

2. LOCAL GOVERNMENT

For most residents of Suffolk County, the branch of government that best addresses their problems is the town. Suffolk County is divided into ten towns (see Table 2.1). They vary greatly in size, from Brookhaven, whose 326 square miles exceed all of adjacent Nassau County, to Shelter Island with an area of 11 square miles. Population and development patterns are equally diverse. Brookhaven is home to over 400,000 residents while less than 2,300 live on Shelter Island. The five eastern towns, Riverhead, Southampton, Shelter Island, East Hampton and Southold, are sparsely developed and depend heavily on tourism and agriculture to sustain their rural way of life. The western towns, Babylon, Huntington, Islip, Smithtown and Brookhaven, are far more developed and include a mixture of housing, light industry and services. The commuter belt has extended to the point that an increasing number of commuters travel over 100 miles a day to jobs in New York City, Nassau County and western Suffolk County.

TOWNS

Towns were the original governmental units on eastern Long Island and preceded the establishment of Suffolk County. They were largely colonized by New Englanders who purchased land from the local Indians or patents from the British Crown. Today, the towns are governed by supervisors and town boards. Each town elects a Supervisor as its chief executive, who presides over meetings and is a voting member of the Town Board. Towns also elect town board members, clerks, superintendents of highways and receivers of taxes. Before 1970, the county was governed by the Board of Supervisors, one supervisor from each town. Thus, each town had an equal vote, regardless of its population. In 1970, the Suffolk County Charter established an 18-member Legislature, consisting of representatives from legislative districts approximately equal in population size, thereby complying with the one-man, one-vote ruling of the U.S. Supreme Court.

Each Town Board is responsible for preparing a budget for the town and for administering town finances. It enacts local laws and ordinances, appoints town officials and citizen boards, levies taxes for town services and administers all services to unincorporated areas. It also collects taxes for the county, school districts and other special districts within its boundaries. In addition, the five eastern towns elect town justices and assessors. East Hampton, Southampton and Southold elect trustees, as well.

**TABLE 2.1
TOWNS OF SUFFOLK COUNTY**

Name	Area (sq mi)	Year Founded	Population (U.S. Census)	
			1900	2000
Babylon	53	1872	7,112	211,792
Brookhaven	326	1655	14,592	448,531
East Hampton	64	1648	3,746	19,719
Huntington	94	1653	9,483	195,289
Islip	110	1710	12,545	322,612
Riverhead	78	1792	4,503	27,680
Shelter Island	11	1652	1,066	2,228
Smithtown	65	1668	5,863	115,715
Southampton	145	1640	10,371	54,712
Southold	69	1640	8,301	20,599
Totals:	1,015		77,582	1,418,877

VILLAGES

The incorporated village is unique in that it is created at the request and with the approval of its own residents. Residents of an area as small as three square miles may initiate procedures for incorporation by procuring signatures on the proposition of at least one-third of the real property owners in the area. If the area has a population of more than 2,000, the signatures of at least one-half of the property owners are required. While incorporation may be initiated to give services not provided by the town or county, the usual impetus is to ensure stricter zoning controls and achieve more local autonomy. After incorporation, contiguous areas may be added to the village.

The Village Law, enacted by the State Legislature, defines the structure and scope of village powers. Within this framework, villages remain self-contained units. A village may adopt and amend local laws relating to its legislative body and the transaction of its business.

There are 32 incorporated villages in Suffolk County (see Table 2.2) with populations as small as 11 in Westhampton Dunes, and as large as 27,819, in Lindenhurst. All villages have an elected mayor, four to six elected trustees, a clerk and a treasurer. They may also have a village engineer, superintendent of public works, one or more justices, an attorney, and citizen review boards.

The mayor prepares a budget submitted for approval by the trustees. The trustees set a tax rate which pays for village services, such as roadway maintenance, fire protection, garbage collection and recreation. The trustees are also empowered to collect such taxes separately from the town, and the village residents do not pay the town taxes for those services provided by the village. The trustees may borrow to provide village improvements and contract for services from other governmental units or from private sources.

For current information on local government, refer to the listings in the blue pages of the telephone directory.

**TABLE 2.2
INCORPORATED VILLAGES OF SUFFOLK COUNTY**

Name	Year Founded	Town	Population	
			1975*	2000**
Amityville	1894	Babylon	10,722	9,441
Asharoken	1926	Huntington	613	625
Babylon	1893	Babylon	13,563	12,615
Belle Terre	1931	Brookhaven	852	832
Bellport	1908	Brookhaven	3,227	2,363
Brightwaters	1916	Islip	3,881	3,248
Dering Harbor	1916	Shelter Island	22	13
East Hampton	1920	East Hampton	1,955	1,334
Greenport	1838	Southold	2,518	2,048
Head of the Harbor	1928	Smithtown	1,046	1,447
Huntington Bay	1924	Huntington	1,866	1,496
Islandia	1985	Islip	---	3,057
Lake Grove	1968	Brookhaven	10,547	10,250
Lindenhurst	1923	Babylon	20,082	27,819
Lloyd Harbor	1926	Huntington	3,605	3,675
Nissequogue	1926	Smithtown	1,412	1,543
North Haven	1931	Southampton	798	743
Northport	1896	Huntington	8,031	7,606
Ocean Beach	1921	Islip	93	138
Old Field	1927	Brookhaven	921	947
Patchogue	1893	Brookhaven	12,948	11,919
Poquott	1931	Brookhaven	468	975
Port Jefferson	1963	Brookhaven	5,925	7,837
Quogue	1929	Southampton	939	1,018
Sagaponack	2005	Southampton	---	582
Sag Harbor	1846	Southampton	1,758	2,313
Saltaire	1917	Islip	35	43
Shoreham	1913	Brookhaven	164	417
Southampton	1894	Southampton	5,101	3,965
The Branch	1929	Smithtown	1,679	1,895
Westhampton Beach	1928	Southampton	2,142	1,902
Westhampton Dunes	1994	Southampton	---	11

* From *This Is Suffolk County*, League of Women Voters of Suffolk County, New York, 1977

** From U.S. Census 2000