

# Fairbank, Maslin, Maullin & Associates

Opinion Research &  
Public Policy Analysis

TO: Interested Parties

FROM: David Metz and Curtis Below  
Fairbank, Maslin, Maullin & Associates

RE: Key Findings from Recent Long Island Voter Survey

DATE: March 31, 2009

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Fairbank, Maslin, Maullin & Associates (FMM&A) recently conducted a survey of 800 likely voters on Long Island to assess their attitudes toward open space preservation.<sup>1</sup> Overall, the survey results show that although voters are highly concerned about the economy and are worried that it will worsen over the next year, **they remain strongly committed to preserving open space and farmland from development.** Voters believe that Long Island can have both a clean environment and a strong economy at the same time, and that communities do not have to choose between the two – in fact, voters believe that open space preservation will both protect Long Island’s quality of life and strengthen its economy. As a result, **eight in ten survey respondents (79%) believe that local governments should spend at least the same amount – if not more – to preserve open land on Long Island.**

Among the key specific findings of the survey are the following:<sup>2</sup>

- **Long Island voters unquestionably concerned about the economy.** Fully 61 percent of Long Island voters rate “having secure, good-paying jobs” as an “extremely” or “very serious” problem on Long island – ranking it among the top

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<sup>1</sup> **Methodology:** From February 19.23, 2009, FMM&A completed 800 telephone interviews with Long Island, NY voters who are likely to cast ballots in the November 2009 election. The margin of sampling error for the full sample is +/- 3.5%, margins of error for other subgroups within the sample will be higher.

<sup>2</sup> Unless otherwise noted, results from Nassau and Suffolk County respondents were generally similar.

2425 Colorado Ave. Suite 180  
Santa Monica, CA 90404  
Phone: (310) 828-1183  
Fax: (310) 453-6562

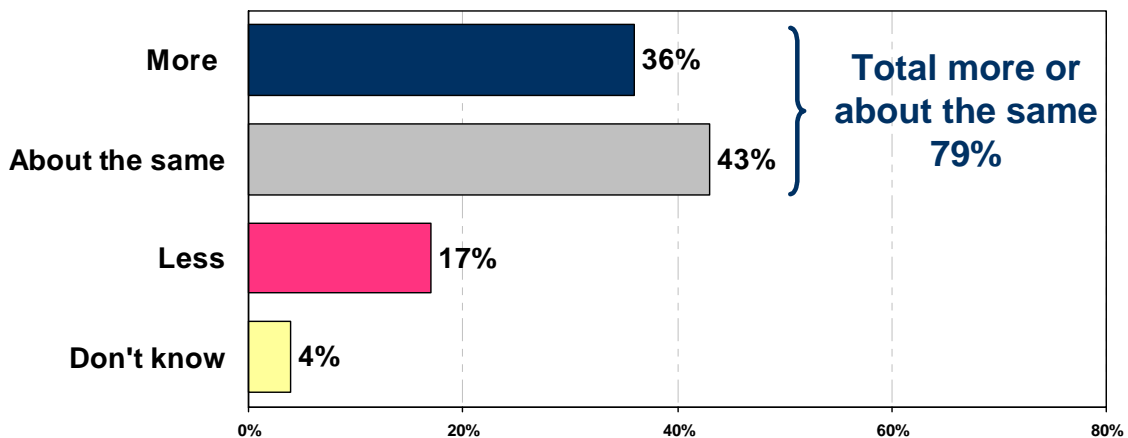
1999 Harrison Street Suite 1290  
Oakland, CA 94612  
Phone: (510) 451-9521  
Fax: (510) 451-0384

concerns facing the community. And most voters expect economic conditions to get worse before they get better. A 71-percent majority says that Long Island’s economy will get worse in the next twelve months (60% in Nassau and 82% in Suffolk), while a 43-percent plurality says the same for their personal financial situation.

- **At the same time, voters also express concern about the condition of open space on Long Island.** When asked if Long Island has “too much,” “about the right amount” or “too little development, nearly two-thirds of voters (64% overall, with 59% in Nassau and 70% in Suffolk) say “too much” development and only seven percent say “too little.” development. In addition, over the next year a 39-percent plurality expect the condition of land, air and water on Long Island to get worse, rather than better.
- **In this context, eight in ten voters believe local governments on Long Island should maintain or increase spending levels on open space preservation.** A plurality of Long Island voters (43% overall, with 39% in Nassau and 46% in Suffolk) says that their local governments should maintain their current spending levels to “preserve open land from development” (**Figure 1**). Furthermore, over one-third (36%) call for local governments to spend *more* on land conservation. Combined, eight in ten (79%) believe that local governments should spend at least the same amount – if not more – to preserve open land on Long Island (75% in Nassau and 82% in Suffolk). These opinions were shared by respondents from both Nassau and Suffolk Counties. In each county, 36 percent of respondents supported increasing spending on land conservation, while pluralities supported maintaining existing spending levels (39% in Nassau and 46% in Suffolk).

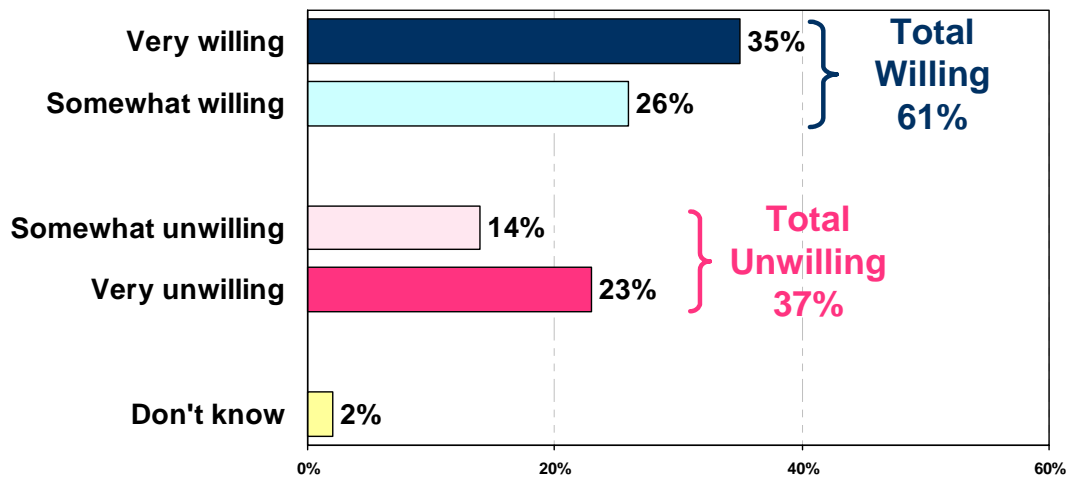
**FIGURE 1:**  
**Local Spending on Environmental Conservation**

*In general, do you feel that your county and local government should be spending more, less or about the same to preserve open land from development?*



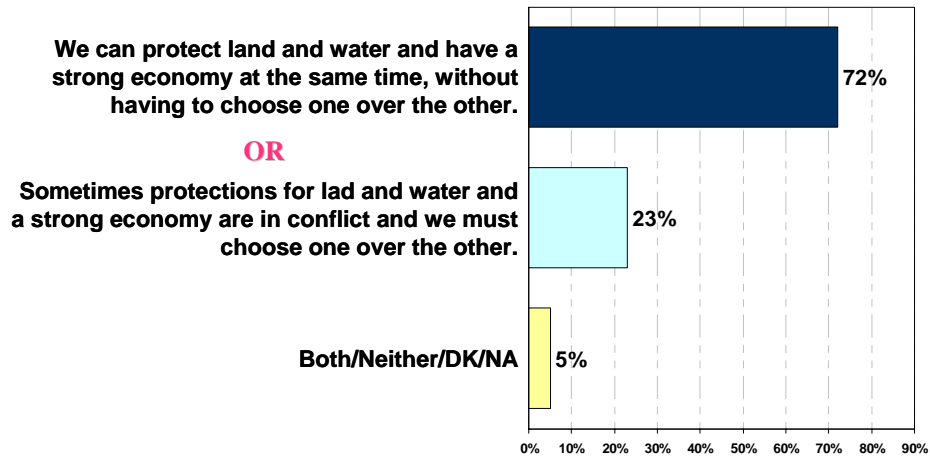
- Six in ten voters would be willing to pay as much as \$35 a year in additional taxes to support land conservation programs on Long Island.** Long Island voters have a long history of taxing themselves to support open space preservation, and as shown in **Figure 2**, a solid majority of voters (61% overall, with 58% in Nassau and 63% in Suffolk) indicate that they would be willing to pay \$35 per year in additional taxes if those funds were “dedicated to programs to preserve open land from development on Long Island.” The percentage of respondents “very” willing to pay an additional \$35 (35%) was nearly equal to the total percentage of those unwilling to pay the increased tax (37%).

**FIGURE 4:**  
**Willingness to Pay \$35 per Year in Household Taxes to Preserve Open Space from Development**



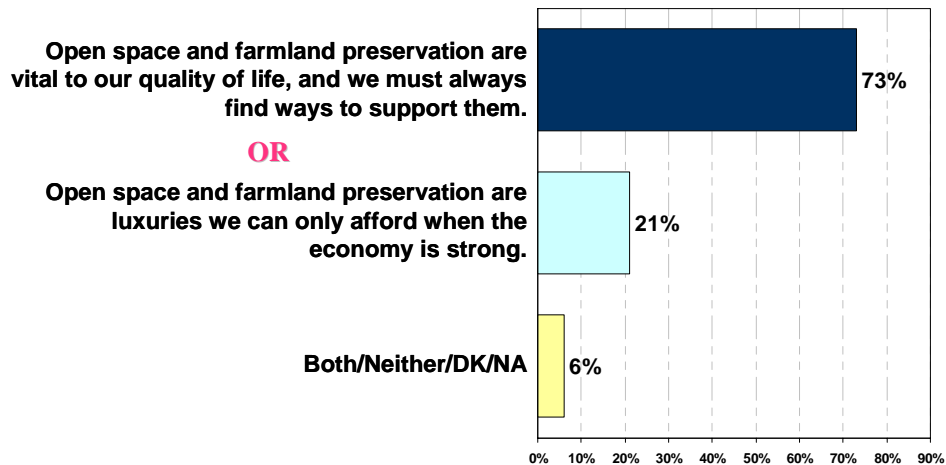
- Voters believe that Long Islanders do not have to choose between a strong economy and protecting the environment.** Voters’ continued support for funding open space preservation stems from a core belief that economic growth and open space preservation are not incompatible. Survey respondents were read two statements about the economy and protecting the environment and asked to indicate which came closer to their own point of view. As shown in **Figure 3**, over seven in ten (72%) chose the statement asserting that “we can protect land and water and have a strong economy at the same time, without having to choose one over the other.” Less than one-quarter (23%) felt that we must chose between “protections for land and water and a strong economy.” This sentiment cut across ideological categories within the Long Island electorate, with 77 percent of Democrats, 71 percent of independents, and 68 percent of Republicans agreeing that economic and environmental goals were not at odds with each other.

**FIGURE 3:**  
**Perceived Relationship Between a Strong Economy and Protecting Land and Water**



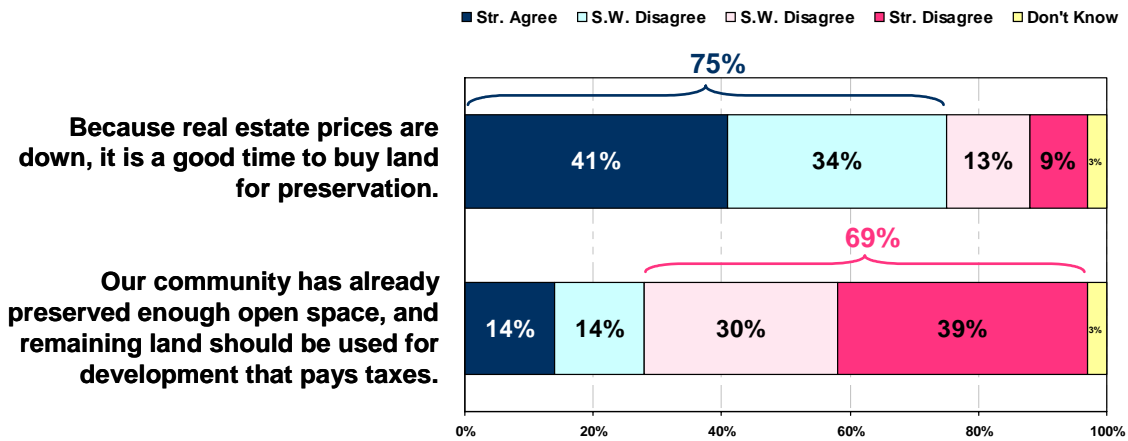
- **Voters believe that preserving open space and preserving farmland are vital to Long Island’s quality of life, and should be priorities regardless of economic conditions.** Respondents were read two statements about the importance of open space and preserving farmland on Long Island and asked to indicate which came closer to their own point of view. Over seven in ten (73%) agreed that “Open space and farmland preservation are vital to our quality of life, and we must always find ways to support them,” with only one in five (21%) asserting that open space and farmland preservation are “luxuries we can only afford when the economy is strong.”

**FIGURE 4:**  
**Importance of Open Space and Farmland Preservation**



- Long Islanders believe that now is a particularly good time to buy land for preservation purposes instead of development.** As shown in **Figure 5**, three-quarters of survey respondents (75%) agreed that now is a “good time” to buy land for preservation because of declining real estate prices (41% “strongly” agreed). In contrast, nearly as many respondents (69% overall, with 66% in Nassau and 71% in Suffolk) rejected the argument that their local communities have already preserved enough open space and should instead develop any remaining land to generate additional tax revenues.

**FIGURE 5:**  
**Thoughts on Preserving More Open Space**  
*(Split Sampled)*



Overall, the survey results show that while voters are highly concerned about the economy, they believe that strengthening the economy and protecting the environment can be accomplished at the same time. Consequently, eight in ten voters (79%) believe local governments on Long Island should maintain or increase spending levels on land conservation. Voters believe that this is a good time to purchase land for conservation affordably, that doing so will result in lower taxes, and that open space and farmland are vital to Long Island’s quality of life.