

# Land purchase lacks funds

## NY budget calls for saving land at ex-nuclear site

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A provision in New York State's recently passed budget envisions the state buying more than 800 acres of prized woodlands around the shuttered Shoreham nuclear plant, but does not provide any funding.

State officials who agreed to a deal to include the Shoreham property and several hundred other acres in the core pine barrens say they will press Gov. Andrew M. Cuomo to fund the purchase, perhaps in stages, starting next year. The purchase price, according to one official briefed on the plan, is expected to exceed \$35 million.

Lawmakers and site owner National Grid announced at the completion of budget talks last week that the state would move to buy the property outright. The pine barrens designation gives new protections to the woodlands but does not open them to public access.

State Assemb. Steve Englebright (D-Setauket) said he has crafted language for a bill that would begin the process of planning for the Shoreham parcel to become state property. His expectation is that the property will be purchased in separate transactions over a period of years.

"I've not seen any language or allocation for it" to be bought as yet, Englebright said. But he added his understanding is that funding for the plan either would be accomplished through additions to the state environmental protection fund, at \$5 million to \$10 million a year, or through newly appropriated direct funding.

He said lawmakers received a "handshake" agreement from the governor to complete the purchase. Cuomo is expected to sign the state budget that includes the core pine barrens designation in coming days or weeks.

"They're going to start," Englebright said of state officials. "There's a handshake arrangement right now to proceed in this direction. The governor has made a commitment and I



More than 800 acres near the shuttered Shoreham nuke plant would gain pine barrens designation.

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Cuomo's office declined to discuss purchase details, saying it was premature because the property hasn't yet been appraised. Leo Rosales, a spokesman for Cuomo, said in a statement, "The final enacted budget includes an important expansion of the Long Island Pine Barrens by adding more than 1,000 acres to the core preservation area. This legislation restricts development on these important properties to protect habitat and Long Island's drinking water supply."

He noted that the final budget "also includes a commitment to pay school taxes to the Shoreham-Wading River Central School District for any state land within the district in the core preservation area."

New York has agreed to pay more than \$2 million a year in taxes on the parcel that are currently being paid by National Grid.

National Grid spokeswoman Wendy Ladd said the company signed a "preliminary agreement for the purchase of the

Shoreham property with the state, as part of the pine barrens preserve."

She noted, however, that "further details regarding the purchase need to be discussed and negotiated with the state in the coming months."

She said National Grid is a "proud supporter of open space preservation and looks forward to the community enjoying this pristine property for generations to come."

Brookhaven Supervisor Edward P. Romaine, who worked with state officials in support of preserving the property, said the town, pending approval of its board, would entertain contributing several properties that surround the Shoreham parcels to add to an eventual state park.

That includes Shoreham Beach on the Long Island Sound, its parking lot and bathroom building and the historic Woodhull House to serve as an eventual park headquarters in Brookhaven. "My hope at the end of the day is that this land is put into the pine barrens core,"

Romaine said, noting that town zoning rules limiting that parcel to 10 acres residential made its development unlikely.

Michael Whyland, spokesman for Assembly Speaker Carl Heastie, explaining why there was no 2018 appropriation for the purchase, noted the state's Environmental Protection Fund "can be used to purchase the property over time and wouldn't need to be accessed until next year."

More important now, he said, "is how the land will be managed once it is purchased and that is addressed in the budget language. This will ensure that the land will be governed by a management plan, taking into account the unique nature of the area, and that the public has a voice in determining appropriate uses." A spokesman for State Senate Majority Leader John Flanagan (R-East Northport) wasn't available for comment.

Lawmakers last year had discussed the prospect that any state park at the Shoreham property might be named for former Gov. Mario Cuomo, the current governor's father, who was instrumental in the decommissioning of the Shoreham nuclear plant that is surrounded by the property. Rosales said there's "no indication on any name and it's premature at this point."



JOHNNY MILANO

The privatization plan also recommended allowing the president to appoint an independent nine-member panel that could close VA medical centers it deemed inefficient unless Congress acted within 45 days.

"I believe a veteran should be able to take their VA benefit to any provider that they wish," Rep. Lee Zeldin (R-Shirley) told Newsday Friday. "While some veterans would want to go to a private provider with that option, other veterans love the services they receive at the VA."