

In Last week's Smithtown News, Mike Rosato tries to discredit the Kings Park Civic Association by mischaracterizing its position on playing fields in the Nissequogue River State Park and insinuating that our position is racially motivated. Mr. Rosato cherry picked a small portion of the email he thought would disparage the KPCA. In full disclosure, the KPCA believes that releasing the emails will show the community that our concerns had everything to do with the impact on the ecosystem on the North Side of the Nissequogue River State Park and was not about keeping a 'bad element' (Mr. Rosato's words) out of the park.

It should also be noted that Kings Park's youth sports leagues are members of the Nissequogue River State Park Foundation. Both groups seek to establish public/private partnerships with NY State Parks to attain additional playing fields for their teams.

The original email is from a NRSP Foundation member who represents one of the Kings Park youth sports club. We will call them XXXX.

**From XXXX ( NRSP Foundation Board Member and president of a KP youth sports league).**

I was just wondering how many are for or against the picnic tables and the ball fields going into NRSP? And I was just wondering who decides what buildings come down and what goes up in their place?

I have heard mixed feelings about the next phase and I was just wondering how we got to this phase?

**Mike's Rosato's Response:**

Hi XXXX,

I believe most people do not oppose adding recreational fields and picnic tables at the park. It's the way these new park amenities (ball fields, picnic tables, marina etc.) would be funded that troubles many residents. The funding would apparently come from the pot of money Flanagan had put aside specifically for the park cleanup, instead of State Park's capital improvement fund.

Many of us were also hoping that a master plan would come first before deciding to add new park facilities piecemeal. I think this approach would make more sense.

Mike

**KPCA President Sean Lehmann's Response:**

On Apr 18, 2015, at 10:04 PM, KingsParkCivic@aol.com wrote:

Thank you for the question XXXX. I already raised this concern with the board members of the [Kings Park](#) Civic Association last fall. We discussed it again at a board meeting last month. We respectfully disagree with Mike.

First of all, as far as I know, there has been no community feedback on the Phase Two demolition plan or any of the improvement projects (playing fields, picnic tables etc.). The KPCA is the group that holds community meetings. I receive calls regarding many community issues and concerns, and I have yet to receive a call about the Phase Two plan. I believe this is because nobody really knows about it.

As far as demolition money being used for capital improvement projects, representatives of the Kings Park Civic Association were the **only** representatives at the Phase Two demolition meeting with State Parks who raised concerns on this. I think the KPCA representatives were pretty tough on NY State Parks that day, as we should have been. Heck, that's what civics do. We also put NYS Park representatives on the spot and asked them to publicly state that the **entire** former state hospital was a park. **They would not.**

As a matter of fact, NY State Park Regional Director Wayne Horsley told a KPCA representative that the state wants to put the southern half of the property "back on the tax rolls". She reminded him that it already is as the state pays the KP school district roughly \$2.9 million dollars in taxes every year.

Now back to playing fields and picnic tables. Here's why I think playing fields and picnic tables are not a good fit for this park. Mike knows my opinion. I discussed this with him the day after the Phase Two demolition meeting and we have discussed it a few times since. I'm trying to look at everything - impact on wildlife, impact on the park, impact on [Kings Park](#) as a whole. The KPCA is also aware of impending projects in and around [Kings Park](#). This is a state park, so we must remember that anyone can use it. In our board's opinion, ball fields and picnic tables on the north side of the park is a terrible idea.

Here's why:

- People from Brentwood come to [Kings Park](#) to play soccer on early weekend mornings. I have received a couple of phone calls about non-residents playing in town parks. These non-residents actually have their own teams and leagues. They come up here because of a shortage of fields in their area. They will likely begin to utilize the fields in the Nissequogue River State Park. They also have every right to.
- We already have over-used playing fields and picnic areas in [Sunken Meadow State Park](#). As a matter of fact, the people who picnic are already overflowing towards the roadway. They have run out of space.
- There is a **9,000 unit housing project** (Heartland) that will be developed just south of us. Take a look at page 11 of today's Newsday. This project and its impact on [Kings Park](#) has been on our mind for many years. The opposition to this massive city ( 9,000 units of housing, 3 million square feet of commercial, 1 million square feet of retail) has been slowly decreasing as the local school districts, community groups and others are in favor of the project. This thing is getting built in my opinion. Add the fact that both the state and county are looking to connect (through a rapid transit bus lane) the Heartland project and the Deer Park train station to both downtown Kings Park and our two state parks, and we see tremendous impact. With all those new residents, there will surely be a large overflow from the picnic areas and playing fields in [Sunken Meadow](#) to the new areas in the Nissequogue River State Park. This will be where the new residents go for their recreation. Like I have said to Mike....Time will tell.

- Impact from all these new people on the playing fields and picnic areas will seriously impact the north side of the NRSP. Overflow will move to the trails and will surely impact the delicate eco system on the north side. We have a bird sanctuary, the greenbelt trail, a pond, bluffs and wildlife. We believe it will have terrible implications on these assets. Picture many people barbecuing and playing on the fields, kids running through the trails (maybe even riding bikes...it's only not allowed if state parks has the staff to stop it). No, we think this park is unique and we worry about the impact on its resources.
- If the park is now known as a park with playing fields, what's to stop people from trying to use Tiffany field if the other fields are taken? The soccer club can tell them that they are not allowed. But wait until a few phone calls are made from people complaining that they pay state taxes and can't use state park fields. A few more calls and the state might just break that lease with the soccer club. I'm sure there is a clause in the lease agreement that enables the state to break the lease at any time.
- It's easy for NYS Parks to just demolish a few small structures and add grass and picnic tables. It's also cheaper.
- The NRSP is unique; it's not an extension of [Sunken Meadow State Park](#) and should not be treated as such. This park should be different. In my own opinion, the north side of the park should be a mix of a preserve and arts and culture. Why not enhance the current ecosystem and utilize the trails in the proper manner? Why not have museums, concert hall and both indoor/outdoor theaters? The impact will be much less than ball fields and still make this park a destination with minimal impact. The original members of the foundation went to [Snug Harbor](#) many years ago. What a beautiful place! We seem to be forgetting about that beautiful park. We once said that creating a park like Snug Harbor with its museums, gardens, art facilities was our goal. At least we have a healing garden.
- The southern half of the property is a different story. Perhaps just as the soccer club is doing, our youth leagues can get some playing fields through a public/private partnership (remember that phrase?). The idea of a small research campus was discussed a few years ago. As a matter of fact, I believe it was Gary Symansky who raised the idea at a foundation meeting. At the time, Cold Spring Harbor Lab was looking for more space. I thought it was a great idea. The foundation chairman (Mike) told me that he didn't believe it should be in a state park. An educational research facility was discussed again a couple of years ago. When I mentioned it to John a little more than a year ago, he told me that the foundation would be opposed to this. Well, probably two thirds of the foundation board members are KPCA members and we had discussed this idea at a few KPCA meetings. There was overwhelming support for the idea. I think as a foundation, we need to go back to the conceptual plan. An educational facility is listed for the Lawrence Road area (I'm not stating that it should go there, but it's on the plan). I happen to believe that we would get much support on this from Kings Parkers. However, it seems like it's come and gone for a number of reasons. Btw, NY State Parks leases land to a number of educational facilities.

The [Kings Park](#) Civic Association has every intention of discussing the phase two demolition plans with our residents. I stated two foundation meetings ago that the KPCA is gathering information about a number of issues with the park, including a detailed list of expenditures. Fact finding, FOIL's and reports take time. I did state that once completed, the KPCA would share everything with the foundation board members. Two meetings ago I stated that I was not in favor of the letter being proposed. I said to leave the civic stuff to the civics. I think we are

pretty good at it. The foundation should be concentrating on what it was intended to do. I believe it can be pretty good at that as well.

XXXX, I want to thank you for your question because I have no problem stating my opinion or concerns.

I think there is another question to ask.

Where are we going as a foundation? The foundation has done some wonderful things, but we seem to have lost our way at times. This foundation was originally created by Mike and KPCA members like me, Frank, Dorothy, Gail and Jack etc. We networked with friends, representing other groups, to do something special. Our mission was to beautify and enhance the park, network to establish public/private partnerships and to have an agreement with NY State Parks to help fund a master plan. We were to obtain a friends group status and get a memorandum of understanding with NY State Parks. We talked with the Caumsett Foundation and the Friends of [Caleb Smith State Park](#) to learn how to do such things. After telling Mike all the information that I received from the founder of the Caumsett Foundation, I remember him saying that we need to follow the same path. We did try at first and I remember our first Long Island Friends Group meeting and all the information we gathered. We planted native grasses (thanks to Jan), and held our first Turkey Trot and Summer Runs. They were fantastic and they brought more people to the park every year. Good things have continued.

However, it's eight years later. We are not a friends group, there is no memorandum of understanding, there is no agreement for a master plan and we seem to be stuck on whether we are a foundation or a civic group for the park. We are sitting on **\$150,000** and we are not approaching state parks for an agreement to do a master plan. The Caumsett Foundation did it correctly. They established a good working relationship with NY State Parks. They stayed out of the politics and controversial stuff (that's what a civic association is for). They didn't aggravate public officials. They worked with them and got exactly what they wanted in just a few short years. The Friends of Caleb Smith is no different. They do great things. They even host classes! (Jan and Karen could tell you much more than me). Now I know that it's true that this park is different, but I believe we can accomplish more if we stick to our mission. It's no secret that I have had my problems with the foundation. But that is because I have been frustrated at the very things I just stated. I have had no problem sharing my thoughts with the foundation leaders, Yet we keep following the same path.

Just my two cents.

Sean

### **Mike Rosato's Response:**

On Apr 19, 2015, at 8:00 AM, Michael Rosato < wrote:

Sean

Your nuts!

**Another response from Mike Rosato four minutes later:**

On Apr 19, 2015, at 8:04 AM, Michael Rosato wrote:

Excuse me. You're nuts and a racist.

**Mike Rosato again, 54 minutes later:**

In a message dated 4/19/2015 8:58:39 A.M. Eastern Daylight Time, :  
I apologize Sean. Racist is a strong word and it was inappropriate of me to use it. I was a little groggy this Beautiful morning when I first read your email.

However, you should not single out any community, such as Brentwood, when expressing your concerns about who may use the park in the future if recreational fields and picnic tables are added to the grounds. It does not convey the proper perspective, especially from a civic leader.

Also, your criticism of the foundation is very unfair. You know that the foundation has accomplished a great deal over the years. You are also aware that much of the blame for the park's status is due to inaction by many of our politicians. Convincing our political representatives to act on our behalf is the civic's responsibility, so it's disingenuous to find fault with the foundation.

Anyway, we agree on most issues and I'm sure we can find common ground on this one as well.

Mike

**KPCA President Sean Lehmann's Response:**

Sent: Sun, Apr 19, 2015 9:19 am  
Subject: Re: NRSP

Mike. All is good. I only said Brentwood because the people that play in our town parks are from Brentwood. I'm only stating fact. Brentwood is just south of here and everyone knows that there is a shortage of schools there. It is also the largest school district on Long Island so they don't have enough fields to accommodate the population.

Mike, I think I made it very clear that the foundation has done some great things. We should all be proud of that. You especially deserve tremendous credit.

As far as the politicians, yes, they could and should be doing more. So we pushed Senator Flanagan to make the entire property a park through a legislative act. He did his part. It passed through the Senate 63-0 again this year. You called to tell me such. But it won't even make it out of committee in the Assembly.

When I met with Flanagan last fall, I had to actually tell him that we are not against development in the park (as long as it fits in with a park). He thought that we wanted just open space. I even brought up the foundation's conceptual plan.

Sean