

Pine barrens 'core' grows

800 Shoreham
acres protected,
but purchase lags

BY MARK HARRINGTON
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Protections against development of about 800 acres of newly designated core pine barrens around the never-opened Shoreham nuclear plant took effect Jan. 1, even as the state continues to explore how and when it will buy the woodland property.

Under state law enacted last year, the 800 acres became part of the core pine barrens preservation area starting this year, said John Pavacic, executive director of the Central Pine Barrens Planning and Policy Commission.

That designation means it can be acquired by the state or a private land trust with limited and rarely approved options for development. Owner National Grid had at one point expressed an interest in building a solar farm on a portion of the land but has since shelved the plan and is actively negotiating a sale with the state.

Pavacic noted that until it's purchased by the state, National Grid technically has the right to request a hardship waiver to develop or to apply directly to the commission, though neither step is consid-

ered likely.

"I think the public can be satisfied that this land is their land," said Dick Amper, executive director of the Long Island Pine Barrens Society, adding the likelihood of development was slim to none. "I wrote that portion of the law and that [development] ain't happening," he said, calling the transaction "one of the greatest acquisitions in the history of the pine barrens movement."

The New York State Department of Environmental Conservation on Friday said it has a memorandum of understanding with National Grid to buy the property, and that no additional state budgetary authorizations are needed.

"To be clear, New York State is committed to purchasing the property to conserve and protect these important lands for future generations, and funding is available as it is needed to advance acquisition of the parcels," spokeswoman Maureen Wren said in an email noting such land transactions are "complex" and take time.

National Grid spokeswoman Karen Young said the "complex" sale negotiations, which include LIPA, aren't expected to close until 2020. Newsday has reported the estimated price at \$35 million but Young said the price hasn't yet been finalized.

The DEC now lists the Shoreham lands as a "priority project" in the state's Open Space Conser-

vation Plan, the agency said, so it's eligible for money from the state's Environmental Protection Fund or other state, federal or local funding sources. Funding also could come from the Clean Water Infrastructure Act, given its ability to protect land over public aquifers, the DEC said.

Even when it does begin buying the parcels, likely through a combination of funding sources, the DEC will do so over five years.

London-based National Grid took ownership of the land when it acquired KeySpan in 2007. KeySpan is a successor of the Long Island Lighting Co., which developed a central portion of the property for the shuttered nuclear power plant. LIPA owns about 57 central acres of the site upon which the plant remains.

State and local legislators, including Assemb. Steve Englebright (D-Setauket), a key backer of last year's pine barrens acquisition, have envisioned a state park on the property. Brookhaven Supervisor Ed Romaine has offered to include the town's Shoreham Beach waterfront property and a separate historical building as part of any larger park, he said.

It may be years before the entire process is complete.

Wren said an appraisal will begin "once the final layout is determined." When that's finished, DEC will "determine the source of state funds that will be used to complete the purchase."



HOWARD SIMMONS

The new plan for the Bayville property has the mayor's support.

Big inn is out; event center is in the works

BY TED PHILLIPS
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A controversial seaside inn proposal for Bayville has been dropped in favor of an event center to be detailed at a village board meeting Monday.

The developers created the new concept for the waterfront property on Bayville Avenue, commonly known as the former site of Steve's Pier, after a repeal in November of the village zoning code that would have permitted a four-story inn to be built.

D'Wayne Prieto, chief executive of Dobbs Ferry-based Ward Capital Management LLC, an investor in the project, said the new proposal includes a spa, event center and restaurant and has been completely redesigned by the firm's in-house architect.

Prieto declined to provide details before the presentation, but said it would not require variances from the village board and would be built to complement a planned renovation of the Tides Motor Inn, down the street from the site.

"It's the perfect town for a

boutique event center-hotel," Prieto said. The project would have a national hotel brand name, he said.

The earlier proposal had envisioned a 14,273-square-foot, 23-room hotel for the property owned by Leonard Gross. In November, the village board changed the zoning code to prohibit a seaside inn and a lawyer for Gross had threatened legal action.

Bayville Mayor Robert De Natale had opposed the earlier plan, but has embraced the new one.

De Natale said he had reviewed preliminary plans of the new proposal, which he said was smaller and "less imposing on the property" than the seaside inn proposal had been and would not require a variance.

"It's a plan the residents will be excited to see," the mayor said. "It's very fitting for the area."

De Natale said the presentation is a preliminary step and it could be several months before a plan is finalized.

The village board meeting is at 7 p.m. at the Bayville Intermediate School, 50 Mountain Ave.



The shuttered Shoreham nuclear plant, pictured in 2015, is surrounded by land that's newly protected.