

Kings Park tour group shrinks Newsday editorial board, LI business group representatives won't go with parks chief on visit to site

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There will be some vacant seats on the bus for state Parks Commissioner Carol Ash's tour of the former Kings Park Psychiatric Center today.

Representatives of the Long Island Association, a regional business group, and Newsday's editorial board said they have decided not to attend - though they initiated the visit - because the tour had become too political.

That leaves as Ash's tour partners local civic leaders and possibly local government officials - who were not initially invited by Ash - along with news media. Ash began a study in January on what to do with 330 acres of the hospital property that was turned over to the parks agency at the end of the Pataki administration.

Ash spokeswoman Eileen Larrabee said "this was always intended to be a fact-finding tour of Kings Park for the commissioner."

As for the dropouts, "We don't want to be part of a political dispute," Newsday editorial page editor Jim Klurfeld said. "We were just going to do reporting and all of a sudden somehow in a most ridiculous way we became part of a political dispute."

Long Island Association communications director Gary Wojtas said "considering the misinformation that's currently prevalent in the community, we just don't believe that the meeting as it's set up will be productive."

Linda Henninger, president of the Kings Park Neighbors Association, called the Long Island Association's decision not to attend "another victory for the community." She had charged that the initial invitation to the LIA and editorial board - and not community leaders and officials - had signaled the state's intention to have the 330 acres developed. The Kings Park Neighbors Association wants the site to remain parkland.

As for Newsday's opinion staff pulling out, Henninger said "they shouldn't have been involved in the beginning" because Newsday publisher Tim Knight, who heads the editorial board, sits on the LIA board.

In a statement, Knight responded that "it is the editorial board members' responsibility to first understand key issues in order to express their opinion and that was their purpose in wanting to visit the Kings Park facility. In addition, I am only one of more than 50 LIA board members, and therefore, have no involvement in their day-to-day decision-making. I was not aware of the decision by the editorial board or the LIA to visit Kings Park."