

# JAY

## ★ FOR SOUTHAMPTON TOWN SUPERVISOR

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## 12,000 Telephone Poles Are Useless Duplicates <sup>[1]</sup>

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Suffolk County Legislator Jay Schneiderman recently succeeded in passing a bill, on September 13, to rid county roads of some 12,000 double utility poles marring the landscape along the highways and byways on this side of the Island. Despite the absurd number of these unsightly and redundant poles, it seems some local residents never noticed the poles or even knew they aren't supposed to be this way.

"It's basically like littering," Schneiderman said of the offending poles, which suspend wires around the county for LIPA, Verizon and Cablevision. "It's serving no purpose." The legislator explained that all three companies are supposed to move their wires to the new poles, but that directive has often been ignored by one, two or all three of them.

Wires from the three companies are suspended at different heights, usually with LIPA on top. As each company moves its wires, it chops the pole down to the height of the next set of wires. The next company in line is expected to follow suit until all the wires are moved and the old pole is eliminated. For years, the utilities have had little incentive to take care of this in a timely manner. Until now.

"Utilities have abandoned these poles because there has been no financial consequence for leaving them in place," Schneiderman said, pointing out that new poles are added because their older counterparts are becoming weak and damaged. "Now it will be in their business interests to quickly remove these poles and relieve our communities of this visual blight."

Under the bill, Suffolk County will assess a penalty of \$1,000 per pole per month upon the uppermost utility on the double pole following a 60-day notice period. After all the utilities have been removed, the pole will be subject to a similar penalty. Schneiderman said the County could contract a private vendor to handle the notice and revenue collection for 10% of the fines, which could be as much as \$12 million per month.

"I'm not getting used to ugly," Schneiderman said. The Legislator noted that two double poles outside his office in Sag Harbor and next door to his cottage colony in Montauk had irritated him for far too long, not to mention an additional 30 along Old Montauk Highway in Montauk. "It's marked 'scenic highway,'" he said of the particularly annoying and ironic, poles in Montauk. "It's been bothering me for years."

Schneiderman said there were 11,000 double poles when he tried to tackle the issue years ago, but none of the companies did the right thing, and the number has grown by 1,000. "It's not going in the right direction," he said.

But not everyone has noticed the poles, and one local painter says they should stay put. For the past decade, North Haven artist Grant Haffner has painted local roadways featuring prominently the utility poles and wires that line them, yet he never thought much about the extra poles. "I haven't really noticed that—the bigger poles out here," Haffner said. "It hasn't affected me." Upon some reflection however, the artist explained that, for him, more poles means more lines, which make for better paintings. "I kind of like the look of it when I paint it," he said, unable to see the problem. "The lines for me, it's just a whole new aesthetic that doesn't really bother me," Haffner added, noting that he'd actually like to see wind farms in people's yards. "I think they're beautiful."

According to Schneiderman, Haffner's beloved poles may cease to exist one day. Though it's not likely to happen for many years, the legislator said the utilities should really bury their wires in the future. Until then, Schneiderman said people will become much more aware of the messy poles and wires. "Once I start pointing them out, you'll start to see them everywhere," he explained, noting that the issue hasn't received much publicity. "I think when the poles come down people will notice the difference."

The Legislature could begin giving notice for poles immediately, but Schneiderman said the current bill only covers county roadways, and he's hoping the local towns and villages will

follow this model and adopt similar legislation to clean up their roads as well. He said a more coordinated effort could be mounted at that point for a truly countywide solution.

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