

## Lesko leaving Brookhaven for Accelerate Long Island

by John Callegari

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After months of looking in all corners of the country, the [Accelerate Long Island](#) executive search committee has settled on a local guy to lead the fledgling initiative.

[Brookhaven Supervisor Mark Lesko](#), who himself conceived of the Accelerate Long Island concept, will lead the upstart organization beginning mid-September.

Lesko will remain at Brookhaven until then, negating the need for a special election. A new Brookhaven supervisor will be elected on Election Day in November.

Lesko had begun meeting with several large companies and business groups beyond the borders of Brookhaven in recent weeks, leading many to speculate that he had already received the nod for the executive director position.

[Long Island Association](#) President Kevin Law, who has been leading the search, said the group unanimously settled on Lesko today after screening about 10 other potential candidates, although as of three weeks ago, Lesko hadn't even applied for the position. The Accelerate board first began its search in February.

"We recruited him," Law said. "In terms of all of the resumes I saw, I thought all along Mark was going to be one of the strongest candidates. To me it was a no-brainer."

But if the board recruited him, then was the entire search just a formality? Not according to Law.

"He's had a lot of opportunities," Law said. "We weren't sure if he was going to be interested or not, and all of the institutions that are contributing funds wanted to see what other talent was out there."

Accelerate Long Island is made up of [Brookhaven National Laboratory](#), [Cold Spring Harbor Laboratory](#), Hofstra University, Stony Brook University, the North Shore-Long Island Jewish Health System, CA Technologies and Canrock Ventures.

Lesko has been at the helm of Brookhaven since winning a special election in March 2009 when then-Supervisor Brian X. Foley left to take a position as a one-term state senator. The deputy supervisor, Councilwoman Kathleen Walsh, will act as town supervisor after Lesko leaves until a new one is elected in November.

There has been no word yet as to who will run for supervisor in November, but several political insiders have thrown out names as possible candidates. Suffolk Democratic Chairman Rich Schaffer said Brookhaven currently has a number of highly qualified elected or appointed officials including Lesko's chief of staff Brian Beedenbender, Patchogue Mayor Paul Pontieri, former Assemblyman and Brookhaven Democratic Committee Chairman Marc Alessi, town Councilwoman Connie Kepert, town Councilman Steve Fiore-Rosenfeld and Brookhaven Clerk Pat Eddington.

Suffolk Republican Committee Chairman John Jay LaValle's name has been thrown in the ring as a possible candidate for supervisor, although he declined to comment on that. LaValle served as town supervisor before Foley.

LaValle didn't shy away from lambasting Lesko's decision to leave, saying the town was currently in the middle of the budget process and facing a \$10 million shortfall.

"I think Lesko's leaving the town in a very bad situation," he said.



Other possible Republican candidates, according to LaValle, include town Councilman Dan Panico, Suffolk Legis. Ed Romaine and state Assemblyman Dan Losquadro.

Candidates for the November election must be selected within 14 days of Lesko's resignation date, currently slated for Sept. 14.

Law said Lesko's first duties at Accelerate Long Island will include developing a business plan for the organization.

Beyond that, Lesko will be responsible for overseeing the operations of Accelerate Long Island, directing all programs and initiatives, building strong relationships with the group's founding partners, identifying funding for startup companies, representing the organization on a regional, state and national level, and collaborating with various private, government and nonprofit stakeholders on Long Island.

Lesko did not immediately respond to requests for comment.

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