

**NISSEQUOGUE RIVER STATE PARK
PUBLIC INFORMATION MEETING**

**Draft Master Plan and
Draft Environmental Impact Statement**



February 3rd, 2021 at 6 PM

**Held virtually via Zoom:
<https://zoom.us/j/93229430897>**

**Andrew M. Cuomo, Governor
Erik Kulleseid, Commissioner**



**Parks, Recreation
and Historic
Preservation**

MEETING AGENDA:

1. Welcoming Remarks and Team Introduction
2. Overview of Project Scope and Timeline
3. Historic Context of the Park
4. Park Programming and Natural Setting
5. Public Input
6. Next Steps

INTRODUCTION

In August of 2019, the New York State Office of Parks, Recreation and Historic Preservation (OPRHP) released the 2020-2025 Statewide Comprehensive Outdoor Recreation Plan. This document identified the following four themes to guide recreation planning in the State:

- Keep the outdoor recreation system welcoming, safe, affordable, and accessible.
- Improve the visitor experience.
- Restore and enhance the State outdoor recreation system with an emphasis on conservation and resiliency.
- Celebrate and teach history while promoting historic preservation efforts across the State.

Development of a Master Plan for Nissequogue River State Park will advance these themes in the programming, recreation, and conservation actions it recommends and will target areas for investment and development in the park for the next 10-15 years.

Nissequogue River State Park, formerly the site of the Kings Park Psychiatric Hospital, is distinguished both by its array of historic buildings as well as its ecological resources.

The purpose of this public information meeting is to invite park users, area residents, and other stakeholders to become involved in the planning process and help inform the future of Nissequogue River State Park. Public input will assist the project team evaluate issues, concerns, and programming preferences for the site. In addition, this identification of issues and topics of special concern will also help inform the depth to which each topic is analyzed in the Draft Environmental Impact Statement.

This information packet and the public information meeting are intended to provide an overview of the project site, its history, and context, and offer an opportunity for the community to provide early feedback to guide preliminary planning stages.

MASTER PLAN TIMELINE

- Public Information Meeting – February 3, 2021
- Release of Draft Public Scoping Document – March 2021
- Public Scoping Meeting and Comment Period – April 2021
- Release of Final Scoping Document – May 2021
- Release of Draft Master Plan/ Draft Environmental Impact Statement (DEIS) – July 2021
- Public Hearing and Comment Period on DEIS – August 2021
- Release of Final Plan/Final Environmental Impact Statement (FEIS) – December 2021

OVERVIEW OF THE PARK

Nissequogue River State Park is a 522-acre park located in Smithtown, NY that is most visibly distinguished by its many historic buildings. Established as state parkland in 2000, the park occupies a large portion of the former Kings Parks Psychiatric Center (KPPC) site, which still retains numerous large institutional buildings situated in a campus-like setting. In addition to the historic structures, the site contains an array of wildlife habitats, a bird conservation area, saltwater wetland, and access to the Nissequogue River, a state-designated recreational river. The park currently supports active programming including soccer and boating, and supports various passive uses through its trail network and diverse array of open spaces, woodlands, and waterfront areas. Nissequogue River State Park is located immediately to the east of Sunken Meadow State Park, and fewer than 10 miles from other large parks, including Blydenburgh County Park and Caleb Smith State Park.

SITE HISTORY

Pre-1665	The Nesaquake Tribe inhabited the area now occupied by the Nissequogue River State Park
1665	Smithtown founded
1884-1895	Kings County Farm and Asylum established
1895	Kings County Farm and Asylum acquired by New York State to become Kings Park State Hospital (KPSH)
1925-1940	KPSH constructed many of the hospital’s largest structures and building groupings
1975	KPSH renamed the Kings Park Psychiatric Center (KPPC)
1996	Kings Park Psychiatric Center permanently closed
2001	Nissequogue River State Park established

ENVIRONMENTAL SETTING

Nissequogue River State Park is situated in the Kings Park hamlet of Smithtown, which lies on the northern shore of New York's Long Island. The park is adjacent to the Nissequogue River, a River of Special Significance that flows in a northerly direction and outfalls into the Long Island Sound. The river system is one of the largest coastal wetlands on Long Island's north shore. The park, which overlooks Long Island Sound, consists of dozens of historic buildings and accompanying infrastructure, several managed areas (including lawns, ornamental tree plantings), and natural areas. There are a total of nine ecological communities present in the park, representing three classification systems—terrestrial, estuarine, and freshwater. Directly west of Nissequogue River State Park is the 1,288-acre Sunken Meadow State park. The two parks are formally connected via the Long Island Greenbelt Trail, and informally connected via a shared shoreline.

NATURAL RESOURCES

The master planning process will include an evaluation of opportunities to further protect and enhance the natural resources found at Nissequogue River State Park and identify ways to increase the public's access to and enjoyment of these features.

Ecological Communities

Ecological communities within the park were identified during numerous site visits made in the fall and early winter of 2020, and include intertidal low salt marsh, high marsh, coastal shoals/bars/mudflats, freshwater wetland/pond, dredge spoil, successional field, successional mesophytic forest, and mesophytic forest. There are also areas of littoral zone (open riverine water) present within the park. The only ecological community within the park considered a significant natural community is the low salt marsh. Successional mesophytic forest comprises most of the natural areas of the park. The majority of the park has been previously cleared and these successional forests are in varying stages of maturity.

Flora and Fauna

The park supports a large diversity of plant species, although many of the communities contain a heavy presence of invasive species. Native tree species that were observed in the forested areas include multiple oak species, American Beeches, and Tuliptrees. The low intertidal marsh, a significant community, is dominated by a native wetland species, *Spartina alterniflora*.

The fauna present within NRSP is typical for the region. Common inhabitants include white tailed deer, gray squirrels, and raccoons. The park supports numerous bird species, including shorebirds, wading birds, waterfowl, and raptors. Portions of NRSP were designated as a Bird Conservation Area (BCA) by OPRHP in 2000. The BCA supports a range of bird species, including wading birds and migratory songbirds.

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The Nissequogue River, its wetlands, and some adjacent uplands have been designated a Significant Coastal Fish and Wildlife Habitat. The NRSP parkland east of St. Johnland Road is included in this designation.

Topography and Soils

The park topography ranges from areas of steep slopes to large, level areas created during its use as a hospital facility. The soils at the site have been disturbed in areas that have been previously developed. The existing site conditions will be mapped using existing topographic and soils data and will be used in the assessment and selection of locations suitable for development of new park facilities.

Wetlands

There are NYSDEC regulated tidal and freshwater wetlands present within and adjacent to the park. These wetlands are sensitive and ecologically important habitats that support a range of wildlife. Numerous fish and shorebirds utilize the tidal wetland habitat, and the wetlands support abundant ribbed mussel and oyster populations. There is one freshwater wetland located in the center of the park.

Water Resources

Nissequogue River State Park (NRSP) is adjacent to the Nissequogue River, a River of Special Significance and one of the largest coastal wetlands on Long Island's north shore. Due to the undeveloped condition and rarity on Long Island, portions of the Nissequogue River have been designated a Scenic and Recreational River by the NYSDEC. The sections of the river that fall within or adjacent to the park are part of the recreational river designation.

A NYSDEC regulated freshwater wetland that was previously used as a reservoir is located on site. The wetland is primarily a pond with some emergent wetland community types on the western end.

Scenic Resources

The landscape of Nissequogue River State Park has several features that add to the scenic value of the park. These include view of the Long Island Sound, Nissequogue River, beaches, and woodlands.

CULTURAL RESOURCES

During the master planning process, opportunities to reuse select historic buildings on site will be evaluated.

Historic Structures and Landscape:

The historic buildings that remain from the site's previous use as a psychiatric hospital constitute a historically and architecturally significant district that is eligible for the National Register of Historic Places. Established in 1884, the Kings Park Psychiatric Center was one of the first of several hospitals established across New York State for the treatment of mental health. While its earliest extant building dates to 1890, the majority of the site's remaining structures were constructed between 1920 and 1944. The buildings' use of restrained Colonial Revival design and relationship to the overall campus through a system of roadways, open greens, and landscape elements is indicative of institutional construction during the 20th-century. The site also includes a number of significant structures and landscape features including a ball field, reservoir and associated waterworks, and transportation infrastructure.

The psychiatric hospital ceased operations in 1996 and the 153-acre grounds became the Nissequogue River State Park in 2000. While some of the buildings were demolished after the park was established, the variety and density of the remaining buildings are a testament to the history and development of mental health treatment in the late 19th- and early 20th-centuries. The park actively uses three of the historic buildings, including the greenhouse (Building 65), truck garage (Building 62), and Administration Building (Building 125), which is currently undergoing renovations.

Archeological Resources

Nissequogue River State Park may contain pre-historic and historic archaeological resources. An archaeological assessment (Phase 1A survey) will be conducted to identify areas of sensitivity. A cemetery affiliated with the former hospital is also located on site. These areas of sensitivity will impact locations of proposed programming.

RECREATIONAL RESOURCES

Nissequogue River State Park currently supports a variety of recreational uses. The site features boating facilities (marinas, canoe/kayak launch), soccer fields, and a network of walking and biking trails. Additional recreation opportunities on site include bird watching, sightseeing, picnicking, beach access, and organized group activities such as running races.

An assessment of future recreational opportunities that the park can support will be conducted during the master planning process. Marina facilities will not be included in the scope of the Master Plan.

INFRASTRUCTURE

The park today features numerous roads and driveways associated with the site's historic institutional use. Two public roads, Old Dock and St. Johnland, traverse the site. Kings Park Boulevard south of St. Johnland is a park road that is open to thru traffic; OPRHP has a maintenance agreement with the Town for weather-related maintenance. Parking in this area of the park is limited to the island between the north and south lanes at the northern end of the Boulevard. Kings Park Boulevard north of St. Johnland is a park road that extends north into the park to parking area and recreational facilities. Numerous other park roads are gated and inaccessible to the public.

The Park has major utility infrastructure in place from the facility development as a hospital. All existing utility infrastructure including water, sanitary, storm drainage, electric will be mapped from existing information and field reviewed and edited. Necessary upgrades to the systems will be assessed dependent on the alternatives identified in the Master Plan. Additionally, steam tunnels and other underground utilities will be mapped based on available data.

OPERATIONS

The master planning process will include an assessment of existing park operational facilities and identification of operational needs, including facility and landscape management and maintenance, staffing, park police, emergency operations, and waste management. The Master Plan will include recommendations for upgrades and additions to park operations, depending on the future development alternatives identified.

PUBLIC INPUT

Input from members of the public is an important part of the master planning process. Information gathered at the February 3rd public information meeting and subsequent outreach events will inform the site design and programming alternatives explored during the development of the Master Plan, Master Plan Alternatives and EIS.

Preliminary List of Items to be addressed in Master Plan

- ADA compliance
- Archeological resources
- Park boundaries and entrances
- Climate change adaptation and resilience
- Connectivity to the surrounding neighborhood
- Educational programming
- Habitat protection and enhancement
- Historic preservation, including selective reuse of historic buildings

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- Infrastructure needs
- Invasive species management
- Maintenance
- New active recreational opportunities
- Parking
- Partnerships
- Permits
- Public art and performances
- Public safety and security
- Special events
- Trails (including bike paths, multi-use trails, and nature trails)
- Traffic and circulation
- Waterfront access

NEXT STEPS

Suggestions, issues, considerations, and alternatives identified by those in attendance at the public information meeting, through written comments received, and through the Recreational Needs Assessment survey will be summarized and made available online at <https://parks.ny.gov/inside-our-agency/master-plans.aspx>.

The Recreational Needs Assessment Survey will be open and collecting responses online from February 2nd through February 17th, 2021, at the following website: <https://bit.ly/2YABFpq>

The public comment period following the Public Information Meeting on February 3rd will be open for 30 days, closing March 5th, 2021. The Draft Master Plan/DEIS will address issues identified by the community in this preliminary input phase. Additional public outreach may occur during the development of the draft Master Plan. Public review of the Draft Master Plan/DEIS will include a public hearing as well as a public comment period. Comments received during this period will be considered during the preparation of the Final Master Plan/FEIS. Following the issuance of the Final Master Plan/FEIS, a findings statement will be issued along with the Commissioner's decision regarding adoption of the plan.

CONTACT

To submit comments or questions regarding the Nissequogue River State Park Master Plan/EIS, please email NissequogueRiver.Plan@parks.ny.gov.

Alternatively, you can submit questions in writing to either of the following addresses:

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New York State Office of Parks, Recreation and Historic Preservation
Long Island State Park Headquarters - Nissequogue River Master Plan
P.O. Box 247
Babylon, New York 11702

or

Diana Carter
New York State Office of Parks, Recreation and Historic Preservation
Division of Environmental Stewardship and Planning
625 Broadway, Floor 2
Albany, New York 12238