everybody has mulch, probably do. The one Joe Gergela mentioned, that was Long Island Composting, that's a private vendor.

**CHAIRWOMAN VILORIA-FISHER:**

But just for the committee, what we should do as part of the information that we give is which towns provide compost, because I think Ms. Mitten just said that Smithtown doesn't have a composting program.

**MS. MITTEN:**

They have -- they just have a mulch. They have like a thicker mulch and this finer mulch.

**MS. KIANG:**

Town of Brookhaven has it.

**MS. MITTEN:**

And I've heard -- I'm wondering what's going into that mulch. I know there are a lot of horse farms on Long Island, is the manure going in there? In some ways that's a good thing, but what happens -- what if there is still seed that hasn't been completely -- that isn't dead; how is the it turned. Other people can comment at greater length on the quality of the compost and the mulch. And also, I don't know, is the mulch good? Do I want to put it on my garden? It is going to --

**MS. KING-COHEN:**

The mulching from Smithtown is kind of a side dressing. So you would ask, "Is it high-quality mulch?" But it's good if you just want to keep something from growing. No, it's not certified organic.

**CHAIRWOMAN VILORIA-FISHER:**

I just have to regarding ground rules, because otherwise you're going to make our stenographer go crazy, please don't answer from the audience without identifying yourself, because it makes it very hard for our stenographer to try to keep track of who is speaking. I don't want to shut anybody up, you're all welcome to speak, but I don't want to make her job harder. Okay. Well, are there any other questions for Ms. Mitten.

**MS. KIANG:**

I just want to give you a couple of answers. There are organic gardening information or farming information. You can go to our website -- I'm from Cornell Cooperative Extension, and our new website is [cccsuffolk.org](http://cccsuffolk.org). And we just put the link to this. This information is from Cornell University. So if you want immediate information.

**MS. MITTEN:**

What kind of information.

**MS. KIANG:**

How to do organic farming. That's what you're asking for, right? And also, we are -- Cornell Cooperative Extension is offering a Spring Gardening school. We've been doing this for the past 28 years. One of our Extension educators, she's offering organic gardening session. We have three dates; April 10th, it will be at the Academy of St. Joseph in Brentwood; April 17th, it will be at Bellport High School; April 24th, it's going to be at Riverhead Middle School. They are -- you know,

I know other places probably offer the classes too.

**MS. MITTEN:**

I guess one of the important things that people invest time in just figuring out we need quality materials to put into our community garden and how we can get the best quality materials for our community gardens and for Long Island's gardens that's even free, because municipalities are giving this away.

**MS. KIANG:**

And another thing we try to do encourage gardens to do home composting. You don't really need to get compost from someone else.

**MS. MITTEN:**

Well, the problem with that, I mean, I'm starting a 3000 square foot garden, year one. This is very clay soil. What am I going to do in year one? I need to get -- I need to get some sort of organic matter in there. We're just starting, so we haven't been doing this for years, we don't have a huge monster pile. It's a barrier to entry. We have two people with their hands up. I think there was one more question, though, for Ms. Mitten from Mr. Lyon. Did you have a question?

**MR. LYON:**

No. I was kind of just pointing out that Larry had some comments about composting.

**CHAIRWOMAN VILORIA-FISHER:**

Regina Dlugokencky.

**MS. DLUGOKENCKY:**

My name is Regina Dlogokencky, I'm a member of the Long Island Community Agricultural Member, not a founding member, but very involved in the grant writing process for Stony Brook, as well as I'll be involved in the education portion whereby we're going to teach gardeners, young and old, new and old, how to garden, just the basics. And hopefully also, part of that plan, I think in conjunction with (inaudible) to teach people what to do with those vegetables once they actually grow them successfully.

I also own my own small business, it's called Seedsower Farm. I have many, many, many -- too many years to really stand here and tell you about -- of gardening experience. I started gardening when I was eight years old. I have a great passion for it, I have a great passion of teaching people how to garden. I'm involved in Long Island CAN because I want people to learn how to grow their own food and to know where food is coming from and to take pride in having grown that successfully.

I do have a couple of comments I'd like to make to the committee. First and foremost, there is a major lack of land available. I know you have marked on here all the different CSAs and community gardens that are on Long Island.

**CHAIRWOMAN VILORIA-FISHER:**

Well, not all. We're working toward it.

**MS. DLOGOKENCHY:**

I'm not sure what your source was on that.

**MS. KIANG:**

A lot of it was from me.

**MS. DLUGOKENCHY:**

I see one Centerport. It could be me actually. I'm very small. I'm up there, I'm a minuscule little

thing. I'm lucky enough to farm on some very kind people's property.

**MS. KIANG:**

That was is in Huntington.

**MS. DLUGOKENCHY:**

Okay. I'm not sure. Anyway, one of the things I wanted to get back about -- while we're on the subject of compost, this is something that I've heard about over the years. Apparently, Suffolk County Farm had at one point had some kind of system put in place for composting, and that kind of fell by the wayside. Now, anybody that knows anything about the (inaudible) knows that on the olden farms of the United States before the Green movement, before pesticides and oil-based pesticides and fertilizers were create as a result of surplus of war materials, people used to -- it was a closed loop in a farm. Animal manure was spread on the field, it added organic matter, it added nitrogen, and it was a closed system.

Now, I realize with water issues on Long Island, that may not be an option. But we have Suffolk County Farm where there are animals producing manure. I understand there was at one time, if there's not still, a facility there or some kind of infrastructure in place where compost was going to be made. Now, I think if you're starting victory gardens, which I still like the definition of, and community gardens, it would be great to have that as a resource to the County residents, a free resource if possible. And also, just utilizing this waste in a real practical way making it as compliant with Northeast Organic Farming Association standards of organic compost and making it available to people who want to garden.

In addition, I think there should definitely be home composting, no question. But as Lisa said, if you're just starting off, it's very hard to find a good clean source of compost on Long Island. But I think that -- that just came to mind because I thought about Suffolk County and I thought about the fact that there is this animal population up there, I don't know what's happening with the waste up there at the moment. We have a groundwater issue here on Long Island that we want to keep clean, so maybe there's something you can follow up with on that.

**CHAIRWOMAN VILORIA-FISHER:**

Well, we spent a lot of money on keeping that clean too there on the farm as well, to make sure that the runoff isn't contaminating the water.

**MS. DLUGOKENCHY:**

If a composting system could be put in place, that would be a beautiful marriage of two issues. As far as land goes, I have looked at the license agreement between Friends of Huntington Farmland and Suffolk County on Froehlich Farm Preserve and specifically on section number -- the section Part Six, Management Information, "parcel two is specifically stated as being a parcel that should be given consideration to community allotment gardens for demonstration and educational purposes."

Now, I understand that there's a small -- people up at Froehlich Farm who are managing that property, a very small part of it. I have yet to see as an individual, as anybody on the street, any information about any educational programs going on. So I know that they do stuff, and I think it's a commendable task they've taken on to grow food and to donate it to the hungry and to the needy. But I have a very strong belief that people should have the right to grow their own vegetables and to be self-sustainable in that.

So I don't know if this is something that should be investigated to some degree to see if it's possible to start a victory garden, a community garden, I'm not sure what the difference is, in Froehlich Farm sooner rather than later, because as Mr. Foglia just said, that farm is just going to succession. It's just overgrowing and it's just that much more of a process to get it back in shape for production.

Ninety-seven acres, parcel number two. I don't know what parcel they're presently on, but 97

acres is an incredible amount of land to be utilizing -- not to be utilizing I should say. And if it could possible be considered as possibly a task force -- a victory garden location for the task force or perhaps I know -- I know Suffolk County also has something about community gardens, which is why I'm a little confused about what the different is. Maybe somebody could clarify that.

**CHAIRWOMAN VILORIA-FISHER:**

We don't need to make that fine a point on it, okay, because we're using the term "victory garden," because the term has an evocative name to fulfil a need at a time of need, and that's why I chose it as leading the resolution. The genesis of the resolution was what I discovered to be a real need out there, which was defined by a fourth grade class that poor kids can't access healthy food. And we wanted to fulfill that need. And I saw gardens as a way of fulfilling that need. And I agree with you, I think it's very important to have community gardens that raise or gardens that raise crops and distribute them to soup kitchen. But I think it would be much more meaningful to have families, and this is where the grant you got from Stony Brook and Hobbs farm and -- - which is the third one? I keep forgetting.

**MS. KIANG:**

Tuckahoe.

**CHAIRWOMAN VILORIA-FISHER:**

It's out East. So to have children and their families raise their own food, I think, gives the family that sense of self-esteem of having worked on it and then enjoying the fruits of their labor. Anybody who has had a garden knows the tremendous satisfaction of that. And there's a lot of pride in having to ask for food. There's a lot of pridefulness involved in that. But I believe if you have a plot of land that you're allowed to work and you're working for the food, it's a different thing. And I have to give a lot of the credit for making my concept become the reality of the resolution to my friend Tom Lyon who came with me with the victory garden concept, you know, a modern day victory garden. So as I said, the term victory garden, we're not using in any technical term.

**MS. DLUGOKENCHY:**

Okay. I was just confused.

**CHAIRWOMAN VILORIA-FISHER:**

It's just so important to invoke that sense of people working during a time of need.

**MS. DLUGOKENCHY:**

I am in total agreement with you. And I can attest as a kid from Brooklyn, eight years old, parents stuck corn in my hand and said, "Plant that," and I was like you've got to be kidding. And I've been gardening ever since. So I totally agree with you. I am very, very happy that this is happening. I'm in total support, and anything I can do to proceed forward and make it a success, I'm happy to do.

**CHAIRWOMAN VILORIA-FISHER:**

Well, we have your name and we have your number.

**CHAIRWOMAN VILORIA-FISHER:**

I will just tell you a quick story, Regina. When my oldest daughter was about four years old, I was making and she had a play date over, her friend Dana who lived next door was at our house. And I was washing potatoes and Dana said, "Why are you washing rocks?" And I said, "These aren't rocks, they're potatoes." And she said, "No, they're not, those aren't potatoes." So I said -- I called up her mom and I said -- I asked her if she could stay to eat with us. And she watched while I peeled them and cut them and boiled them and mashed them. And when I spoke with her mom I said, "You know, Dana thought the potatoes were rocks." I said, "How do you make potatoes?" Well, she either made Ore Ida in the oven when they wanted fried potatoes or she -- this was 1970 -- '78 -- or she would use the flakes to make mashed potatoes. The child had never seen a

potato. I don't think we are as bad now as people were in the '70s. I mean, I think we have progressed a little bit.

**MS. DLUGOKENCHY:**

I think that may be true.

**CHAIRWOMAN VILORIA-FISHER:**

And, you know, I've always kept that -- so I would invite them over when I picked the sour cherries from our cherry tree. And the whole family, including the mother said, "Oh, my God, you're making this pie, you're rolling the crust." She just -- you know, pies were something you got at a bakery. And they were just magically produced at a factory. You know, we had this kind of antiseptic thing about food, that it was made in this clean sanitary factory. And you should have seen this family at your house popping each little tiny sour cherry, you know, pitting them and helping me make the pie. I'll tell you, that family taught me a lot and it's always stayed with me. So we want to get back to people discovering food.

**MS. DLOGOKENCKY:**

And I'm in total agreement with you. Thank you so much for taking this project on, because I think this is really needed, it's just coming so timely. You know, we all know Michelle Obama instituted that garden. It made me cry when I read that article, because it's just the most fabulous thing. Thank you very much.

**CHAIRWOMAN VILORIA-FISHER:**

Thank you. Linda Lieberman. Hi, Linda.

**MS. LIEBERMAN:**

Hi. Nice to be here. I was actually here just really to take in information. I'm presently taking the master gardeners course with Carolyn right now. And we are interested in the movement on Long Island. Lisa and I would love to put together a resource book where we can get resources. I was working with a school garden, and I pretty much had to guarantee my first born to get some horse manure in there. It was a pretty daunting project, you know putting them in garbage bags, putting them in the trunk and loading them over.

But I also wanted to maybe mention a couple of other organizations that you might be interested in also following up. There is an organization called Healthy Planet, and they've been doing healthy school lunch programs for a really long time, so you know, they might want to get in to have a word about this; Health and Welfare Council of Long Island has a Hunger Task Force Committee Meeting that meets once a month. That's another. I'm sorry, I don't have all the contact information.

**CHAIRWOMAN VILORIA-FISHER:**

I know Gwen.

**MS. LIEBERMAN:**

I think they also have a conference coming up April 24th I believe. And to address the question about compost, there is fellow called Jeff Frank at Nature Lyceum, he used to work at Long Island Compost. So he might be a good resource about finding out if you're getting good compost or, you know, how it's produced, what is the best way, who do you -- you know, who practices what practice in making compost. And that pretty much it.

You know what? Another thing comes to mind also. I was wondering if you would you consider different -- different models even to approach this problem of hunger as far as maybe even having a greenhouse of starter plants that you could give out to schools and maybe senior citizen complexes that might be able to maybe just do container gardening. You know, it would only supplement their food source, of course, it wouldn't be the whole thing. But maybe getting people to even donate a

portion of their backyards. So people may already do a garden or maybe people would give permission.

**CHAIRWOMAN VILORIA-FISHER:**

I think that there's a group that does that, Grow a Row for Hunger, I think. I don't have it exactly right. What's it called, Tom.

**MR. LYON:**

Plant a Row for Hunger.

**MS. KIANG:**

That's a (inaudible). They just encourage their members to take on the project in the communities. And recently they -- one of the seed companies, Territorial, they -- if you order seeds from them, like more than, I don't know, \$25, they give you free package of carrot seeds. They want people to plant a million of carrots this year. And I gave (inaudible) last week.

Actually, you are talking about giving out free plants, you know, (inaudible) for people. I would say maybe 15-20 years ago, Master Gardener Program had done that. But we got the funding from the County Executive's Office then. I personally start the tomato plant. And then we give out -- I had master gardener volunteers give it at out at the senior centers throughout the -- throughout the County. So now I don't have that kind of money in the budget anymore. And I don't even have a budget to train master gardeners. I used to get \$25 per head to train master gardeners. Now master gardener volunteers have to pay to be trained and they do volunteer work.

That's how we developed that map over maybe 30 years now. Different master gardeners got involved with the community gardens County-wide, and that's how we started this map. Some others, some CSA gardens we have in there. Another thing I thought, maybe we should encourage too is, like, large corporations that, you know, they might have land available.

**CHAIRWOMAN VILORIA-FISHER:**

There's Estee Lauder. Estee Lauder has a garden.

**MS. KIANG:**

I know Estee Lauder is one.

**CHAIRWOMAN VILORIA-FISHER:**

Yeah. We have looked at different models.

**MS. KIANG:**

That is for the employees. Their gardens are associated with a church. You know, all these different places I thought that we should look, you know, just encourage more people to grow food themselves. It's a healthy lifestyle and also, you know, eat proper food at the time.

**MS. LIEBERMAN:**

And I'd like to say that Long Island CAN, Regina and Larry are terrific teachers. They're great educators for organic farming.

**CHAIRWOMAN VILORIA-FISHER:**

That's great. And we are trying to look at different models.

**MS. KIANG:**

I just want you to comment if you don't mind about Starflower.

**MS. LIEBERMAN:**

Oh, Starflower Experiences?

**CHAIRWOMAN VILORIA-FISHER:**

You're working with them.

**MS. KIANG:**

You do a lot of --

**MS. LIEBERMAN:**

That was actually for the school gardening that I referred to before.

**MS. KIANG:**

I just don't know how active they are now.

**CHAIRWOMAN VILORIA-FISHER:**

Linda, there's another question for you.

**MR. LYON:**

Linda, just for you and for the record, I know some folks in Brooklyn, there's Stacy Murphy of BK Farmyards is doing exactly what you said. This is only about the third year now for her, but she is matching up people who want to farm or have a small garden with people with land in their backyards in Brooklyn. So she is probably gone through, you know, some of the legal or the ethical issues.

**MS. LIEBERMAN:**

What is the name of the organization?

**MR. LYON:**

It's BK Farmyards, I believe, dot org. And her name is Stacy Murphy. You can Google it.

**CHAIRWOMAN VILORIA-FISHER:**

Thank you, Linda. Terry. Terry Daniels.

**MR. DANIELS:**

Hi. My name is Terry Daniels. I'm just a citizen who -- I used to be a landscape gardener for ten years about 12 years ago. And just was doing a little research online about community gardens, victory gardens, and I found about this hearing. I just want to encourage the work you are doing, because I think it's great. I also think Victory Garden is a great name. It is evocative. And I was starting to research this, the idea that America could produce 40% of it's food in victory gardens so the war effort could divert energies elsewhere is amazing. That's very inspiring I think.

So my interest in community gardens is really just a beginning stage. I have two-thirds of an acre. I grow my own garden. It's just a little small patch. And I think, you know, the idea of matching myself up with other people in a community garden is more of a social experience than my isolated experience gardening. So when you're flagging in the middle of the summer, you know, you have someone to weed with you. So my research about community garden, I think that's a synergy that's very important. And also beginning gardeners getting the experience with someone who knows and the idea of people who are experienced gardeners teaching those who don't.

A couple of thoughts. I came out today more as an information gather for myself just to network. I think Long Island CAN is amazing. But I think, you know, an idea of maybe rental space -- I run a construction surveying company in Smithtown and created cells in Brookhaven. And I'm just thinking about this today, the idea of diverting some of that waste, which is very costly -- I'm sure the town has numbers on what that waste costs -- and the idea of diverting it to composting would

be an amazing, amazing idea.

So I just think, you know, this is a great initiative and sign me up and let me know. I'm very curious afterwards to find out about maybe -- you're creating a map now, but how we can use the space; I mean, this lot that I have next door, would it be feasible for me to make it a community garden. What sort of -- I'm sure there's homeowners that might have plots like this and there might be concerns about insurance and starting to invite the community in, you know, what sort of liability would we have to do such a thing.

**CHAIRWOMAN VILORIA-FISHER:**

You know what, Terry? I think we're seeing this as a beginning, because my initial vision for our report would be to identify the community gardens that are out there and the types, give some kind of a manual on how to start a community garden, create something that would be available to different schools, because as an educator, I always look from an educational point of view. And there is another piece of legislation that overlaps mine that was introduced by another Legislator which was to identify County properties that could be used for community gardens as was suggested. And one of the members of our committee is Pam Greene who is our Director of the Real Estate Division of Planning.

But as we talk to people, this becomes -- and as we read and research, it's becoming a bigger and bigger concept. And I think it's going to take on a life of its own. After our work as a task force is completed, I want to have a standing council that will continue the conversation, because this is organic, no pun intended. And we're finding that every time we discover something, we -- every hearing we've learned something new, every hearing we've learned about another organization and the way they can interact. And the need continues to grow.

And when you talk about production of food being diverted because of the war effort, I think nowadays the production of food is being diverted for industrial farming; farms that are growing corn that's not used to feed people, but to create -- well, byproducts that feed people, you know, corn syrup and corn that's used for other uses. And of course, food that's used for fuel. So, you know, I think you are really in the right direction. And it helps us see -- I think our goal keeps changing a little bit or getting big, doesn't it?

**MR. DANIELS:**

Well, the interesting thing is, I mean, you're really going smaller to have a backyard garden or community garden, but you solve -- I believe there's potential for this to solve a lot of issues. You know, I've heard that the average food that hits your plate travels 1500 miles. We saw fuel prices go up, spike up, and I believe they are headed there again when the economy returns. And the idea of those industrial farms in this nation, how long term are those, how sustainable are those. You know, the idea of nutrition for kids -- I mean, it's a great story about the potato -- getting kids who are now linked up online all the time out into nature, reconnecting to the earth to grow food and that magic of seeing something grow. So the nutrition and the health of getting kids out -- all of us, not just kids, but all of us away from TV and growing our food again. There's no commercials involved.

**CHAIRWOMAN VILORIA-FISHER:**

Any questions for Terry?

**MR. LYON:**

Terry, I'm just wondering, where's your property?

**MR. DANIELS:**

Aquebogue. And there's actually --

**MS. KIANG:**

Where in Aquebogue?

**MR. DANIELS:**

60 Peconic Bay Boulevard. Not too far from the Meeting House Creek Restaurant. There's a series of CSAs --

**MS. KIANG:**

We're neighbors.

**MR. DANIELS:**

So I've got a nice plot.

**CHAIRWOMAN VILORIA-FISHER:**

You've traveled a long way to come here.

**MS. KIANG:**

There's -- Golden Earthworm. There are two people who have worked with them before from Riverhead. They're going to start a community garden in Riverhead.

**MR. DANIELS:**

Excellent. I visited that CSA to ask them. Another thing that struck me was in the news a couple of weeks ago about soup kitchens and the funding cuts. I mean, the economic crisis, the funding cuts were so -- the reason why I started searching was I thought, "can you get people that are being served by soup kitchen to garden and help grow their own food. Started the inquiry with the guys over at Earthworm and just continue the search.

**MS. KIANG:**

Go to that planning meeting April 6th at Riverhead Library.

**MR. DANIELS:**

Very good.

**MS. KIANG:**

I'll see you there.

**CHAIRWOMAN VILORIA-FISHER:**

Thank you, Terry. Our next speaker is Faith Groody. Are you a master gardener?

**MS. GROODY:**

Yes. I'm really happy to see Carolyn here, because she was next on our list to go for all our questions. But I'm -- with Joan, we do our gardening up at the Vanderbilt in Huntington. And at this point, we are -- we were just -- at one point, we were just flowers that we were growing, planting new gardens, and then we decided we would like to get another portion of the Vanderbilt back to the way it was originally; growing their own produce for their own use. So we had started that last year, and it was a very successful garden. Our crops were great except for tomatoes.

It just was a wonderful experience. And we wanted the food used by someone, so we began to look for outlets to give the food to. And we did find Huntington Station was very, you know, happy to receive our produce. But at this point, we want to expand it all. And we contacted the Board Chairman and his wife, and they came and they gave us a lot of information including the -- that this meeting was going to be available for us. We're still considering what we want to do, but we're going to certainly continue to garden and enlarge it. And we have been doing it organically and will continue to do that. We also grow flowers just for edification.

And I am also involved as is Joan with -- the Commack School District has property, the Marion Carll

Farm, which you probably -- maybe have heard of. And the Commack Civic Association had decided that they would like to make a community garden on that property, which has not been used at all in many years. So we're on that committee. I'm looking for information on starting that. And any information that would help us to make it productive so that we can give the food away or perhaps it's just a community garden with the people taking the land and farming it and then using it for produce themselves. It will be a teaching thing for the students of the Commack School District. And the board is considering it. They have asked us to come before their Executive Committee, and hopefully, you know, we will be -- it will be very positive. And we're prepared to do all of those things at this point.

**CHAIRWOMAN VILORIA-FISHER:**

That's great. That's wonderful. What is your agreement with the Vanderbilt? Do you have a contract or a license agreement?

**MS. GROODY:**

No. We are strictly volunteers.

**MS. KIANG:**

Volunteers. In 2000 -- let me see -- the Year 2000, I guess or 2001, the Director then of Vanderbilt --

**CHAIRWOMAN VILORIA-FISHER:**

Was it still Lance Mallamo?

**MS. KIANG:**

Yes. He invite master gardener class to visit the garden -- to visit the Vanderbilt Museum and we took on the project. And a group of master gardener volunteers, now they still meet there every Monday for all these years, and they try to restore the gardens out there, they do decoration. The holiday, the courtyard was beautiful.

**CHAIRWOMAN VILORIA-FISHER:**

Okay. You do a great job.

**MS. KIANG:**

And then expand the garden. Now they got moved to the Normandy House, the mansion, across the street.

**CHAIRWOMAN VILORIA-FISHER:**

On the other side of the street.

**MS. KIANG:**

Yes. And they -- last year, they started the vegetable garden. And also, they're going to expand to the fruit trees.

**CHAIRWOMAN VILORIA-FISHER:**

Oh, the vegetable garden is on the Normandy House side of the property?

**MS. KIANG:**

Yes.

**CHAIRWOMAN VILORIA-FISHER:**

Oh, I see.

**MS. GROODY:**

They also cleared a lot land there. They're taking down a lot of the overgrowth that's there. And that will help us to continue, you know, building the garden.

**MS. KIANG:**

This is Vanderbilt master gardener group. I have another group.

**CHAIRWOMAN VILORIA-FISHER:**

And the reason I ask that is because earlier, our first speaker, Mr. Foglia, had mentioned, you know, license agreements, etcetera, but this sounds like you have a nice informal agreement that's gone on for many years. And I was thinking, you know the Vanderbilt has a number of educational programs. And it would -- I think it would be great for them to incorporate, you know, maybe the kids at least seeing the work you are doing with the vegetable gardens.

**MS. GROODY:**

We have that suggested that too. Money is a very big problem. It takes a lot of their time. At this point, it's in supply. So I hopefully will get around it, you know, the way we have been doing. They have supported everything that we have done so far. We would be interested in getting the mulch as well, because that's a big part of the garden there.

**CHAIRWOMAN VILORIA-FISHER:**

Any questions? Carolyn, did you have any other questions?

**MS. KIANG:**

No. Another place is Meadow Croft in Sayville, and they have been doing same thing, gardening project. They gave the produce to the needy in the community. And that's like -- that was one of Roosevelt's old play house. And they had a tradition then; they used to have their kitchen garden. But they used to bring the -- you know, the produce to the community. Meadow Croft now is a County-owned -- yeah. And they keep the tradition. In addition, they give tours of the buildings. But they always have that vegetable garden. And I think master gardener volunteers have been going there since early '90s.

**MS. GROODY:**

We do it bring it down to the Town of Huntington by Huntington Station.

**CHAIRWOMAN VILORIA-FISHER:**

That's great. Thank you, Faith.

**MS. KIANG:**

Their first year was very successful.

**CHAIRWOMAN VILORIA-FISHER:**

We need to talk, Carolyn, because Deep Wells is going to try to set up a garden, Deep Wells in St. James. We could use some master gardeners there. I was going to speak about it at an Eagle Court of honor that I'm going to this weekend. Vincent, you are back. Vincent Cirasole.

**MR. CIRASOLE:**

Just can't stay away.

**CHAIRWOMAN VILORIA-FISHER:**

Well, you're a wealth of information.

**MR. CIRASOLE:**

My name is Vincent Cirasole, C-i-r-a-s-o-l-e. I have a 6000 square food market garden in Copiague. I grow a mixed variety of vegetables organically, and I sell the vegetables. My basic purpose for coming here this afternoon was to volunteer to help to set up community gardens. I

don't exactly know how to do that other than I have a concept of doing it in my own town in a small way. But I'm looking to the task force to be a resource for me to help with that, and it is, because I learned about Long Island CAN, and that seems to be an already-established vehicle. So that's a big help. But that's what I came here for.

While I was here, I heard a lot of -- a lot of ideas thrown out, and I have a little bit of information that I will contribute for whatever it's worth. As far as the town composting and mulching operations are concerned, that's a pretty complicated situation in terms of getting clean compost from them. Those operations are done by the Highway Department or the Sanitation Department, and their focus is on cleaning up the debris in the town. And that's their responsibility, that's what they're charged with doing. And that's their vision of the task.

They pick up anything that's at the curb. And if it's at the curb, it's conceivably contaminated by oil washing down from the roadway. It's probably contaminated by pesticides that the people who live in the houses have used on their lawns and so forth and put out for them. So in my opinion, those -- those town composts would not qualify to lease as organic standard. It's a real shame, because their free, and it would be really nice.

In my garden, I don't use them at all for that reason. I don't think they are clean. But they're not intended to be clean right from the origin. So that's one complicated factor. Vivian spoke about -- about people who need wholesome foods and nutritious food, and it's particularly children. And I would offer the idea that that might be my point of view, it certainly is my point of view, and it might be Vivian's point of view, but I suspect that that's not the point of view of these people and these children. They've been educated by the TV, and they think McDonald's is food. If someone doesn't know the difference between a rock and a potato, do you think that person is interested in getting in wholesome nutritious food? They need to be educated about wholesome nutritious food. So I think that's going to be one problem when you try to encourage or motivate people to get involved in projects that are important to us. Don't be too surprised if you find that they don't give a damn about it.

Also related to that, if you grow your own food, you automatically create a problem because that food has to be cooked. Now, when I was a boy, the girls used to learn how to cook from their mothers. And when they grew up, they knew what to do with food and they prepared meals in their kitchen and the family ate. But that's not the way our society functions now. Now the girls are taught economic skills and they're taught to go out and work for money. And a lot of times people are just run ragged, their schedule is too full. And the idea of cooking food the way food used to be cooked when I was growing up, that's a difficult selling today. And that's exactly what's contained when we're selling fresh food to people, fresh vegetables to people. So that I think is another problem that is inherent in what we're trying to do. And we're going to have to grapple with that.

As far as clean compost, really clean, there is a company that I'm familiar with. I don't think this is a practical idea unless it can be organized in some way. There is a company that's certified organic, and it called Vermont Compost Company, and they're located in Vermont. Now, to get compost from Vermont down to Long Island, it's just not a practical situation. But I don't know of any other certified organic compost available. I think two compost operations here on Long Island, Briermere is one that's Long Island compost, I forget -- I forget the other one. But I think neither one is certified organic.

So once again, you don't really know what you are getting when you're buying compost from them. I somehow have a little bit more confidence in the product that they're putting out than the product that the towns are gathering up just because it begins with a different orientation; their purpose is different, their purpose is to make compost, not to clean up the town. So I think their product might be a little better, but it really does not technically meet the standard of organic compost. I want to thank everyone for all that you are teaching me, that's why I came here.

**CHAIRWOMAN VILORIA-FISHER:**

Thank you, Vince. By the way, my idea started with a child, a 4th Grader who said she wanted to have healthy food.

**MR. CIRASOLE:**

That's wonderful.

**CHAIRWOMAN VILORIA-FISHER:**

Sylvia King-Cohen.

**MS. KING-COHEN:**

Thank you very much. First off, I just wanted to mention to the people here that I'm from Newsday. I'll be happy to pass out cards afterwards. I'm doing a story, trying to list CSAs -- I'm sorry, community gardens. I just did one on CSAs so people would know the CSAs that are out there, what's available to you. We're trying to do the same thing with community gardens so people in the community can know where these are, what you have to do to be eligible, what's it's going to provide, etcetera. So that's just one of the reasons I got invited here. So if anybody wants to talk to me afterward, I will stay.

But in listening to all, some of you may not appreciate the comment I'm going to make. But, you know, when I look out here, I don't see a lot of people of color. And people of color actually do know how to plant things, we've got a big community of Hispanics who work in landscaping. If they had the land, they would do it. But you really have to make it accessible to them. I don't care who's there when I go. I actually have a very big yard so I can plant my own stuff, but people like to see people who look like them. If they don't see people who look like them, they're going to keep walking down the street because they may not feel comfortable or may not realize that it's accessible to them. That's why I want to do the story so people know (inaudible) some people don't know. But I would just really love to see, if you're at a community garden, drag one of your Black friends out with you, take one of the Hispanic people so that people who walk by go, "I'll ask him, he's Black, I feel okay asking that guy." There are still a lot of people out there who don't always feel comfortable who think that "this is something y'all are doing and y'all are not letting me in."

**CHAIRWOMAN VILORIA-FISHER:**

Actually, our first public hearing was in Brentwood. And it was because my suggestion came from a little Hispanic girl, so I wanted to start in her neighborhood. Unfortunately, we only had one person come to our public hearing. So our outreach has to be, I think, more vocal or more enticing to bring in people in the underserved communities, because we're also trying to address the whole concept of food deserts, which someone who came to testify at one of our hearings said that in Wyandanch there's one supermarket within, I forget what the perimeter was that she mentioned. But that's a food desert. People don't have choice and people don't have access.

And those are definitely issues that are part of what we see as our charge and why we're identifying the locations for folks. The is -- the Health Department is work in a community garden at the Sisters of St. Joseph's property, again, in Brentwood. The effort is there. We're working with a community -- what is Sandra Gill's title? She's a community health aide -- not health aide.

**MR. MYER:**

Community outreach worker.

**CHAIRWOMAN VILORIA-FISHER:**

Community outreach worker. She's -- actually another task force that I have. But she also is working on the garden and she's helping with outreach. So we are trying to make that effort. By the way, I am Hispanic. So we have a couple here.

**MS. KING-COHEN:**

This is the thing that I'm noticing, because -- okay. I grew in Oklahoma. I grew up on a ranch. I grew up composting, all that stuff, because we were taught this is all the land you get. We still raise chickens, hogs, goats, everything. And it's all pastured. But there are a lot of people who if you go the churches and say, "Hey, this is available, come out here and get this before all the plots are gone." You will have people who will do it, because you have old people who actually know how to garden who will happily partner with someone younger and say, "Come on, I'll teach you how to cook it," because I cook for a lot of people and I bring a lot of things that people were not aware of that they even liked. But I cook it for them because this is what I grew up doing.

You know what? If you work really hard and you don't have a lot of money and you're working two jobs, you are barely able to sit home with the kids and read and help them with their homework. So it's not that you don't want to garden, it's that you have to find the time. And if you fear that it cost money and you don't have any money, you don't know that the community garden is free. You don't know that you can probably find somebody there who will give you some of their plants or some of their seeds. If you think that you would have that much money, you're not going to buy a package of carrots, you're just not going to buy some carrots. You know, we talked about the fast food. Unfortunately, that food is cheaper than good food. If you only have so much money and you have five to feed, you're going to get feed them what you can. So I know I'm kind of preaching, but --

**CHAIRWOMAN VILORIA-FISHER:**

By the way, you can get seeds and seedlings with food stamps. If you want to put that in your article, that's an important piece of information.

**MS. KING-COHEN:**

I absolutely will do that. I think that's great. I will say that afterward I'll be happy to pass my card on, because we really want this to be a story that's going to tell people early on these plots are available, get them before they're gone.

**CHAIRWOMAN VILORIA-FISHER:**

Thank you. I'll call you back up after I get to the other cards, okay, because I have a couple of people waiting to speak. Did you have a question? Come back up, Sylvia.

**MR. LYON:**

For Sylvia, just for your information, because I'm working at Hobbs Farm which was the last African American on Long Island, I'm aware that there's a Black Farmers Conference in Brooklyn April 10th. It's a morning conference just 9 to 12. I wrote some stuff on a card here, I'll give it to you. But, you know, there's a huge movement in New York City as well. Hopefully, we can tie into that as well.

**CHAIRWOMAN VILORIA-FISHER:**

Also, Tom and I were trying to tie into the Central America workers who are working and do know a lot about farming, they farmed where they came from. We've been talking about trying to get this going for a long time.

**MS. KING-COHEN:**

People do want to eat things that they are familiar with.

**CHAIRWOMAN VILORIA-FISHER:**

Anybody else? Thank you, Sylvia. Regina and Peter Montemurro.

**MS. MONTEMURRO:**

We're residents of Melville. And we just came up with the idea that we wanted to do a garden on our property. We have less than three-quarters of an acre. Our property was landscaped and our neighbors cut down their trees, so we have plenty of sun. That just happened to us. I thought it

would be an interesting thing to start a garden and have our family do it.

My brother-in-law suggested we blog it. We live in the Rolling Woods section. And so I was interested in gathering information on starting the garden and what would be involved if we asked our neighbors to help or participate or get involved with us. I did think about the people up near the train station who are from South America who must have been involved with farming possibly and might be available to help us as well.

I have always enjoyed having a garden nearby and had actually even thought of putting ads in the paper like the Village Voice, you know, "if you are interested in coming out and doing something on our property, you know, come help us." But my history is that I grew up Holliswood in Queens, a bedroom community. But the gentleman -- a retired gentleman across the street had a small farm in his backyard, just grapes for his own wine, strawberries, one apple tree, corn, vegetables. And he would come over with the vegetables and give them to my mother. My mother would cook up whatever meat she was cooking and his vegetables and bring back a plate to him. So he helped us and we helped him as well. And I thought that was a cool thing.

And so really the reason why I wanted to start it also was for spirituality reasons for our family. We have three kids, one new grandchild, and we thought that it would be cool. Yes, my daughter would love to have McDonalds rather than a strawberry. And I just thought if she was able to pick something -- the only thing we have done on our property is raspberries. And I was very proud to hand them the baskets and say, "Bring them into me whether you eat them or not." She didn't, but my son did and enjoyed them very much.

**MR. MONTEMURRO:**

We're actually here because my sister told us about the meeting, Maria Maier, she's a nutritionist and a gardener, long time gardener. So our little personal thoughts about gardening are kind of connected to larger thoughts about, you know, what's happening on Long Island, what resources we might be able to tap into. So we figured we'd come and listen and, you know, share a little bit. I think, you know, there's a bigger picture beyond just growing a few vegetables to eat. I grew up always with a garden. We had a garden as a family when I was growing up. And that's sort of a little personal life, you know, growing your own food. But there's a bigger picture I think about just what's happening to our food supply. You know, educating ourselves about what's healthy, what's not.

There's a lot going on I think legally about food that we've heard that is concerning us. You know, there's genetically modified foods, there's legislation to radiate all the food, there's legislation to control how food is produced. And food is sort of out of our control. And even if you avoid McDonalds, you don't know what you are getting even at the supermarket. And that's concerns us. So on one level we want to take control of what we're eating. You know, and we want to give our kids a chance to do that too.

**MS. MONTEMURRO:**

We also have concerns about the property that we're growing our garden on. You know, it was landscaped; what is in our soil. We are thinking of possibly taking up a small tennis court and what's involved with --

**MR. MONTEMURRO:**

There's some asphalt in the backyard. And if we demo it, can we grow on it or should we scrap two feet of soil up before we try to grow on it? So we don't really know a lot about our own property.

**CHAIRWOMAN VILORIA-FISHER:**

Well, we have someone right here who knows a lot about it.

**MR. MONTEMURRO:**

Great. We're interested. And, you know, we appreciate the fact that there are meetings like this going on and that people are concerned about it and that there are resources available to us. Carolyn, you want to tell them what they can do to find out about their soil?

**MS. KIANG:**

I'll tell you later. It's going to be pretty involved.

**MR. MONTEMURRO:**

Yeah. I'm sure there's testing we can do and stuff like that.

**MS. KIANG:**

That kind of test can be expensive and might not be necessary.

**CHAIRWOMAN VILORIA-FISHER:**

Well, there are different levels of testing, right, Carolyn? I mean you can bring a soil sample to Cornell.

**MS. KIANG:**

That kind of test is just to see if your soil pH is the right level for you to grow the crops. Another would be if you need lime or not. You can go to the website.

**CHAIRWOMAN VILORIA-FISHER:**

And even some local garden center do the testing as well.

**MS. KIANG:**

If you want to look for certain things in the soil, then you have to go to the private lab, and it's pretty extensive test. Again, you know, it might not be even necessary unless you know the history. But it is very helpful if you know the history of your land.

**MR. MONTEMURRO:**

Thank you very much.

**CHAIRWOMAN VILORIA-FISHER:**

Thank you for coming. We love your generosity. Maria Maier.

**MS. MAIER:**

Hi, I'm Maria Maier. First, I'd like to say that I'm a student of nutrition at the Dietetic Technician Program at Suffolk Community College and I'll graduate in May. I want to just emphasize how important I think composting is because the health of the soil is what determines the health of the plants. If you don't have healthy soil and you use chemical fertilizers, you set yourself up to need to use, you know, pesticides and herbicides. I'm probably not telling you anything you don't already know.

One of things I learned this semester at school is that the Hilton Corporation composts all their wet garbage. And one of hotels in the chain takes 15 tons of compostable wet garbage, turns it into one ton of compost that they sell to the local golf courses and horticulturists. So that's something to, like, consider I think. I don't know, maybe.

And I'm also familiar with Jeff Frank at the Nature Lyceum. There's an organic gardening class, a two day class. And he stayed on with Long Island Compost. So it may not be organic, but it may be the best thing we have. And then the other thing is that Tuckahoe has received some grants. It's in Southampton. But Southampton High School is having, April 15th, a groundbreaking, because they're putting in a garden there for the high school kids. And they're looking to find out about grant money for them. So I was wondering if you know, I could get information about that.

**CHAIRWOMAN VILORIA-FISHER:**

About grant money? We're not doing grant money. We're describing how people are getting grants from other people, but the County is trying to make up a \$200 million shortfall. But we can tell you resources.

**MS. MAIER:**

I understand that. And I just want to emphasize that Jeff Frank is a good resource for organic gardening.

**CHAIRWOMAN VILORIA-FISHER:**

And where is he?

**MS. MAIER:**

He is in Westhampton. Actually, you know, what? When I took his class, it was Westhampton. I don't think it's Westhampton anymore, but it is still out on the East End. And his school is called the Nature Lyceum if you want to Google it. But I think he has moved from Westhampton. And then how big does a garden have to be to get grant money? Does it have to be a certain size? Does anybody know?

**CHAIRWOMAN VILORIA-FISHER:**

I don't know.

**MR. LYON:**

I can answer with one specific thing. There's something called the Green Education Foundation, it's a national organization. They have issued something called the Green Thumb Challenge, and their goal is to have 10,000 new gardens across the United States this year. They're headquartered in Massachusetts, but I know they've partnered with Lowes and a couple of other organizations. They do have some grant money available, small quantities, but that's just one. I think you are going to have to just do a lot of searching. But that's one that I think everybody here should register your garden with them with them. [Greeneducationfoundation.org](http://Greeneducationfoundation.org), I'm pretty sure it's org.

**CHAIRWOMAN VILORIA-FISHER:**

You know what we might do, anybody who is affiliated with a school here, because they're for schools, the Green Thumb Challenge, maybe we'll just forward the information to you, okay. I have that in my office. I think everybody give us their e-mail on these cards.

**MS. MAIER:**

So it's the Green Education Foundation and it's the Green Thumb Challenge.

**CHAIRWOMAN VILORIA-FISHER:**

Specifically for schools.

**MS. MAIER:**

Right. And this is Southampton High School, because Tuckahoe is like a K-8.

**MS. KIANG:**

Try National Gardening Association. I think the deadline is April 15th, you might still have time. They give out grants to schools.

**MS. MAIER:**

I actually just wanted to mention that I'm taking the Spring Gardening Classes. Thank you.

**CHAIRWOMAN VILORIA-FISHER:**

Carolyn Hannan.

**MS. HANNAN:**

Hi, everybody. I am a gardener and have been a gardener since as long as I can remember. And I'm listening to all of this, and I agree there is a very great need to a great extent. There is a very great need for far greater publicity and notification that these community gardens exist as well as they need to be enlarged.

Now, there's a second point. Maybe we can somehow make this part of the school curriculum, not just for the Special Ed kids as is the case at Washington School in Huntington, but for all the elementary school kids. And these days with our busy moving kids (sic) that live in Huntington Station to Huntington Bay and Huntington Bay to kinds to Huntington Station and every school having at least five to ten acres of land which they do not use all of it, some of it's playground, some of it's playing fields, but there are portions of it that could definitely be made into maybe -- I mean 40, 50 ten by ten plots for community gardens.

And that, at least for the people that live there, would be able to get to them, there would no need to travel. If you wanted to stop on your way home, it would just be a hop, skip and a jump away. One of the things when you say it's in these different areas, you've got to get from where you are to there. And for many people, that's very difficult. If they can't -- there's no time. There's an hour to garden, but it can take 40 minutes to get there. You know, that's a problem.

The other thing I'd like to see happen, I know there's a food bank in Huntington Station and there's one in East Northport. I have not been to either place. But if we could have -- I know the Family Service League on Park Avenue has it; a good size garden and a large size parking lot in the back. There is no reason why you have to plant marigolds when you could plant a tomato plant in a cage and a pepper plant in a cage, and people would learn from this. Plus, as the harvest came, when they came in for whatever you were giving them, "This is what we got in today's harvest, help yourself," type of thing.

And you don't have to have a large piece of land to do this.

On a piece of land that's an average of 100 square feet or less, you can grow an awful lot of tomatoes, an awful lot of green beans. I get less results with peppers. And certainly lots of lettuce and radishes and things like that, and some usual things like collard greens -- unusual for me. I was growing swiss chard and I was doing it at the Estee Lauder garden. And one day I picked all that was left before a heavy frost, and one of the men from the building who was in the Finance Department came out and he saw me with this, "Oh, you've got collard greens. I said, "No, it's swiss chard." I never grew collard greens, I don't know what they taste like.

But I did learn about some sort of -- it looks like a plant like (inaudible), but you use the leaves and you make kind of like grape leaves, you wrap things in them. They're from the Orient or something. You know, I learned about other things from the other people in this garden who were the -- the R&D Department is such an international group. You choose a country, they must have a couple of people who work there. So you got to learn about a lot of different vegetables you didn't know about.

But I'd also like to see if we got people coming to the food bank for food, hey, gee, you know, if some of you could spend ten minutes, we really need to have those weeds cut down next to the tomato plant or whatever. Get them involved. Don't make it strictly a handout. Get them -- an ownership. So that's the two things I had to say about it. I would like to have seen a lot more people here, I'd like to have seen a lot more publicity. I mean, if it hadn't been for the master gardener program, I wouldn't even known you were having this. And I do read the papers. I'm not online much, but you know.

**CHAIRWOMAN VILORIA-FISHER:**

Well, we put out a press release, it's up to the papers to put it in or not. You know, we try. It's up to them. Carolyn, I just have a question. How did you get involved in the Estee Lauder Program.

**MS. HANNAN:**

I work there. When they started, I said, oh, good, it's another piece of land.

**CHAIRWOMAN VILORIA-FISHER:**

That's great. By the way, last year I grew turnips and we couldn't even them enough. We did so great with this little package of turnips. But sometimes you try a new vegetable and it's just not something that your family is that nuts about. We gave a lot of turnips away.

**MS. KIANG:**

When did they start that community garden? I was there two or three years ago.

**MS. HANNAN:**

I think it was like 2000, 1999. They've been doing this for several years.

**CHAIRWOMAN VILORIA-FISHER:**

Thank you. Thank you. Regina Dlugokencky.

**MS. DLUGOKENCKY:**

I just wanted to reply to some of the things I heard here. First, I'd really like if Suffolk County itself had something on the website about all of these gardens that I heard about for the first time today. About three years ago, I was looking to see what community gardens were in Suffolk County and all of these different initiatives that are starting obviously are new, but I couldn't find any. And actually that wind up landing me in a farmers job, which has now gotten me where I am today, which is a whole story.

But oddly enough, the only garden I could find was the one in Huntington Station -- Huntington on Dunlop Road and Greenlawn Road, which I am a member of. And I have to say, we have a variety of people there, a diversity of people there. We all help each other. We feel very comfortable asking each other questions. But I totally agree. I think Larry is going to speak so some of the outreach initiatives that Long Island CAN will be taking on or will be making to different people in the community.

One of greatest things about in a community garden is the community. You get people who will give you so much help and advice, you always leave with vegetables that you never grew. It's a constant bartering of information of vegetable or help, and it's just an incredible experience. And one of the things that I love about it is that it is diverse and that all kinds of people come together and shed stereotypes and work together and learn about a person as opposed to what they think a person is about. So that is one of the unsung things about a community garden.

I wholly endorse it being as diverse as possible. And I think at the garden, you have a good range of people there of all ages, all shapes and sizes, and it's really wonderful. People give you advice whether you want it or not. It's really an awesome environment. And I actually garden next to a woman who is 93 years old. And she may just come and water, but for her, it's a social environment. And it keeps her going and she pulls a few weeds. I think it's keeping her alive and I think it's really wonderful. But I just wanted to point that out to Sylvia.

As far as Regina and Pete, your land could be remediated just by growing the vegetables. I don't know the technical term, but there are certain greens you can grow that will actually pull lead out of the ground. It's bioremediation. You can go online, type that in, and you will find out that you can grow things and actually pull the toxic things out of your ground.

**AUDIENCE MEMBER:**

Chemical Consulting of Babylon.

**MS. DLUGOKENCHY:**

I wanted to also mention, I heard somebody, maybe it was Maria, talk about restaurant waste and how it's being used. Did you say the Hilton? Well, we have a lot of restaurants on Long Island as you all know. Huntington itself is full of restaurant. So if there's a way I'm sure they're throwing out tons of food, if there would be a way to kind of -- that's clean. We don't know what is in those leaves, that's why I never use leaves unless I know who had them on their property and I get from them directly. But that's an option. All that food is pretty clean.

I think that's basically it. There was something I want to say about the Green Education foundation, the Green Thumb Challenge, but I'm not sure if I know what that was. Thank you, again. I really appreciate it. This is a huge thing. It's great for everybody, all Long Islanders.

**CHAIRWOMAN VILORIA-FISHER:**

I feel like we want to keep having these public hearings. People are so great.

**MS. DLUGOKENCHY:**

Would you consider having more?

**CHAIRWOMAN VILORIA-FISHER:**

The legislation called for four public hearings. I would have to amend the legislation and extend our period of getting the work done. So I'd have to talk about it with the task force and what they see going forward. But I would like to send something out to the people who have come to our public hearings when we introduce our report to the Legislature so that everybody can come to the auditorium at the Legislature; in Hauppauge or at Riverhead, wherever we're meeting that particular time. We have your e-mail addresses and we will let you know. We're trying to create a larger list of people who have already shown an interest so that you could spread the word. Because that's how we really relied on Carolyn and Tom, they both have long lists with all of the work that they do. Richard Myer from our Health Department had some of the techies in Health do a really neat one that will be going on the website. Sylvia, come on up again.

**MS. KING-COHEN:**

I'm just curious about one thing. You mentioned the thing about -- can they put community gardens and food banks -- obviously, people know where it is, they do have a way of getting there?

**CHAIRWOMAN VILORIA-FISHER:**

You know, I would think that they can, they're privately owned, you know, by the not-for-profit.

**MS. HANNAN:**

That would be nice.

**CHAIRWOMAN VILORIA-FISHER:**

And some of the churches that have food pantries also have community gardens. I think that's what St. Joseph The Worker has, isn't it? Down on Patchogue. Sophia Gardens is a CSA. I don't know if there's soup kitchen associated with the mother house there in Amityville.

**MS. KING-COHEN:**

They do a lot of community outreach.

**CHAIRWOMAN VILORIA-FISHER:**

They do do a lot of community outreach. But I don't know if there's any prohibition, but that depends on the individual not-for-profit.

Are you done, Sylvia? Okay. We have two minutes left. Lawrence, you got the first word, you will get the last word.

**MR. FOGLIA:**

Two minutes, that's tough. I believe everyone is entitled to my opinion. Let's see, addressing the people of color situation, that's a specific task of Long Island CAN. We want -- we are addressing that directly, we are setting up -- we have a whole community that's just doing outreach to get people of color into the existing community gardens and create community gardens in their neighborhoods.

And going along with this, we're trying to get the bus company to realize that a lot of these people don't have cars. And we have a community garden that has potentially a couple of hundred open spaces, we need -- it takes two buses in Huntington to get a mile and half because of the way the routes are. So we're bringing this up as factor too. And again, this is a model for the issues that have to be addressed in other communities.

The Town of Babylon received a grant to develop a community garden. And I work in the Wheatley Heights at the Usdan Center, and I noticed in looking at Google Maps that behind them the Post Office in Wheatley Heights has a huge track of land, which is literally right in the middle of Wyandanch, there's no trees on it, there's no park development. With a little research, I found out that it's a very far in the future Pinelawn Cemetery addition. It behooves Suffolk County to encourage a partnership between federally-owned land and towns -- town-owned land or towns that have needs and policies to see -- I mean, there's no reason why if that's not going to be used for a hundred years as a cemetery that it couldn't become community gardens for one of the neediest towns on Long Island. But it's going to take somebody with a cattle prod for a while to get the Federal Government to go along with that. The administration in place, might be very much in favor of that. So we need to invite Ms. Obama down to Wyandanch.

The Hispanic community, one project that we have in mind should we get the ability to farm in Froehlich or other large tracks of land through New York State Ag and Markets there is a program that has legal immigrants who have been trained in other countries to be farmers, who cannot get jobs like that here that will fund them. So it's a source of funding for us but it's also a source of integrating our community and using those people who have been trained as farmers to train local Hispanic people.

**CHAIRWOMAN VILORIA-FISHER:**

I'm forgetting the name of the program, because I have looked at it. Tom, do you remember the name of that program.

**MR. LYON:**

There's a program headquartered in New York City, New Immigrant Farmer Initiative, is that the one?

**MR. FOGLIA:**

Yes. I think it's Christina Grace, again, from New York Ag and Markets and Urban Gardening Program that turned me on to that. So I mean, that another long-range plan. So Suffolk County facilitating access to land, County-owned land, Federal land. Also, remnant farms. (Inaudible) is one example of a town that's in the denser part of Western Suffolk County that has remnant farms. I work with the Farmland Committee -- Suffolk County Farmland Committee, and I put my own farm up for sale of development rights. I didn't even make the list, and I've been a farm forever, because of their criteria. It's very much shunted towards Eastern Suffolk County. It makes it very difficult for Western Suffolk County to take remnant farms -- it's like a last-ditched effort. And now, it's a down market, it's the time to do it.

**CHAIRWOMAN VILORIA-FISHER:**

What part of the criteria did you not make?

**MR. FOGLIA:**

Well, you have to be surrounded by other preserved or preservable properties, that's the high point; the quality of your soil, which is not necessarily a factor; the size of the land; and the big one is the cost of the acreage. So the further west you go, the higher the price. One of Legislators from Lloyd Neck has a factor on there; if you're farmland is within an area of above a certain density, but that's not really enough to push a remnant farm over the line.

**CHAIRWOMAN VILORIA-FISHER:**

So it's not getting through the committee.

**MR. FOGLIA:**

No. No. We have one 13 acre farm in Greenlawn, which is horrible soil, through the committee, only because Howard Johnson on the committee knew the father of the farmer and they were all buddies, and they put it up there as a historic farm because it dates back to very early Colonial Times and a charter from the King of England.

Let's see. Okay. I'm going to give you very quick -- and stop me if you know this -- history of the municipal composting on Long Island and how it intergrades with the needs of people here, because I was on the Grass Task Force. As a result of going to the New English Environmental Conference for years in the '90's realizing that Long Island is in the dark ages compared to other parts of the country and the world are doing to solve environmental problems, a number of us came back, through a grant from EPA, we started the Grass Task Force, which initially was to help communities tell their population not to pick up grass clippings. In the '50's of before that people didn't pick up their grass, and they burned leaves. So you had to stop burning leaves, towns had to provide the service to pick them up, fertilizer companies sold liquid fertilizer and high-nitrogen fertilizer so the grass grew quickly.

**CHAIRWOMAN VILORIA-FISHER:**

We are running out of time.

**MR. FOGLIA:**

Thank you for listening.

**CHAIRWOMAN VILORIA-FISHER:**

Thank you so much. Well, thank you, everybody, for coming. You gave us a treasurer trove of information. We look forward to continuing our relationship with you an being in touch. Thanks a lot.

(\*THE MEETING WAS ADJOURNED AT 5:20 P.M.\*)

{ } DENOTES BEING SPELLED PHONETICALLY