

Barrens plan omits Mastic site

Cuomo budget would add 800 acres in Shoreham

BY MARK HARRINGTON
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The Cuomo administration's state budget bill includes a measure that would expand the core Pine Barrens by around 800 acres in Shoreham, officials said, but omits a controversial parcel in Mastic favored by legislators on which a developer has sought to build a solar farm.

The governor's budget measure would include all of the Shoreham property previously part of a state law passed by the legislature last year (later vetoed by the governor), giving Pine Barrens core preservation status to some 800 acres surrounding the shuttered nuclear plant, according to lawmakers and the developer who reviewed it.

But the 100 acres for the Middle Island Solar Farm, whose owners successfully lobbied for Gov. Andrew M. Cuomo's veto late last year, are not part of Cuomo's budget bill, officials said. Other Mastic properties amounting to around 250 additional acres also were excluded, they said. The exclusion would clear a prospective hurdle for the developer to build the solar farm, since the area where it will be built would not come under Pine Barrens protections.

Representatives for Cuomo's office didn't respond to requests for comment.

Brookhaven Supervisor Edward P. Romaine said he was "appreciative" that Cuomo included the 800 acres at Shoreham in his bill, which still must be approved by the legislature. He said he's also "committed" to working with Cuomo staff to find an alternative site for the Mastic solar farm so the developer doesn't have to bulldoze some 60 acres, including 40

acres approved by the town for the solar farm earlier this month.

At the same time, a separate bill by state legislators that includes the Mastic properties is moving swiftly through the Assembly and Senate this week, a spokesman for Sen. Kenneth LaValle (R-Port Jefferson) said Monday.

A representative for Assemb. Steve Englebright (D-Seatauket), who has resubmitted his original Pine Barrens bill in the Assembly, said he was "reviewing" the governor's proposal.

Gerald Rosengarten, managing director of the Middle Island Solar Farm, said the governor's budget bill is "very clear. He left us out of the budget."

Rosengarten already has received town approval to develop just over 40 acres of the Mastic property in a phased development that would leave another 20 acres for future development, along with a structure. He said he plans to begin building when clearing and other permits are granted, but he remains hopeful of reaching a deal with Brookhaven Town to shift the 20-acre development to a town property, perhaps on the Brookhaven landfill. "I'm prepared to save every tree I can save if I can reach an agreement with the town," he said. Forty of the 100 acres will stay undeveloped under the developer's original plan.

Meanwhile Monday, LaValle and Assemb. Fred Thiele (I-Sag Harbor) introduced a bill that would require LIPA trustees to consider the "economic interests of its ratepayers" when considering rate increases. Current law allows trustees to examine only a narrow set of criteria, including "sound fiscal operating practices" and "safe and adequate service" in considering rate hikes. The bill also would prevent LIPA from increasing rates to offset revenue losses due to ratepayer energy conservation efforts.

Harbor lights



Streetlights along Northport Harbor on Monday night. Rain is forecast for Tuesday.

RAYCHEL BRIGHTMAN

COMPTROLLER WAIVER BILL VETOED

BY RICK BRAND
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In a rare move, Suffolk's Democratic County Executive Steve Bellone has vetoed a measure to allow Republican Comptroller John Kennedy to negotiate a private sale of Suffolk bonds without approval of the county waiver committee.

In issuing the veto, Bellone said such a change would eliminate one of the checks and balances of the current procurement system adopted in 2009 and should only be done as part of a comprehensive evaluation of the existing law. The veto is only Bellone's second in the past two years and his eighth since taking office in 2012.

Kennedy said he will seek an override at the Feb. 6 legislature meeting, saying the bill is needed to give him flexibility to react quickly to changing financial market conditions. He noted his office had been able to refinance more than \$650 million in county debt saving \$35 million over the next decade.

Legis. Tom Cilmi (R-Bay Shore), head of the GOP caucus, called the measure "a smart government initiative" from a

"comptroller who has demonstrated an ability to save the county millions of dollars." He labeled Bellone's veto "an act of pure partisan politics." Kennedy is up for re-election for a second term this fall.

Currently, the comptroller must seek approval of a three-member waiver committee — made up of two representatives of the county executive and one from the legislature — to authorize such private sales.

The vetoed measure requires the comptroller to disclose details of the solicitation for any proposed private bond sale to both the county executive and legislators. It also requires the comptroller to detail his evaluation and assessment of all proposals that are made.

The bill was approved last month on a veto-proof 12-6 vote, with six Democrats joining the six-member GOP bloc. That GOP bloc is now seven and Cilmi expects it to remain fully supportive. However, two Democrats who voted for Kennedy's bill and a third who opposed it left office at



Bellone

year's end.

Presiding Officer DuWayne Gregory (D-Copiague), who originally voted for the measure, called it "good reform" but will review Bellone's veto message and speak with Kennedy before making a final decision on the override.

Newly elected Legis. Susan Berland (D-Dix Hills) said she is reviewing the bill and has made no decision on an override, but freshman Legis. Tom Donnelly (D-Deer Park) said he will vote to override the veto.

Legis. William Spencer (D-Centerport), who originally voted for the measure, said he was having second thoughts about removing the review in light of Bellone's veto, though he has not made a final decision. Should the county have a future comptroller in whom "we don't have as much confidence, it could lead to corruption," he said.

Kennedy expressed confidence an override will succeed and said he intends to "have an earnest discussion with every [legislator] even those who opposed it."