



IB/Finnegan

Protest at town hall

Story By: **LIZ FINNEGAN**

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ISLIP TOWN—Around 50 or so residents—primarily from the Brentwood and Central Islip areas—gathered outside Islip Town Hall on Tuesday afternoon before the scheduled town board meeting to announce that a federal lawsuit had been filed the night before to create council districts. They say the current system of at-large candidates to run for town council has been unfair and needs to change.

A council district system divides the town into separate districts with one council member from that district taking a town council seat. This system is already in place in a number of towns across Long Island, including the Town of Brookhaven. The protestors noted that the current at-large system of choosing candidates has left them poorly represented. Having council districts, however, would insure that they would get a voice that they had been lacking.

Organizations such as Make the Road New York and New York Communities for Change, as well as attorneys for a number of plaintiffs from several law firms including Frederick K. Brewington, who attended the rally, filed the lawsuit. Brewington noted loudly, "We want the people in town hall to hear our voices loud and clear...this is the grassroots speaking out." The crowd responded with shouts of "Enough is enough—we want change now."

"We want justice and we want it now," added Brewington.

Several speakers took to the podium, speaking in both English and mostly Spanish, citing all of the issues the predominantly Latino and African-American communities have endured without having representation. Among the issues noted were the 2014 toxic waste dumping at Roberto Clemente Park, in which town officials and a town contractor were criminally charged and pled guilty; the town's failure to provide proper public services such as street cleaning, snow plowing and garbage pickup; as well as the town's failure to provide translation and interpretation services to Spanish-speaking residents.

One of the plaintiffs in the lawsuit, Magali Roman, said in a press release, "The town handles complaints from our neighborhoods differently than it handles complaints from other parts of Islip. When people in the Latino community call to report streets that need to be repaired, the town does not respond to us."

They claim that the town has discriminatory zoning and land-use practices that permitted the industrialization of properties near residential areas in these communities, thus posing a health risk to the residents' health.

Another plaintiff in the case, Maria Magdalena Hernandez, noted, "Until our community can elect a representative of our own, the town will never listen to us."

Islip Town did not respond to a request for comment by press time.

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