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By [Michael Dobie](#)[@mwdobie](#)

Deciding what to do with Long Island's garbage



Recycled glass is a product that has a lot of potential for use in construction on Long Island. Credit: Getty Images/Photography by Mangiwau

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As the scheduled closing of the Brookhaven landfill in 2024 creeps closer, the mounting concerns about what to do with Long Island's municipal solid waste and construction debris pile higher. On Tuesday, the Long Island Association hosted a webinar prosaically called "The Future of Waste Disposal on Long Island."

While much of the discussion focused on using rail to take garbage off the Island, Stony Brook University professor Lawrence Swanson injected some imagination into the conversation with a pitch for "new opportunities for recyclable materials."

Swanson noted Long Island's pioneering role in developing recycled plastic lumber, spearheaded by former Babylon Town Supervisor Anthony Noto, and argued that creating such products from plastics that currently have no market would be a boon for jobs and the environment while reducing garbage.

Glass, Swanson said, is another waste product with potential.

"You can make a nice engineered sand out of glass ...You can use powdered glass as a substitute for Portland cement," Swanson said.

The process also helps deal with climate change, he added:

"Every six tons of powdered glass substituted for Portland cement results in a reduction of CO2 emissions of one ton."

Swanson also advocated for state legislation to require the reuse of some materials, citing laws in California that mandate 35% recycled glass in glass bottles sold in the state and that 50% of newsprint be made from recycled newsprint. A new California law gradually increases the percentage of recycled plastic that must be in plastic beverage containers from 15% by 2022 to 50% by 2030.

"We have concentrated on collection," Swanson said. "I think we should concentrate a little more on reuse."

All the panelists agreed that there is no one solution to Long Island's looming waste crisis. As Will Flower, vice president of Winters Bros., one of the region's major solid waste management companies, said, "There is no magic bullet."

Just a lot of garbage, that will soon be looking for a home.



By [Michael Dobie](#)

[@mwdobie](#)

Michael Dobie is a member of the Newsday editorial board.