

**LONG ISLAND**

**SPRING 2021**

# ROAD WARRIORS

A publication of the Long Island Contractors' Association

## **Natural Born Leader**

Some people become great leaders, while others seem to be born that way. Find out what makes Carrie Meek Gallagher a natural and successful leader.

**Inside:**



**Now is the Time for  
Bold Investment!**  
Cameron Engineering  
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**Carrie  
Meek Gallagher**  
Acting Executive  
Deputy Commissioner,  
NYS Department of  
Environmental  
Conservation



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*Long Island ROAD WARRIORS is the official magazine of the Long Island Contractors' Association, Inc. (LICA). LICA represents the interests of the region's premier heavy construction general contractors, subcontractors, suppliers and industry supporters. Focused primarily in the transportation infrastructure construction industry such as highways, bridges, rail, sewers and other public works, LICA's member companies play a significant role within Long Island's Nassau and Suffolk Counties. The economic impact of the industry contributes \$4 billion to the area's local gross regional product.*

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# Making the Grade



At the end of every state legislative session, New York's assembly and senate representatives scurry to find out where they rank on report cards issued by various special interest groups. These report cards are based on how the legislators voted on particular bills. One of the most influential reports for those representing Long Island is released by the Environmental Advocates of New York. A rating close to 100% is considered a badge of honor.

Historically, the environmental voting ratings for members of the Long Island delegation, regardless of political party, are among the highest in the state. That's because our representatives understand our region's natural resources are a substantial reason why we choose this place as our home. Long Island's strong environmental support is further demonstrated whenever environmental bond initiatives are placed before the voters. The Nassau/Suffolk vote tallies are usually overwhelmingly supportive.

Lawmakers and voters aren't the only ones demonstrating support for Long Island's environment. The region's heavy construction industry quietly devotes much of its efforts toward protecting and enhancing our natural resources. Unlike many other communities, we work collaboratively with local environmental advocates for the betterment of our surroundings. We are proud of the vast array of important environmental projects led by LICA member firms, which often go unnoticed.

Here is a sample of some of the great work taking place: **Bove Industries** capping the Brookhaven Landfill to prevent seepage of harmful waste into the aquifer, **Greenman-Pedersen (GPI)** performing an analysis of quality drainage systems throughout the region, **H2M** advising and assisting municipal water suppliers and private water utilities how to ensure drinking water safety, **Haugland Energy** repowering the future with off-shore wind initiatives, **Peter Scalamandre & Sons** constructing the educational Nature and Energy Center at Jones Beach, **Posillico Materials** operating the nation's largest contaminated material washing facility to recycle safe use of aggregates, **Rason Materials** advocating and manufacturing higher percentages

of recycled asphalt pavement (RAP), **RJ Industries** improving effluent pumping systems at Bay Park and Cedar Creek to protect our pristine bays, **Roanoke Sand & Gravel** pioneering environmentally sensitive mining techniques to protect our ecosystem, and **Roman Stone** manufacturing innovative and alternative wastewater treatment systems to replace polluting cesspools and conventional septic systems.

Many of these initiatives take place under the watchful eye of the New York State Department of Environmental Conservation (DEC). Our industry is fortunate to enjoy a cooperative working relationship with the agency charged with regulating and overseeing the protection of our natural resources. The success of that relationship starts at the top. Locally, that has been through the exemplary leadership of the Regional Director. Carrie Meek Gallagher, the subject of this edition's cover story, held that position from 2015 until her recent, deserving promotion to manage statewide environmental and energy strategies.

LICA has worked closely with Carrie on issues including; illegal dumping, construction and demolition regulations, mining permitting, and water quality issues. Her ability to humbly combine a common-sense approach with her brilliant intellect, has been one of her most admirable attributes when tackling any opportunity for Long Island's betterment. If LICA ever decides to issue an environmental report card, there's no question Carrie would earn an "A+" rating.

The region's heavy construction industry quietly devotes much of its efforts toward protecting and enhancing our natural resources.



Sincerely,

Marc Herbst, Executive Director  
Long Island Contractors' Association



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# Now is the Time for Bold Investment!

by John D. Cameron, P.E., Managing Partner - Cameron Engineering & Associates, LLP  
Chairman, Long Island Regional Planning Council



This past year has certainly been a challenging one, for some much more than others. Long Island, being part of the regional epicenter of the initial outbreak of the COVID pandemic here in the U.S., suffered greater economically than most other areas of the country. In addition to our governmental entities, our hospitals, colleges, universities, and pre K-12 schools; the private sector, in particular restaurants, retail and hospitality all were racked financially. The employees of those businesses as well as the owners were all hit hard. Many of those businesses closed, some for extended periods, unfortunately for some permanently. The construction industry was impacted also as many projects were either delayed or suspended due to budgetary problems.

We all are aware of the challenges that we face as a nation and a region as we look to move forward. The uncertainty of the duration and control of the pandemic make planning very difficult. Federally, we need to have our COVID-created governmental budget deficits repleted by Congress which has responsibility for financially addressing natural disasters, which the pandemic certainly is. Hopefully, by the time of this printing, Congress has done its legislative duty and funded these unavoidable deficits in the budgets of the State, its agencies and local governments.

For the nation to move forward, Congress needs to jump start the economy with a major infrastructure bill. We in the engineering and construction industry know all too well the dismal state of our Nation's infrastructure. In engineering circles, we used to say that "wait until a bridge falls down, then maybe Congress will finally act and address this critical national issue." Well, bridges have fallen down and yet we still have not seen a national infrastructure bill. For years we have heard from both sides of the aisle that they support infrastructure funding. The

only problem is that Democrats would say, "raise revenues" (i.e., taxes) and Republicans would say "cut spending"! So the twain would never meet. Hopefully both sides recognize that the "infrastructure can" can no longer get kicked down the road.

Addressing this "off balance sheet liability" can provide the economic stimulus of creating significant skilled job growth with a great direct, indirect and induced multiplier effect which will stimulate and grow our economy. What Long Island needs is not a replication of the ARRA funding back in 2009, when President Obama learned the hard lesson that "shovel-ready" was not shovel-ready unless the project was already engineering designed, and those that are designed usually have their capital budgets funded.

The projects we need to fund out of a major federal infrastructure bill are ones that will provide work for not only the next 2-3 years but ones that will provide economic development for the next 20-30 years. Those are projects that will not only address infrastructure needs but are ones that if built, will stimulate major private investment thus growing the economy at a much higher rate than just restoring or replacing outdated roads and related infrastructure.

We all know the popular but salient phrase, "never let a crisis go to waste." Well, this pandemic has certainly been the crisis of our lifetime. Let us not let it pass without seizing the opportunity to make smarter and bolder decisions so that the investments we make today, funded on the credit cards of our children and grandchildren, can actually be repaid by the wages, profits and taxes created by our new burgeoning economy.



## The “New” Lightweight Contender for Infrastructure and Resiliency Planning Ultra-lightweight Foamed Glass Aggregates (UL-FGA)

by Archie Filshill, Chief Executive Officer - AeroAggregates LLC

### ONLY NEW TO NORTH AMERICA

Although new to North America, ultra-lightweight foamed glass aggregates (UL-FGA) have been successfully used throughout Europe for 30 years.

Produced from curbside recycled glass, foamed glass aggregates are 85% lighter than quarried aggregates and are utilized on a wide variety of infrastructure, commercial development and residential projects because of its low unit weight and insulating properties.

### MULTIPLE APPLICATIONS

A common application for UL-FGA on infrastructure or commercial developments is to raise grades on sites through the construction of embankments, widened roadways, or ramps over soft soils, existing utilities, or existing structures.

*...they were able to reduce the amount of dump truck traffic by over 1,200 trucks... and divert the equivalent of over 17 million bottles from landfill.*

Designers may choose lightweight fill in lieu of other ground improvement options like preloading or deep foundations due to technical necessity, favorable economics or a need for an accelerated construction schedule.

Locally, UL-FGA was utilized in a private commercial development in Island Park. This project required the site to be raised 6 feet to be above Sandy flood elevations. The developer opted to use 3 feet of UL-FGA across the site and 3 feet of cover soil to reduce the amount of surcharge.

As a result of using lightweight fill, they were able to reduce the amount of dump truck traffic by over 1,200 trucks through Island Park and divert the equivalent of



Commercial Development, Island Park, NY

over 17 million bottles from landfill. In addition, the open graded UL-FGA provides additional stormwater storage and improved ground water infiltration.

### BACKFILL, MSE AND STORMWATER STORAGE

UL-FGA may also be used as backfill in traditional or Mechanically Stabilized Earth (MSE) retaining walls and will reduce the lateral earth pressures significantly through the combination of low density and high friction angle.

An emerging use for UL-FGA harnesses the inherent high porosity of the layer to be used for stormwater storage with a typical void ratio of 40% after compaction.



Nassau Expressway Route 878 Resiliency Project

UL-FGA was also utilized as part of the NYSDOT Nassau Expressway project. This Design/Build project required raising grades on soft compressible soils. The use of UL-FGA allowed the D/B team to eliminate piles by excavating soil and replacing it with lightweight fill for zero net surcharge.

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# The True Cost of COVID-19 for Construction Contractors

by Carl Oliveri, CPA, CCIFP, CFE, MBA - Construction Practice Leader - Grassi Advisors & Accountants

With pandemic-related requirements still impacting construction projects, and economic uncertainty chipping away at backlogs, 2021 will bring a myriad of new financial concerns. It is important to assess the obvious and not-so-obvious costs of COVID-19 in order to respond to its impact on operations and cash flow.

## Emergency Paid Leave

Contractors with fewer than 500 employees were subject to the paid sick and family leave requirements of the Families First Coronavirus Response Act (FFCRA) last year.

In 2021, New York contractors continue to face strict COVID-19 paid sick leave requirements:

- **100 or more employees** – must provide 80 hours of paid sick leave. Fortunately, federal tax credits are still available through March 31, 2021 for employers who provide full FFCRA benefits.
- **11-99 employees** – must provide 40 hours of paid sick leave.
- **10 or fewer employees and net income greater than \$1 million** – must provide 40 hours of paid sick leave.

This leave must include full wages and benefits. Only after emergency leave periods end do standard family leave and disability benefits begin. Employees who have exhausted FFCRA benefits are still entitled to NY benefits if they provide a notice of isolation or quarantine from their local department of health, or a positive test result.

## Increased Job Site Expenses

Because contractors cannot operate remotely, they will inherently incur more expenses to keep their workforces safe. One example is on-premise COVID-19 testing. With no precedent to guide us, the question of who is responsible to pay for job-site testing is answered on a job-by-job basis. Even with cost-effective options available, the construction contractor usually shoulders most of the initial cash outlay.

Another measure some contractors have taken is modifying their projects' entry points to become "clean rooms" whereby anyone coming onto the job site is screened by a medical professional. This has led to changes in project design and slowed the pace of job site access. Whether contracting an outsourced medical team or hiring these professionals full-time, the unanticipated cost during a financial downturn could erode already-thin margins.

## Insurance Costs

Added COVID-19 risks are sure to exacerbate contractors' concerns around rising insurance costs. The unfavorable market conditions that NY contractors have experienced to this point are not expected to soften any time soon.

## Building Healthily

Already known for their ability to build safely, contractors now need to build healthily too. Safety expenses have risen during the pandemic to cover everything from extra personal protective equipment (PPE) to training on COVID-19 procedures.

## Office Staff Concerns

The changes COVID-19 brought to the office must also be considered. How costly is unused office space as employees opt to stay remote? How will office space be modified to accommodate social distancing expectations? Should testing be done in the office? As 2021 moves along, we will answer these questions together, but what will be the impact on the construction contractor's bottom line?

## Technology

One of the vulnerabilities that the COVID-19 pandemic exposed was the construction industry's widespread lack of technology investment. Limited human interaction called for increased reliance on remote work, automation and other technologies that were not embraced by most contractors pre-pandemic. The cost of implementing new technologies in record time and planning for more upgrades this year will be a major area of expense, but one that will save valuable time and money for years to come.

While the 2021 outlook may sound grim, the new year poses a fresh start to gain a competitive advantage in the areas of technology, cost-effective safety solutions, risk management strategies and an effective cash flow plan. Take this opportunity to evaluate deficiencies and areas of improvement in your business plan and take action to strengthen your company's defenses against any crisis it faces.



**Carl Oliveri**  
CPA, CCIFP, CFR, MBA

Carl Oliveri is a Partner and the Construction Practice Leader at Grassi, one of the top 50 construction accounting, tax and advisory firms in the nation. He can be reached at [coliveri@grassicpas.com](mailto:coliveri@grassicpas.com).



# PEF MEMBERS ON THE FRONTLINES OF THE FIGHT AGAINST COVID-19



by Wayne Spence, President - Public Employees Federation

Members of the union I lead, the Public Employees Federation (PEF), have volunteered to perform duties above and beyond their day jobs during the COVID-19 pandemic. PEF members working at the Department of Environmental Conservation (DEC) have stepped up to support the agency's various missions, while responding to areas hard hit by extreme weather conditions.

DEC staff from every division have volunteered to help combat the pandemic, working at testing sites; delivering food and Personal Protective Equipment (PPE); supporting Department of Health and Labor call centers; and assisting at vaccination sites across the state.



Photo (courtesy of Carrie Meek Gallagher, far right): Commemorating Day 100 at the Stony Brook COVID-19 testing site with Debra Reitman, DOH Site Lead (left) and PEF member Karen Gomez (center), recently retired DEC Regional Engineer (Region 1).

Others have come to the aid of ailing communities facing forest fires, wind, flooding and record snow emergencies coupled with reduced staff or responders due to COVID-19.

PEF members serve in thousands of titles across New York. As nurses in state hospitals; parole officers keeping the community safe; social workers assisting those in need; psychiatrists treating New Yorkers with mental illness; engineers working on roads and bridges; scientists developing and processing COVID-19 tests; teachers in state facilities, and more. These dedicated professionals have been on the frontlines of the pandemic since day one and continue to serve with bravery and commitment.

Even when facing shortages of PPE, PEF members stood up and did their jobs. Even when the virus was at its peak, sickening and killing hundreds of thousands New Yorkers, PEF members went to work at hospitals, prisons, psychiatric centers, and numerous public-facing locations.

Our union has a motto: We are stronger together. Together, members of PEF will keep New York running during the pandemic, during extreme weather, and every day in between.



Wayne Spence  
PEF President



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# Improving LI's Water Infrastructure

by Kevin McDonald, Long Island Policy Advisor for The Nature Conservancy



Improving our water infrastructure is a boon for the environment and a win for the economy. By modernizing and strategically expanding our sewer system and upgrading old septic systems to new clean water technology, we have the ability to greatly reduce pollution in our groundwater and our beloved bays and harbors, where millions of residents spend time fishing, swimming, boating, or walking along the shore. Our coastlines give Long Island a feel like few places in America. And yet, the risks we face as coastline communities are serious. Rising seas, stronger storms, and nitrogen pollution threaten our homes, beaches, and way of life.

Beach closures, fishkills, and noxious odors at our shores – are not good for business or tourism and are not what residents and visitors deserve when recreating. Our beaches and our water resources can be better protected. Our coastal economy employs tens of thousands of workers and supports a \$5 billion tourism industry. It is a critical part of our economy but depends on clean water to thrive.

Here's the great thing about investing in our environment. It doesn't just reduce pollution and protect clean water, reason enough to act, it benefits our built environment and economy as well. Clean water benefits people and wildlife and facilitates economic recovery like we need right now. Take Suffolk County for example. Due to outdated water infrastructure, downtown redevelopment has stalled and prevented needed reinvestment to make downtowns vibrant again.

We can do something about this. By expanding our sewer system and upgrading to clean water septic systems where we know we won't sewer, we can bring significant new, shovel ready jobs to Long Island and enable the region to turn struggling downtown areas into the thriving community centers they once were. This could lead to a renewed Suffolk County with walkable downtowns, increased property values, and a brighter future.

Unfortunately, due to COVID-19, many infrastructure projects have been put on hold due to budgetary restrictions and lack of funding. However, when federal stimulus money arrives in New York, the state should immediately prioritize water infrastructure projects to create jobs, strengthen local economies, and protect water resources we all depend on. Investing in sewers and clean water septic systems is a smart and immediate way to get people back to work and create a more prosperous future for our residents.

In the meantime, we can still make progress. To learn more about what you can do in your community, you can visit the following websites:

- Suffolk County residents - <https://www.reclaimourwater.info/>
- Nassau County residents - <https://northshorelandalliance.org/water-quality-improvement-program>

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# Carrie Meek Gallagher, NYSDEC Acting Executive Deputy Commissioner: Natural Born Leader

As the oldest of five children, born to working parents living in racially integrated Baltimore, Carrie Meek Gallagher jokingly credits her first-born status for producing a “natural born leader.” All jokes aside, however, it is evident that this eldest child is one of the most natural and respected young(er) leaders in environmental conservation. A deeper look into who she is and how she got here, is worth reading...

## NATURAL CHOICE

While birth order may have predisposed Carrie to play a leading role among her siblings, it's her intelligence, ambition and hard work that have made her successful and a natural choice for her new role as Acting Executive Deputy Commissioner for New York State Department of Environmental Conservation (NYSDEC). However, beyond the impressive resume and rave reviews, I discovered what could be her greatest strength... a personal connection that drives her core commitment to the environment.

Discussing her childhood, I unwittingly uncovered a few pivotal moments and emotional memories that have compelled Carrie to follow nature's path to her chosen profession.

Carrie was in fifth grade when the Meek family left inner city Baltimore, moving to the pristine and privileged shores of Long Island. Surrounded by beautiful parks and sandy beaches with clean water, Carrie quickly developed a deep affection for the natural beauty of her new home. However, she also recognized the stark difference in surroundings between the “haves” and the “have nots”, personally experiencing environmental injustice long before the term became politically popular.

While neither of Carrie's parents nor grandparents were “environmentalists” (her mom's a teacher and her dad, a doctor), they all had a great appreciation for nature and the environment, always preaching the importance of preserving nature and “giving back.” Gallagher fondly recalls long Sunday walks with her grandfather and annual family vacations that consisted of rugged three-week camping trips to the Maritime Provinces or National Parks out west. She made sure to clarify this was “real” camping—no RV's or creature comforts—just tents, campfires, sleeping bags, and the great outdoors. And, of course, the wildlife...

One morning, as 14-year old Carrie unzipped her tent, she came face to face with a wild bison. Instead of fear, she recalls an immediate connection to this majestic creature. For Carrie, it was completely unexpected and indescribable—an almost “spiritual” encounter with nature. So much so, that tears immediately filled her eyes as she recounted the event more than three decades later. In hindsight, she realizes her experience may have been “heightened” due to concerns over rampant rain forest destruction which was

occurring at the time or as a result of reading the best-selling environmentally-sensitive *Diet for a Small Planet*. Regardless of the reason, that breathtaking encounter with a bison made such an impression that Carrie immediately gave up eating animal meat and remains a vegetarian to this day.

## NATURALLY GIFTED

As a teenager, Carrie had other unique opportunities to get “up close and personal” with Mother Nature including a 6-week “Wyoming Trek” with the Girl Scouts, which only deepened her desire to preserve our natural surroundings. Not surprisingly, Carrie excelled as a Scout and went on to earn their prestigious Gold Award at age 17. The interesting coincidence is that local Assemblyman Steven Englebright—whom Carrie now regularly interacts with in a professional capacity—was the person who presented her with the award over thirty years ago!

It was in high school when Carrie (described as “wicked smart” by a colleague and former classmate) first began to seriously consider the issues of environment and sustainability. She credits that awakening to her 11<sup>th</sup> grade American History Honors teacher, Mr. David Rood, as being the person who “really, really, made you think about the impact you were having.” After graduating as one of the top ten students in a class of nearly 650, Carrie chose to apply her intellectual talents to environmental studies in college.



Carrie Meek





Prior to earning her M.B.A from Hofstra University, Carrie graduated Magna cum Laude from Amherst College with a Bachelor of Arts in Interdisciplinary Studies (Sustainable Development), followed by a Master's degree in Conservation Biology and Sustainable Development from the University of Maryland, where she did her thesis on the Central Pine Barrens Comprehensive Land Use Plan. Clearly, her choice of thesis was an early indicator of her environmental commitment to Long Island.

### **NATURAL PROGRESSION**

Gallagher began her professional career as a program coordinator for Sustainable Long Island. There, she created and managed the first Long Island Brownfield Initiative, learning first-hand about the direct connection between economic development and environmental conservation. Carrie also gained experience on how to manage stakeholder engagement, working with diverse communities who have different priorities. This is where she began to develop her "find a way to yes" approach, by searching for shared interests and common ground among disparate groups. It's a skill she continues to hone and one that will be even more important as she assumes her new statewide role in a more politically charged atmosphere.

Following a brief stint as senior planner for a private consulting firm, and a year at Nassau County's Economic Development Resource Center, Carrie landed at the Rauch Foundation, as Director of the Long Island Index Project. The in-depth research, analysis and comprehensive public opinion poll they produced each year gave Carrie unique insights and a deep understanding about key issues and concerns of multiple stakeholders.

A defining moment early in Gallagher's career (and a sign of bigger things to come) was her appointment as Commissioner of Suffolk County's Department of Environment and Energy. At the age of 32, Gallagher was charged with safeguarding the County's natural resources and considering the environmental impact of all issues and activities in a County of nearly 1.5 million residents. Responsible for five divisions, she oversaw more than \$100 million in annual open space and farmland acquisitions and \$30 million more in water quality improvements, while advising the County Executive, County Legislature, other agencies and organizations such as LICA, on related matters.

Almost five years later, Gallagher accepted a position as Chief Sustainability Officer for the Suffolk County Water Authority (SCWA), where she was responsible for implementing a sustainability program which included water protection, quality and conservation, recycling, energy efficiency, and more.

In 2015 Gallagher joined the NYSDEC as Region I (Long Island) Director, making her a key contact and resource for the infrastructure industry. Despite overseeing a staff of nearly 200, Carrie applied her usual "boots on the ground" approach, taking time to meet with and understand the viewpoints of various stakeholders, while upholding her promise to protect the environment.



Carrie with LICA Chairman Jim Pratt

Gallagher proved instrumental in establishing an open, honest dialogue with LICA, fostering a healthy working relationship between our industry and the DEC, even as they prepared to announce controversial regulations that control construction and demolition (C&D) materials, familiar to the industry as "Part 360." She and her team were available and accessible throughout the comment period and eventual rollout of the revisions. She provided knowledgeable staff to attend meetings that helped clarify new guidance and address outstanding concerns of our members. More recently, Gallagher also helped bring insight, calm and clarity to a local sand mining issue.

Carrie's intellect and experience, combined with a willingness and determination to get things done makes her an admirable and effective leader. She doesn't allow ego (her own or others) to get in the way, making sure staff and stakeholders know to check their egos at the door, reminding everyone that the goal is to "do what's best." Apparently, Albany took notice.

This past December, after five years as a Regional Director, Gallagher was named Acting Executive Deputy Commissioner, making her second in command at the DEC and a new fixture in the halls of our state capitol where she'll now spend the majority of her days, hopefully returning to work from her Long Island home part of the time. In her new role, she'll be responsible for overseeing all nine regional DEC offices. She is excited for the opportunity and plans to utilize the extensive knowledge she gained as a regional director on Long Island and apply it on a statewide basis. That's good news for New York, at a time when we could all use some good news.

### **ENVIRONMENTALLY SOUND**

Historically, the construction industry and environmental interests are often at odds. However, with the rapid growth of the "green" movement and New York's increased commitment to sustainable energy, Gallagher is confident that the two need not be mutually exclusive. She believes future infrastructure projects will continue to provide good work for our members, while also benefitting the economy and the environment.

The massive Bay Park conveyance project (a partnership between NYSDEC and Nassau County DPW) is a perfect example of how projects with environmental objectives can result in new jobs. She believes the call for additional sewers and sewage treatment plants in Suffolk County (to help preserve/improve water quality) is sure to continue, with watershed projects like those for Carls River and Forge River already out to bid. Long Island's constant concern over our sole source aquifer and drinking water quality will require enhancements to existing water systems. And, the need to maintain the quality of Long Island's recreational waters (which is key for our lucrative tourism economy) will demand that existing infrastructure be maintained (or replaced, as in the case of the Bergen Point outfall pipe) which is currently keeping LICA members hard at work.

Looking ahead, Gallagher identifies off-shore wind projects as future work opportunities, citing major plans for the waters off Jones Beach and Montauk Point. Although wind turbine construction is not in most LICA members' portfolios, there is an enormous amount of funding being directed toward these

*Continued next page*

projects which will generate a need for related work which our members can benefit from. Environmental impact studies and engineering will be in high demand, while landing ports and substations will need to be constructed for wind farm operations. In anticipation of this, the state has already entered into a joint venture to help train the next generation of infrastructure professionals in offshore wind technologies, with programs underway at Stony Brook University and Farmingdale State College (SUNY) this coming year. Environmental concerns and technology may change, but as they do, the infrastructure industry will adapt and remain a major economic force.

**MOTHER NATURE**

Beginning a new role during a pandemic that has devastated the State budget is not ideal—not to mention the decimation of department bandwidth due to staff that is still engulfed in managing COVID-related matters. But like an emergency room doctor whose first responsibility is to ensure a patient’s ability to breathe, Carrie knows that clean drinking water is the most critical issue she must address. Without enough of it, little else she does would matter. It will be one of her first priorities and she believes water conservation will need to play a bigger role.

Two other environmental issues which affect us locally are also on the DEC’s radar. This includes continued efforts to clean up the “Grumman Plume” and work to mitigate the damage already

done. Additionally, discussions about the Brookhaven Landfill (which have been ongoing since 2018) are sure to heat up as the scheduled 2024 closure date quickly approaches. We are hopeful that having Carrie’s voice in the conversation will ensure those discussions keep Long Island’s best interest in mind.

However, being charged with the protection of Mother Nature is, at best, difficult, and at worst, impossible, particularly in a state where the number of special interests (political, personal, economic, and environmental) can outnumber the amount of trees in a forest. From a broader perspective, Gallagher believes the bigger challenge for New York will be to address the issue of environmental justice. She says “bringing that lens to every dialogue” will be paramount if we hope to succeed in protecting, preserving and improving our environment for everyone, not just pockets of privileged neighborhoods.

There’s no doubt that Carrie’s personal experience, combined with her professional knowledge, intellect and optimism, made her an ideal candidate for her new position. So much so, that a week after arriving in Albany, Gallagher was “asked” to temporarily take on a second role as Acting Deputy Secretary for Energy and the Environment, responsible for overseeing 12 different state agencies (including the DEC). It would be an overwhelming prospect for most, but not everyone. Because, as it turns out, she was right... **Carrie Meek Gallagher is clearly a natural born leader.**



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# Some 'dish' with the Commish

with *Carrie Meek Gallagher*

**Q. In high school, which group would you say you belonged to? Total Nerds, Overachievers, Popular Kids, Jocks, Dead Heads or other?**

A. Definitely an overachiever.

**Q. What was your favorite subject or class in high school?**

A. 11th Grade History (read her cover story to learn why this class had such an impact!)

**Q. Were you better in Biology or Chemistry or Earth Science?**

A. Biology for sure.

**Q. Environmentalists are often called "tree huggers"... So, what tree would you hug??**

A. A Sequoia

**Q. At home, are you an obsessive recycler?**

A. I don't think so, but my family would probably say I'm obsessive about it.

**Q. What's the most memorable science experiment in high school/college?**

A. Dissecting a fetal pig in college. It confirmed my earlier choice to become a vegetarian.

**Q. Professionally, what is your greatest achievement/impact to date?**

A. As Region Director for the DEC, I was able to have the greatest direct impact on employees and stakeholders, working to improve sustainability.

**Q. Best day on the job?**

A. Aside from my newest promotion, it was probably being named Commissioner of Suffolk County Dept. of Energy and the Environment. It was a very big step at such a young age.

**Q. Worst day on the job?**

A. As a young Commissioner, I was constantly battled and belittled by a colleague who put their ego ahead of working together for the greater good. One day, I was so frustrated, I went to my car and had a good 15-minute cry. But it provided a valuable lesson about keeping focused on the work and learning not to take things too personally.

**Q. Single best advice you can give to the construction industry from an environmental perspective?**

A. The support from this industry has been very helpful. I urge everyone to keep an open mind so we can continue work together to find the best solutions for all.

**Q. What are your thoughts on wind and solar power as sustainable energy sources?**

A. I believe we will need a combination and the right mix of energy sources to get to "carbon neutral."

**Q. Do the proposed LI offshore wind projects give you concerns about possible effects on local waters?**

A. No. I believe numerous environmental impact studies have shown our waters will not be adversely affected and the agreements we have in place ensure the projects will be so closely monitored that, if any indicators show troubling data, we can shut things down until we find a solution.

**Q. If there was one project or cause (money no object) that you could tackle today, what would it be?**

A. From the perspective of long term societal effects, I think we need to do a better job connecting young people to nature so they can truly understand the impact they have on their environment. These days, they're too busy with their phones and video screens to realize the importance of environmental issues on their future.



Photos (courtesy of Carrie Meek Gallagher): Regional DEC team holiday party (pre-Covid)! Right, above bottom: Carrie and her son Conner, in his younger days, planting a tree.

TRANSFORMATIVE INFRASTRUCTURE FOR LONG ISLAND

# Moving Beyond Shovel Ready

*by Suffolk County Legislator Kara Hahn*

The next big thing out of Washington may just be what we've been promised for years: significant new infrastructure dollars! This could transform Long Island by building solutions to problems we've been talking about for generations. Putting people back to work in good-paying jobs at the same time.

Building back better shouldn't mean shackling ourselves to already budgeted shovel-ready projects. It should mean imagining and then creating a future we can proudly pass along to our children. We shouldn't use new dollars to replace what has already been budgeted to keep patching the same crumbling roads. It's a fool's errand. We must have a long-range vision! Only then will we know if we're on the road to ruin, or revival.

We face great challenges as a region, but we can't meet these challenges alone. With the support of Washington, we can invest in high-speed rail and reimagine major intersections that would make bumper to bumper traffic a thing of the past. We can finally electrify the LIRR Port Jefferson branch, one of the most critical economic corridors in our region. Imagine a morning stop at Briermere Farms in Riverhead, then a quick 30 minute ride to Manhattan to make that early meeting, pastry in hand! Now that would be transformative! We could build long overdue overpasses like the one at Nicolls Road and 347, talked about for decades, which leads to the region's largest single-site employer: Stony Brook University.

As chair of the Suffolk Legislature's Environment, Parks & Agriculture and its Economic Development, Planning & Housing committees, I have also long advocated for a few green gems that can help our economy grow faster and better.

First, let's solve our recycling conundrum. Waste on Long Island has been a growing problem for decades. Landfills are unsustainable, global markets for contaminated collections are collapsing. Build us a regional glass recycling facility, a plastic sorting facility, and throw in research dollars to find real, practical market uses for these materials.

Second, the Island's roadways are some of the most dangerous in the nation. Let's finish the LI Greenbelt, but while we are at it let's build hike & bike paths under all the major LIPA right-of-ways, getting bikers, walkers and runners off roads, furthering our environmental justice goals by connecting communities, increasing access to recreation and growing property values.

Third, fully fund a vision I have to "Reclaim our Land." Buy back critical parcels that should never have been built on, undo suburban sprawl and build up functioning, walkable downtowns. The reuse of blighted properties costs more than building on green spaces, but will be worth it in the long run. Let's create a funding stream to pay for demolition costs for development projects that meet the needs of communities and are placed in downtown centers. Let's create an incentive for the County's "Recycling Retail" vision I helped spearhead and a disincentive for building on virgin forested lands.

With the determination of visionaries like LICA and support from Washington, we will find our way forward to transform Long Island and put people back to work.

**Building back better shouldn't mean shackling ourselves to already budgeted shovel-ready projects. It should mean imagining and then creating a future we can proudly pass along to our children.**



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# TAXING THE EMPIRE STATE

by Desmond M. Ryan, Government Relations Consultant

*“A billion here, a billion there and pretty soon you’re talking about real money.”*

— Everett Dirksen, former United States Senator

The old adage goes ‘there are two things in life you can count on—death and taxes.’ Here in New York it looks like the latter will continue to rise. No matter what the final state budget will look like for 2022, it is the intention of the legislature to continue to seek out any additional revenue which will assist them in meeting the goal of their ‘tax & spend’ agenda. The only question is “how far will they go?” With both the senate and assembly firmly in control of the Democrats, they will be debating the Governor’s \$193 billion spending plan— a \$20 billion increase over last year.

One proposal put forth by the Governor is a 2% increase in the state’s top income tax rate. This would increase the rate from its current 8.82% to a top rate of 10.8% in hopes of generating an additional \$1.5 billion to offset the \$15 billion deficit expected for this and the next 2 years. Other proposed revenue enhancers are legalizing the sale of marijuana, a casino for New York City, as well as expanding mobile sports betting. But these will only generate \$75 million a year.

Both the senate and assembly have supported a proposal to increase a tax on the “wealthy” (i.e., those who earn more than \$1 million a year). This measure currently generates about \$25 billion in personal income tax revenue and increasing taxes on this population, as well as a return to taxing the sale of stocks, will force businesses and people to question whether they really want to live in New York.

At the present time, the Biden administration is working on a second coronavirus relief package of \$1.9 trillion, of which \$50 billion is slated to bailout New York. The money is to assist the state and local government, as well as our transit system and small businesses.

The issue is, when does the state reach the breaking point? Federal monies will allow the state to move forward for the next 24 months—then what? There is no question the fiscal policies in this state are having a profound impact on people’s lives. Here on Long Island, there appears to be no light at the end of the tunnel when it comes to what households are paying in real property taxes. Published reports have shown that families who are downsizing from a home to a smaller condo, have seen as much as a 50% increase in their real property tax bill. These increases, coupled with a change in the personal income tax, will only accelerate the death spiral that has already started for New York’s population.

There is no doubt that the Covid pandemic has had a profound impact on how we live and work, and has changed the way we conduct our business. The Governor and the legislature must realize that, because of this, an unsound fiscal policy (in need of major reform) will only add fuel to the fire, adding to the growing exodus of taxpayers who are moving out of state. The solution will not be easy, but finding one will return New York to its status as the nation’s Empire State.





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