Long Island's long-term viability depends on a renewed effort to consolidate government services, Nassau and Suffolk's county executives told a group of about 400 local businesspeople yesterday morning.

Addressing the Long Island Association's annual "County Executives Report" breakfast, Nassau Executive Thomas Suozzi said, "We cannot survive the next 50 years without consolidation." Nassau will "spend the time and the money to do an in-depth analysis as to how much money could be saved and how services will be affected if we were to consolidate individual governments" such as park and sewer districts, he said.

Suffolk Executive Steve Levy opened the session by telling the audience that Long Island has entered an era of "regionalization, consolidation and coordination." He said Suffolk has already started applying for the state consolidation grants Suozzi plans to seek, and he announced that he would be asking the Long Island Regional Planning Board to study inefficiencies in overlapping jurisdictions for municipal services.

Government consolidation has long been a point of contention on Long Island because the region's strong culture of local control took root before open space preservation, traffic and housing affordability became major concerns, according to LIA economist Pearl Kamer. The LIA is the Island's largest business group.

By threatening to combine school districts, for example, "You're erasing what [residents] brackets worked so hard to gain, which was a competitive edge in educating their children," Kamer said.

She said the proposed studies "would be helpful," but that research findings aren't enough to persuade a population which is programmed not to want to hear those results.

Regional Planning Board acting executive director Seth Forman said his agency has researched the issue since 1989. "These issues are coming up repeatedly, in a circular fashion, whenever the property tax issue becomes acute in people's minds," he said.