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## Watchdogs call for an elected LIPA board

By Arlene Gross

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Long Island Power Authority watchdogs want to have a say in what happens next with the energy provider once its agreement with National Grid expires at the end of 2013.

Perennial tax advocate Fred Gorman, president of nonprofit LIPA LIES (Long Island Energy Surveillance), held a forum Aug. 16 at the Melville Marriott to discuss the power authority's reorganization, expected this fall.

Within months, according to a LIPA LIES statement, LIPA will choose whether to go private, stay with National Grid or become a fully operational energy municipality.

LIPA spokeswoman Vanessa Baird-Streeter confirmed the statement, adding that LIPA's Board of Trustees needs to make its decision fairly soon because the power authority needs a year for transition.

Among the 60 or so people at the forum were Suffolk County Executive Steve Levy, who declined to comment this week; Irving Like, a lawyer who has litigated against the power authority; Pete Schlusser, a member of the Suffolk County LIPA Oversight Committee; and Steve Flanagan, founder and executive director of the Conservative Society for Action.

A report by consulting firm The Brattle Group states that in June, LIPA's board announced that Con Edison, National Grid and Public Service Electric & Gas are the three finalists to be the power authority's service manager when the National Grid contract expires in December 2013. The board will award the contract to one of the three at its Sept. 22 meeting.

Gorman described the Brattle report, which LIPA released Aug. 10, as a \$1.5 million smokescreen and cover designed purely to make Con Ed the next provider of power without any serious consideration of other options. "They have 18 board members, which are completely screened and protected from the public [and] who are completely subservient to Albany politicians," Gorman said.

LIPA's Baird-Streeter countered that there's no bias in Brattle's report. "We asked them to analyze because you want to do what's in the best interest of the ratepayer. That's what Brattle did for us," she said.

LIPA LIES addresses the high cost of energy on the Island and looks for viable ways to reduce the rates, Gorman of Nesconset said: "We've now created an awareness that we're hoping is going to expand and grow. We need to have people that are responsible to us — not responsible to government, not responsible to special interest."

One of Gorman's grievances with LIPA is that it took on debt rather than raising rates last year. "That equates to now my children are paying their share of our utility bills," he said. "I think it's disgusting that somebody could make our children pay for energy we're using today without even telling us."

He also takes issue with the millions in tax payments the power authority makes to Brookhaven and Huntington towns in exchange for operating the Port Jefferson and Northport power plants, which are owned by National Grid.

Without the payments to both townships, LIPA could realize an estimated 20 percent savings, Gorman said.

LIPA is suing both Huntington and Brookhaven townships for a 90 percent tax assessment reduction; both Huntington town and Northport-East Northport school district have filed countersuits.

Northport-East Northport school board President Stephen Waldenburg said LIPA tax payments accounted for about \$37 million in revenue for the school district in 2010-11. "How do you say that they're just not necessary, just cross them off with a pen?" Waldenburg said. "And suddenly entities like school districts or villages or towns or counties that had been counting on those legitimate real estate taxes, suddenly they disappear?"

Port Jefferson Mayor Margot Garant could not be reached for comment.

Gorman said, "The ratepayers of Port Jefferson or Northport aren't getting any deals, just swollen government. You tell the governments of Northport and Port Jefferson that you have to rein yourself in. That is not the ratepayers' responsibility."

Like of Babylon wants to see LIPA's board reinstated as an elected body, as it was originally mandated under then Gov. Mario Cuomo in 1986.

"My view is that the appointed board is not truly representative of the ratepayer and has really failed in the things it should have done," said Like.

In the view of Suffolk County LIPA Oversight Committee member Schlusser, the Sept. 22 deadline to make a decision on LIPA is too aggressive. "We need something that is directly accountable to the ratepayer, either through a municipal model or something along those lines," Schlusser of Mount Sinai said. Calling the Brattle report "a PowerPoint presentation," Schlusser added, "There are no details, there are no metrics."

He would like to see LIPA extend its agreement with National Grid for another year.

"We all more or less agree that the municipalization route is the only way to go. We need to understand that this is a 10-year deal that we've committed ourselves to — the ratepayers of Long Island."

But Baird-Streeter added that even with a 10-year contract, there is an opportunity to move to the full municipalization model. "It's not precluding us from being able to enter into that type of arrangement."