

**Newsday**

**Bill seeks to keep Kings Park in parks system**

**BY STACEY ALTHERR**

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Seeking to stop a possible transfer of the land out of the state parks system, Sen. John Flanagan (R-East Northport) has introduced legislation that would add 365 disputed acres of the former Kings Park Psychiatric Center into the already established Nissequogue River State Park.

"It has already been done administratively," Flanagan said. "That is clear." He said, however, that neither the parks department nor the administration of former Gov. Eliot Spitzer has "given me any level of comfort that they won't try to reverse that decision. So let's put it in statute and make it crystal clear."

Flanagan said Assembs. Michael J. Fitzpatrick (R-St. James) and Steven Englebright (D-Setauket) plan to introduce a companion bill in the Assembly.

Englebright said he is supporting Flanagan's bill as well as the concept. "I am still committed to the basic principle of Kings Park being formalized as a state park," he said.

Parks spokeswoman Eileen Larrabee said the department's staff has not had time to review the Senate bill, so it was too early to comment.

The property's future has been a contentious issue since the hospital was closed in 1996. In 1999, then-Gov. George Pataki signed a law making 153 acres of the waterfront property into Nissequogue River State Park. On the last working day of the Pataki administration in 2006, the rest of the property was transferred to the state parks department.

Since the Spitzer administration took over in January 2007, the state's plans for the new part of the park have not been announced, worrying civic leaders that the state might sell off a portion of the property for development instead of keeping it parkland.

New Gov. David Paterson's position regarding Kings Park is not clear.

The parks department has commissioned a study to estimate the cost of the environmental cleanup of the property.

Previous studies have found asbestos and lead contamination in the buildings that once housed the mentally disabled.

"This is something that, if it goes through, will really protect this park in a way that it needs to be protected," said Linda Henninger, president of the Kings Park Neighbors Association.