

Prepared Testimony of William F. Glacken, Mayor, Freeport, New York before the House of Representatives Committee on Education and Labor Subcommittee on Healthy Families and Communities, May 8, 2008.

Madame Chair, Ranking Minority Member and Members of the Subcommittee:

I thank you for the opportunity to address the House of Representatives' Committee on Education and Labor Subcommittee on Healthy Families and Communities Hearing on the National Endowment for the Arts and the National Endowment for the Humanities, scheduled for this morning, May 8<sup>th</sup>. I have been the Mayor of the Incorporated Village of Freeport, New York, a highly culturally diverse community of 44,000 situated on the south shore of Long Island, approximately twenty-nine (29) miles east of Manhattan, since 1997. In December 2006, I had the privilege of attending the Northeast Mayors' Institute for City Design, held at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology, in Cambridge, Massachusetts. The Institute is a program of the United States Conference of Mayors and the National Endowment for the Arts with collaborating universities (in this case MIT), and each organization provided personnel who actively participated in the conference. The NEA's Design Director at that time, Jeff Speck, was one of the most active and valuable members of the resource team.

The Mayors' Institute program provides a very unusual opportunity for a small number of elected officials, academic experts, and design professionals to spend time together focusing on, and applying their expertise to, real world problems that affect the future of the communities that each Mayor represents. At MIT, I was one of eight Mayors participating. One of the unique elements of the program is that Mayors are asked to

attend without their planning or other supporting staff, and to present in their own words the specific design or planning problem facing their communities. Then the problem is opened up to analysis and feedback, not only from the resource team professionals, but especially from the other Mayors, who speak the same language and understand the challenges and opportunities of real world governance as no one else can. The case history sessions are alternated with presentations by the resource team on general aspects of urban design. These presentations were a valuable part of the whole experience, and reinforced the message that community design is a critically important process, and that Mayors need to be directly involved.

When my turn came, I presented the problem of revitalizing Freeport's North Main Street Corridor, a one-mile corridor running north from the Long Island Rail Road station in downtown Freeport, which has resisted positive change for decades, and which remains the worst looking, most run-down portion of what is otherwise an attractive, stable, middle class residential community. In the course of the three-day conference, an intense examination of the problem by all of the participants pointed the way to some very positive solutions, which I found highly encouraging. In fact, at one point during the conference, one of the participants remarked, in referring to the North Main Street Corridor, "What you have here, Mayor Glacken, is a goldmine!"

I left the conference feeling both enthusiastic and greatly encouraged, and with a focus on implementing the recommendation that we pursue a full comprehensive plan for the corridor and develop the zoning changes that would be needed to make real change.

The process of assembling the necessary funding took over a year, but with our own resources from the CDBG program, assistance from Nassau County and a special appropriation obtained through the efforts of Congresswoman McCarthy and Senators Schumer and Clinton, we are now in a position to hire a smart-growth planning firm with a regional or national reputation to complete the North Main Street Corridor plan, including a form-based zoning code, which the Village of Freeport will adopt some time next year.

I am sure that every Mayor in this country could tell you about the increasing limitations we have on the resources available to apply to the challenges we face. There is never enough time or money to do all that needs to be addressed. At the Mayors' Institute, there was time to learn from outstanding professionals, and to discuss common problems with fellow Mayors. What a luxury that seemed during the weekend, and what a positive outcome it is now producing for Freeport.

Planning is the key to the successful revitalization of aging downtowns across this Country, because great places don't happen by accident. The active participation and funding of agencies such as the National Endowment for the Arts, ensure that the Mayors' Institute program remains a rich, multi-faceted experience, one that includes the elements of beauty and delight along with utility and functionality. I urge you to support NEA's continued involvement in this and other programs that have real impact on communities like mine across the country. Thank you.