

Levy: LIPA needs to be overhauled

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The state took the first step toward making Long Island more affordable earlier this year by passing a property tax cap, but now attention must focus on overhauling LIPA, Suffolk County Executive Steve Levy told a meeting of community activists last night in Melville.

Speaking to a group that included tea party members and representatives from various watchdog groups, Levy said "the problem on Long Island is the high cost of living." Energy costs keep going up, Levy said, forcing people to

leave.

The meeting at the Melville Marriott was sponsored by the group LIPA LIES (Long Island Energy Surveillance) and included about 50 people.

LIPA trustees are expected to meet today to be briefed on options laid out last month by a consultant to restructure the utility.

LIPA's contract with National Grid is set to expire at the end of next year. Among the ideas on the table: privatizing LIPA, absorbing National Grid workers to provide electricity itself, or keeping the current private-partnership structure but giving LIPA more control over the budget and priorities.

"Long Islanders need to know what's going on. This could result in a rate increase," said anti-tax activist Fred Gorman.

Under the enhanced private-partnership option, day-to-day management would remain in the hands of a contractor, now National Grid, said the utility consultant, The Brattle Group. The contractor would be subject to greater penalties or profits, depending on service. LIPA would also gain control over how funds are apportioned between different services, LIPA chief operating officer Michael Hervey said yesterday. He said LIPA would put more emphasis in customer service, from answering com-

plaints to billing.

LIPA pays National Grid a flat fee, but the company controls how it apportions the money between various areas.

Under a plan called "municipalization," the utility would hire workers and buy property and computer systems from National Grid to provide service itself.

LIPA will also hold two events today. At 2 p.m., LIPA trustees will have the opportunity to ask questions at a public meeting at the LIPA Assembly Center, 2nd Floor, 333 Earle Ovington Blvd. in Uniondale. At 7 p.m., LIPA will take public comments at the same location.