

NISSEQUOGUE RIVER STATE PARK DRAFT MASTER PLAN

Summary of Public Comments:
Focus Group Meetings on March 24 and April 7, 2021

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**Parks, Recreation
and Historic Preservation**

Introduction

New York State Office of Parks, Recreation and Historic Preservation (OPRHP) is preparing a master plan for Nissequogue River State Park (NRSP). As part of the public outreach while developing this master plan, community outreach meetings on specialized topics were held to gather further input on issues unique to the park. OPRHP conducted four such focus group meetings to share early findings, including results from the recreational needs assessment, and collect comments on the following topics:

- Ecology
- Sports and Active Recreation
- Architecture and Historic Preservation
- Programming and Concessions

This document is a summary of comments received at the focus group meetings, as well as comments received over email or post during the open comment period following each meeting.

The comments were classified according to the subject area they spoke or wrote about. Similar comments were consolidated, and all comments were edited to include the substantive portions. The subject areas are presented in alphabetical order with no indication of any prioritization.

Acquisitions

- Acquire undeveloped/forested land parcel across Old Dock Road through a land swap in order to connect to Sunken Meadow State Park.
- Perform a jurisdictional transfer from the OMH of the southern parcel.

ADA Access

- Expand inclusivity; include braille on signs.
- Add an ADA parking area in the northern section of the park.
- Provide ADA access to the river/waterfront/forested areas. Co-locate inclusive facilities, such as parking, play for all ages, restrooms, and accessible trails/paths.
- Paved trails around the former director's house could serve as ADA paths.
- Add an ADA trail around the reservoir.

Amenities

- **Active recreation**
 - o Include active recreation in the southern portion of the park near the schools.
 - o The west side of the park is better than the east side for active recreation.
 - o Add volleyball courts.
 - o Add a pool.

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- Add a par 3 golf course.
 - Encourage senior-friendly activities such as tai chi and fitness equipment.
 - Add a skating rink in the northern section of the park.
 - The 10-20 acres of land south of the marina might be appropriate for disc golf.
 - Disc golf can be located in peripheral spaces like around park perimeter.
 - Designate an open space for ultimate frisbee.
 - Convert parking areas for court sports like tennis and pickleball.
 - A skate and bike park is needed.
 - Provide space for an equestrian facility/stable in the park.
 - Explore equestrian trail system as well as a link to trail in Sunken Meadow Park
 - Accommodate sledding.
 - Youth population is declining; need for sports fields may be lower than it was 10 years ago.
- **Children's amenities**
- Consider adding a playground in the grassy area southeast of the reservoir along the Boulevard.
 - The site needs special needs playground areas; incorporate with a sensory garden.
 - Consider adding a playground in the open space east of Kings Park Boulevard along the park's southern perimeter.
 - Offer a summer camp on site with historical programming, hiking, biking, and access to the water.
 - Include a multitude of programming for families with kids - dining, programming, and historical engagement.
- **Concessions**
- Focus on family recreational needs like ice cream, a café, and a restaurant.
 - Locate a cafe in the northern section of the park.
 - Add a 16-acre destination water park, including parking.
 - Do not add a water park; the infrastructure of the park could not sustain this use, and it would be detrimental to the atmosphere of the park town.
 - Provide a bike rental concession from the train station and other nearby public transit.
 - Host historical, photography, landscape, and ghost tours.
 - Host a farmers' market with public and private food vendors, both indoors and outdoors.
 - Have concessions for water recreation/activities.
 - Have healthy food options.
 - Keep concessions compatible with those at Sunken Meadow State Park, not competitive with them.
 - Prioritize outdoor recreation over pubs.
 - Provide a small outdoor sit-down café for post hike refreshments.
 - Feature an orchard or winery.
- **Dogs**
- The park needs an off-leash area for dogs.
 - Add dog-friendly trails.
 - Add a dog park near building 93.

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- Provide a fenced in run, shade structure, water fountain (dog and human), turf, seating, terrain and agility obstacles, and runs for different size dogs.
- **Facilities**
 - Locate restrooms throughout the park.
 - Restrooms are needed near the picnic pavilion.
 - Add a comfort station and concessions at Tiffany Field.
 - Add a camping area for scouts.
- **General**
 - Get input from other Native American communities for other ideas on inclusion or additions to the park.
 - Preserve the park's ecology.
 - Strike a balance between preservation and maintaining a park-like atmosphere.
 - The park needs a sense of destination.
 - Create separate areas for distinctive uses.
 - Locate activities in areas that are already open or cleared.
 - Consider park activities that also stimulate economic activity such as water parks.
 - Provide more play areas for children.
 - Program the park with four season activities.
 - Foster a rustic theme in the landscape.
 - Keep the park clean and enjoyable, not overcrowded.
 - Continue to allow permitted model airplane flying.
- **Safety/Maintenance**
 - The park's current state of disrepair makes it feel unpark-like.
 - Graffiti and "exploration" happen in buildings and steam tunnels, causing safety concerns.
 - Increase security presence in the park.
 - Add safety signage.
 - Improve lighting in the park, including along the Boulevard, the marina and at the park entrance off Main Street.
 - Add trash receptacles near the kayak launch.
 - Use a system other than a toll booth to keep better track of visitors.
 - Add pay kiosks/gates at park entrances.
 - Think of innovative ways to keep vandals out of structures that have been stabilized.
 - Consider fencing to deter trespassing into buildings.
 - Do not allow ATVs in the park.

Biking

- Create a bicycle trail network.
- Mountain biking can go up and down hillsides by coal ash landfill.
- Pump tracks are good for beginners and need minimal space.
- Site an obstacle course in flat areas for those learning how to bike.
- Provide bike sharing between areas of the park.
- Bikers need at least 3 miles of bike trails.

Bird Conservation Area (BCA)

- Add signs about bird habitat in the BCA to limit disturbance.
- Focus investment in areas that are already good bird habitat.
- Consider expanding the BCA to include the area around the coal ash heap.
- Encourage education on birds.
- Non-intrusive activities are important in bird habitat areas; drone usage interferes with birds.

Buildings

- **York Hall**
 - o Preserve York Hall.
 - o Program York Hall year-round.
 - o York Hall has assembly space indoors that would fill a void for the community as Kings Park does not have a comparable community space.
 - o Restore to use as a theater.
 - o York Hall historically hosted dances and proms.
- **Building 93**
 - o Building 93 is the last remaining structure of its type in Long Island region and full demolition will be costly.
 - o Stabilize building 93, which is important to the community; possibly use this building for tours.
 - o Building 93 would be a great clinic.
 - o Include a sit-down café in the building.
 - o Make the top floor a sky or science observatory.
- **Building 15**
 - o Reuse this building and have programming for kids.
 - o Use building 15 for event space or programming.
 - o Include a sit-down café.
- **Doctors' Cottages**
 - o Use doctors' cottages for dance, galleries, art, music studios, or rehearsal spaces.
 - o Buildings 95-99 could be reused as cabins if any mold present is remediated.
 - o Use wood framed doctors' houses as vacation homes, hotel, or pub.
- **Fire Station**
 - o Reuse the fire station as concession/field house stand for frisbee or disc golf; include restrooms and a sit-down cafe.
 - o The NRSP Foundation has considered using the firehouse as a museum, with the upper level may be programmatic space. The museum could locate a historic fire truck outside as an attraction and provide Internet and audio tours.
 - o Use this building as a meeting point for tours; there is plenty of parking available.

- **Building 5**
 - o Use the old laundry building for a café or market.
 - o Use building 5 for a museum.

- **General ideas**
 - o Cluster building uses programmatically.
 - o Program buildings as museums with tours, both digital and in person.
 - o Identify key architectural features and typologies that are part of the story.
 - o Save at least one of each type of building.
 - o Reuse buildings for camping and lodging.
 - o Use the visitor center, York Hall, the Macy house, fire station, and the greenhouse to commemorate the site's history, showing how they were used historically.
 - o The director's house would make a good nature center or retreat.
 - o Reuse one of the buildings in the northern section of the park as a comfort station.
 - o Establish a YMCA in one of the buildings to support after school activities with nearby schools.
 - o Include bowling in a building.
 - o Program low buildings with activities for seniors.
 - o Building 126 through 129 should be reused for museums featuring history and art.
 - o Reuse building 90 (Macy Hall).
 - o Reuse buildings 41, 42, and 43 for a museum paying homage to the hospital. Building floors can represent different eras of the hospital.
 - o The northernmost buildings (130, 132) could host cafes, a restaurant, or a bed and breakfast, or glamping with waterfront views.
 - o Include a boat area bed and breakfast with waterfront views, or a golf course bed and breakfast.
 - o Buildings hidden in the woods are great trail and ecological destinations.
 - o Do not include condos in the master plan.
 - o Use of one of the buildings as a center for Native American art, exhibits, cultural events, lectures, conferences, educational programs and demonstrations.
 - o Create a permanent exhibition to include a land acknowledgment of historical native communities from the area and Long Island

Concurrent Plans

- Smithtown is likely to site a leach field at the OMH parcel containing building 1.
- Smithtown is interested in acquiring roughly 50 acres of the park for active recreation at the southern end of the park
- Incorporate DEC's current Marine Resources building footprint and parking area into the park master plan.

Connections and Crossings

- Connect to the train station at the park entrance.

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- The intersection of the Boulevard with St. Johnland Road is dangerous and features a blind curve.
- Graded/protected crossings would benefit people and wildlife crossing St. Johnland Road
- A safe crossing is needed between Shanahan's bar and the park.
- Connect with Sunken Meadow via the waterfront
- Connection to Sunken Meadow Park would benefit wildlife and cyclists/pedestrians.
- Establish a connected biking system with Sunken Meadow.
- Connect walking path in northern section to Greenbelt Trail and Sunken Meadow

Deer

- The deer population must be managed.
- Consider a fence along Main Street to keep deer off the road.

Education

- Explore co-programming with neighborhood schools.
- Create educational landscapes for schools, featuring programs such as ecological tours, history tours, and wetland walks.
- Set aside a portion of the revenue generated at the park for schools.
- Include science education, such as marine studies, bird sanctuary studies, and greenhouses.

Events

- Continue to accommodate recreational events like the Turkey Trot, hosted annually the Nissequogue River State Park Foundation

Gardens and Agriculture

- Grow native plants at the greenhouse and community garden.
- Develop a CSA/community gardening program to commemorate site agricultural history while supporting its ecology.
- Bring local farmers to the park, connecting to the park's history.
- Add some non-native but non-invasive plants for beauty.
- Explore the opportunity for an arboretum on site that involves the community.
- Add a community garden atop the bluffs if soil conditions allow.
- Have "local allotments" - small garden plots given to community members.
- Garden types to add: sensory, native plantings, perennial, hydroponic gardens.
- Add a vineyard that is visible from Main Street/25A.
- Add an orchard.
- Include a botanical garden with sculptures.
- Include four season gardens.
- Include a large compass as a garden centerpiece.

Habitat restoration

- Preserve contiguous habitat areas.
- Connect natural areas to adjacent forests and meadows.
- Add a fish ladder to the reservoir.
- Limit disturbance of bird habitat around the director's house
- Restore grasslands and fields, expanding pollinator habitat
- Reduce "open" areas by 25% and restore to natural state.
- Different habitats are what make this park interesting.

History

- Long Island was central to New York's mental healthcare history.
- The landscape design should reference the history of the site; base the design on the historic hospital grounds.
- Preserve the grounds as a walking museum, using photographs to re-tell the history of the site.
- Bring back the park's old topography.
- Re-plant the shade trees along Kings Park Boulevard, adding interpretive signage.
- Include interpretive signage on the history of site and events throughout the park.
- Connect to the agricultural history of the site.
- Expand the existing museum to feature indigenous history, highlighting and interpreting human and ecological history of the site.
- Establish a permanent committee for consultation on research and recovery of Native American artifacts and human remains.
- Monitor any future construction/demolition for possible locations of or inadvertent discovery of ancient burials.
- Allow people to engage with artifacts from the site.
- Acknowledge the history of farming on the site by serving locally grown, fresh food at cafes located in the park.
- Save items, murals, and artifacts for building memorialization.
- Reintroduce the historic wellness theme into park.
- The potter's field needs to be protected.
- Honor (do not trivialize) the history of the site as an important place for treatment of mental illness.
- Include information about the local/site's military history.

Invasive species

- There are lots of invasive plant clusters along Old Dock Road.
- Invasive Mile-a-Minute grows near the greenhouse.
- Any capital project should involve invasive species mitigation.
- Teach about invasive species so people can remove them from their properties.

Marina

- Improve security around the marina.
- Need better facilities at the marina, including lighting and restrooms.
- Walking down the steep slope to the south of the marina may cause erosion.
- Add fresh running water, via spigots or hoses, to the boat launch area.

Outdoor Performance

- Add an outdoor performance area between York Hall and the DEC complex
- Feature open air concerts in the summer on the lawn west of the Boulevard.
- Consider adding a drive-in theater in the northern portion of the park.
- The area where buildings 21 and 22 are located is suitable for active/loud programming.
- Include a performance area for an outdoor orchestra or theater in the park, which could be used by high schools.

Partnerships

- Community volunteers can help with gardening and maintenance.
- Public-private partnerships can help support leases of historic buildings.
- Partner with ReWild Long Island for educational opportunities
- Partner with art groups for large scale art installations
- Kings Park Heritage Museum has a lot of content; the museum would like to contribute to this park.
- Any organizations (such as a boat club) that use the historic buildings near the waterfront could work with DEC to improve the waterfront and monitor climate change impacts.
- Provide spaces for colleges or nearby schools to rent, possibly partnering with Stonybrook.
- The NRSP Foundation has had a lot of interest in community gardening and use of the greenhouse on site.
- Provide limited access to sensitive areas for traditional ceremonial use by local Native American tribes.

Passive programming

- The east side of the park is better for quiet conversation.
- Add a meditation area in the northern section of the park.
- Add more green space, like a wide field.
- Stargazing would be good at this park.
- The park needs a permanent, well-maintained grassy area with lighting.
- Close off the Boulevard to create more open space areas; or make it for bikes and peds only.

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- Preserve open space and history with minimal activity; make the park a quiet place of respite focusing on the natural setting and tranquility.

Precedents

- The Long Island Expressway rest stop – Precedent for local concessions / NYS businesses (like the Taste of NY program)
- Sailor's Snug Harbor on the North Shore of Staten Island --Precedent for cultural programming and botanical gardens in a historic campus setting
- Smallpox Hospital on Roosevelt Island – Precedent for building stabilization
- Various buildings on Ellis Island – Precedent for building stabilization
- Savannah ghost tours – Tour precedent
- Fort Tilden State Park – Precedent for activating areas with food stalls.
- Bannerman Castle
- Montauk bicycle trail – Precedent for bike trails
- Ganondagan State Historic Site—Precedent for historic interpretation
- Kings Park in Western Australia —Botanic garden precedent

Remediation

- Determine how the ash fill was capped and whether remediation will need to occur in that area.
- There is concern about the need to remediate asbestos in historic buildings.
- Mold on wooden buildings needs to be addressed.

Trails

- Make existing trails ADA accessible for birdwatching and access to nature.
- Make trails wider for social distancing.
- Identify destinations and design trails accordingly to avoid creation of informal trails or desire lines.
- Combine bike and equestrian trails, keeping pedestrian trails separate.
- Make use of existing trails rather than adding new ones.
- Design trails to control erosion.
- Create trails around diverse active uses.
- Add trails in the southern part of the park, connecting to the Hike and Bike trail from the south and east.
- Hike and Bike trail is too narrow to accommodate cyclists and pedestrian traffic.
- Resurface walks by the doctors' houses.

Traffic, roads, and parking

- Preserve Kings Park Boulevard.
- Improve paving conditions along Kings Park Boulevard.
- Remove excessive parking areas.

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- Consider adding parking to the west of the reservoir to keep cars away from the administration building and play structure.
- The intersection of the Boulevard with St. Johnland Road is dangerous and features a blind curve.
- Consider traffic circles and underpasses or grade separations at St. Johnland Road.
- Designate a parking area for non-motorized boat launches and retrievals at the existing boat ramp.

Viewsheds

- Clear or thin some trees by the waterfront to improve the view or provide a viewing deck.
- Program the northern portion of the park for sunset water views.
- The area behind building 137 is suitable for events with waterfront views, which would be great way to bring people to the park.

Waterfront

- Provide ADA access to the waterfront.
- Improve kayak and canoe facilities; delineate fishing areas.
- Identify and develop alternative non-motorized boat launch areas and include adjacent parking.
- Consider issuing permits for non-motorized boat launches to prevent overcrowding.
- The waterfront has good bass fishing and shellfish habitat.
- Formalize waterfront trails to prevent erosion.
- Move waterfront sports activities such as paddle boarding and kayaking away from sensitive areas.
- Add osprey or raptor perches.
- Restore edge wetland habitat.
- Consider adding small piers or boardwalk to prevent damaging shoreline ecosystem.
- Boat wakes disturb the shoreline ecosystem.
- High tide makes access to the shoreline segment of the Greenbelt Trail difficult.
- Dredge the narrow canal to make boat access easier, make it safer for kayaks, and make the island less accessible to predators.
- The sewage outfall pipe causes water quality concerns.

Wayfinding/Interpretation

- The BCA/waterfront area needs more wayfinding signs.
- Identify opportunities to educate visitors about topics such as birds, marshes, and ecosystems. through wayfinding, and labels, phone apps.
- Trails should have educational signage.
- Have trails that pass buildings feature informational signage about historic uses.
- Clear signage is important, especially during events.
- Recreate the panoramic historical view through a view-finder feature or art installation.

Woodlands and trees

- Prioritize tree preservation.
- Preserve the Old Dock Road forest buffer.
- Replant copper beech trees along the Boulevard as it was historically.
- Convert some open turf areas to meadow/forest; new paths through these areas would reduce impacts on established areas.
- Retain as much forest as possible while integrating trails.