If I were mayor, I would use natural solutions to fix and prevent the problem of chemical runoff and algae blooms in Lake Agawam in Southampton, NY. The state of Lake Agawam is truly horrendous. It is full of green murky waters and void of beauty when seen up close. Its current state is unsafe for anyone, including local wildlife who suffer the most because of their now sullied home. Algae blooms are a big problem caused by fertilizer and pesticide runoff from homes surrounding the pond. Though algae is not entirely bad, it still ruins the beauty of the pond. It also blocks desperately needed sunlight for other plants underwater that need it. However, the real problem is the chemicals from the multiple houses surrounding Lake Agawam which flow into the waters during rainstorms. I believe there could be potential solutions to these problems that can keep landowners happy as well as keep our village lake clean.

An environmentally friendly solution would be to use native plants of Long Island to prevent further algae blooms. We could try increasing populations of oxygenating plants in the lake. Plants such as white water lilies or lotus have circular leaves that cover the water and keep algae from receiving the sunlight it needs to survive. We also could add more beneficial native plants like Coontail, which is a plant that can survive low light conditions and is a food source for native Long Island birds including Mallards, Gadwall, and Black Duck. We could also use another beneficial plant called Slender/Bushy Naiad. This plant lives under the water, providing shelter for small fish and is also an important food source for many duck species.

Chemical runoff is another problem we need to address. There are ways to prevent this (and the residents of homes that use pesticides and fertilizers should be obligated for these things to take place). One way is the utilization of straw wattles. Straw wattles are man-made logs filled with wheat or rice and encased in biodegradable material. They are buried on the bank of the pond and used to slow down and disperse sediment and water. Straw wattles are also used to prevent runoff from entering ponds around homes. Another solution is the usage of a vegetative buffer, which are strips of land covered with selected vegetation that reduce and prevent contamination of surface water.

A final recommendation to improve the local environment would be to put in place regulations on the number and frequency of pesticides and fertilizers that homes can use. By having such laws in place, the amount of nitrogen and phosphorus entering the water would be decreased.

Different ways were mentioned above to fix the chemical runoff and future algae blooms in Lake Agawam. Natural and environmentally friendly solutions were incorporated. Though committing to these solutions and applying them to real life would take time and money, in the end, Lake Agawam will be free of all the problems that have afflicted it all these years.

“Now that I wrote this, I realize that I should really respect the mayor more. His job is hard.” - New Paltz

“...I have never seen this much heart in a little village.” - Livonia
Youth in our communities are looking for ways to be heard, get involved, and affect change. This essay contest challenged mayors to engage future leaders across New York State to provide insight and solutions to improving our cities and villages.

Nearly 1,000 essays were submitted on assorted issues such as providing unique green solutions to combat pollution and provide clean water, building and improving recreation and community centers, constructing parks and playgrounds, advocating for public health, repairing street and sidewalks, providing downtown revitalization strategies, building affordable housing, creating crosswalks and bike lanes, improving education and looking for ways to help the less fortunate. These well-informed and inspiring essays show the future promise of these bright eighth graders.

If I were a mayor, I would make our crosswalks safer. In our Village of New Paltz, when pedestrians are using the crosswalks they are still in danger. Last year, New Paltz received $2.2 million in state funding to construct new buffered bicycle lanes and pedestrian accessibility enhancements but did not address current crosswalk safety concerns. Our village may be small, but it is busy with the SUNY campus, Mohonk and Minniwaska resorts. All three draw large out of town crowds. According to the New York State Department of Transportation, the average daily traffic on Main Street ranges in between 10,000-25,000 vehicles. With the high amount of tourists passing through our village that are not familiar with the locations of our crosswalks and the rise of distracted driving, we need to make our crosswalks more visible.

This past Thursday morning while driving in the village, my family passed an incident where there was a vehicle-pedestrian accident that occurred in a crosswalk. In my opinion, these are becoming more and more common. Recently, there was an elderly man that was killed while crossing Main Street. According to New Paltz Police Department, they have responded to 21 car vs pedestrian accidents in the last two years in both the village and the town. Typically they average 10 per year, but these are only the incidents that are just handled by New Paltz Police Department. This average does not include any that were possibly handled by SUNY New Paltz Police Department, Ulster County Sheriff's Office or NYS Police. So why wouldn’t we want our village to take measures that would help save a life? How can we make our crosswalks safer? I propose two different solutions that would bring awareness and attention to our crosswalks.

First, install high intensity LED lighting above the crosswalk to help alert motorists to the presence of pedestrians. Studies have shown that the high intensity lighting alerts motorists more effectively than just lighting the area with continuous light.

The high intensity lighting is only on while pedestrians are in the crosswalk. These lighting systems operate on solar power stored in batteries for nighttime operation. Another possible solution that would help our village is to implement in-road warning lights or IRWL's. This type of illumination is actually installed on the crosswalk in the payment. This type of system lights up the crosswalk similar to the overhead LED’s and are also solar powered. The IRWL’s however, require less electrical power to operate.

In order to fund these improvements, I would use Governor Andrew Cuomo’s Pedestrian Safety Action Plan. This is part of a five-year initiative that runs through 2021. It provides $110 million in funding to improve safety for pedestrians through infrastructure improvements, public education efforts and enforcement across Upstate and Long Island.

If I were mayor, I would want to make a difference by making a realistic change that would help save lives.

SECOND PLACE WINNER
BELLA GAMINO
New Paltz Middle School
Teacher: Mrs. Sullivan
Village of New Paltz

Bella spends most of her free time playing modified and town/village sports which include softball, volleyball, and basketball. Bella also has a love for giving back to her community and does this through community service with her Girl Scout Troop. She also loves to draw, paint and read.

Participating Schools
- Anna Murray Douglas Academy # 2
- Baccalaureate School for Global Education
- Barker Central School
- Blue Mountain Middle School
- Bulkeley Middle School, Rhinebeck
- Clary Middle School
- Chateaugay Central School
- Dake Junior High School
- East Rockaway Junior High School
- Edmonds Central School
- Edmond W. Miles Middle School
- Ellicottville Central School
- Golding Middle School
- Grand Avenue Middle School
- Harrisville Central School
- Herkimer Central School
- Irvington Middle School
- Johnson City Central School District
- Knox Junior High School
- Livonia Central School
- Lynbrook South Middle School
- Mack Middle School
- Malone Middle School
- Marguerite A. Flood Middle School
- Nathaniel Rochester Community School # 3
- New Paltz Middle School
- Olean High School
- Oneonta Middle School
- Our Lady of the Hamptons
- Owego Appalachian Middle School
- Pelham Middle School
- Plainview-Old Bethpage MS
- Port Jefferson Middle School
- Robert C. Dodson School
- S. S. Seward Institute
- SEEALL Academy
- Seven Bridges Middle School
- Southampton Intermediate School
- Syracuse STEM at Blodgett
- Walton Central School District
- Wellsville Middle School
- West Middle School
Article 3 of the New York State Public Health Law requires that every village and city have a local board of health and a local health officer. In villages, the board of health consists of the board of trustees. In cities with fewer than 50,000 residents, the board of health consists of the mayor and six other individuals who are nominated by the mayor and appointed by the common council. Local boards of health have a variety of powers, including (1) issuing orders and regulations to suppress nuisances, and (2) maintaining actions in a court of competent jurisdiction to enjoin violations and enforce its orders and regulations. In addition, every local board of health must appoint a health officer. Local health officers are empowered to enforce within their jurisdiction the provisions of the NYS Public Health Law. Local health boards and officers should be coordinating their community’s COVID response with their County and State Departments of Health.

If I were a mayor, I would implement an Environmental Defense Program (EDP). My village, Port Jefferson, is a Long Island harbor, famous for its shops and beaches. Given the worsening environmental crisis, all is at risk from storms, hurricanes and flooding. My program would improve resident safety and health, and make us a model of long-term and immediate green solutions at the local level.

The EDP will first enhance our parks. This will encourage outdoor activity, curb pollution, and provide important wildlife habitat. I shall commission studies on beach erosion and the effects of severe storms, to guide long-term projects like a seawall at East Beach. Immediate actions will include banning single-use plastics at our beaches, and a 5 cent docking surcharge to fund the EDP and offset the carbon footprint of boats docking in our marina. My tree-planting initiative and wildlife-habitat gardens will support the rapidly diminishing insect and bird population.

One place where new parks and wooded areas could be established is in the “Upper Port” by the LIRR station. This area has long been struggling, with dangerous streets and shuttered stores. I would scrap the current plan to make the area a commercial hub competing with the “Lower Port,” and instead rezone it as a green residential area, a pilot program for the EDP. Affordable high-density apartment complexes will be convenient for commuters and employees of two nearby major hospitals. These developments will have strict codes on emissions, energy consumption, waste reduction, pesticide-use and green materials.

Climate change will bring more storms that, like Sandy, devastated Port Jefferson. Therefore, new drainage systems, funded by the EPF LWRP grant, will eliminate the floods that plague our downtown businesses after every downpour. Further, I will press for a comprehensive storm plan, and a school-program on emergency procedures. These measures will counter the immediate threats of climate change.

To mitigate air pollution and greenhouse-gas emissions, Port Jefferson will work with PSEG to refurbish our power-plant for renewable energy. Although our position on the shore makes us vulnerable to storms, it is advantageous for wind and solar energy production. This will power a clean transit system, allowing easy movement around the village with a smaller carbon footprint. Electric buses or streetcars will efficiently connect “Upper Port” with the business district and harbor. I will reform school-busing with efficient routes, and not waste fuel by seating three students on a bus meant for seventy-two. Collaborating with Suffolk County, Port Jefferson’s new electric-vehicle charging stations will promote clean fuels and attract visitors.

In conclusion, the Environmental Defense Program that I will introduce as mayor will make Port Jefferson a leader in local sustainability, health, and safety (my main responsibilities), while preserving its beauty for future generations. I will unify my community and its businesses in a project for the common good. Port Jefferson will be the best place to live.