

Smithtown board, planning director clash over demolition

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After the Smithtown Town Board had given verbal approval to demolition of some buildings on the former Kings Park psychiatric hospital site, the town's planning director asked the state to reconsider based on the historical significance of some of the buildings.

The March 20 letter sent by Frank DeRubeis has caused confusion among local legislators and a written rebuke from the town board.

DeRubeis' letter recommended to the state Office of Parks, Recreation & Historic Preservation that at least six buildings not be demolished unless required by a health or safety issue.

And he reminded the state that the buildings and portions of roadways, some constructed at the turn of 20th century, are on the town's historic registry. He also said that the state-mandated Local Waterfront Revitalization Program must "protect, restore, and rehabilitate locally significant historic sites in the Sunken Meadow State Park, Caleb Smith State Park and the Kings Park Psychiatric Center."

All four council members signed a letter, dated April 1, telling DeRubeis that the town board must review correspondence to the state about the site.

DeRubeis, in response, said that he is obligated by law to inform the state about the historic buildings during the open comment period. "Before the state could begin demolition, it was required to seek our comments" in order to complete their review, he wrote to the town board.

The letter came two months after the state announced plans to take down 14 buildings, to the relief of civic groups and legislators frustrated with the slow progress on the site. The hospital was closed in 1996 and, in 1999, Gov. George Pataki signed a law turning 153 acres of the property into a park. In 2006, the rest was transferred to the state parks department.

Supervisor Patrick Vecchio said Tuesday he received a call from state parks regional director Ronald Foley and a letter from state Sen. John Flanagan (R-East Northport) expressing confusion about the town's stand on the matter.