

# Dam plan at Blydenburgh Park does not need an environmental study, Suffolk Legislature votes

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The Nissequogue River flows through the breach in the dam that once held back the waters of Stump Pond at Blydenburgh County Park in Smithtown in this aerial photo looking west on Jan. 15. Credit: Newsday/John Paraskevas

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The plan to build a dam in Blydenburgh Park does not need a comprehensive environmental impact study, the Suffolk County Legislature voted 13-5 on Tuesday.

The project has been the subject of fractious debate since the old dam collapsed in a heavy rainstorm in August 2024. Many residents wanted the old Stump Pond returned, but other residents, and a coalition of nearly two dozen local and national environment groups, advocated for allowing the Nissequogue River to "run free."

The state Department of Environmental Conservation and the county agree that the dam would be a Type 1 project under state environmental law — a project that "is likely to have a significant adverse impact on the environment." The classification carries the presumption that a full environmental impact statement should be prepared to assess those possible harms.

In a 49-page analysis, the county's planning department concluded the dam "will not result in significant adverse impact" and Legis. Stephanie Bontempi (R-Centerport) said that analysis was sufficient to justify a vote against further review. "The proper process has been followed," she said.

But Legis. Steven Englebright (D-Setauket) said the study should have been undertaken 18 months ago when the dam was breached, and before any county funds had been allocated for the structure.

Before the vote, several residents spoke for and against a dam. Rob Sikora, president of the Forestwood Civic Association, said the pond should be returned "just like it was for 225 years."

Teresa Dybvig, of Stony Brook, said building and maintaining a dam will be too expensive. The county should instead preserve the emerging marshland, which she called "a wonderland — a glorious rejuvenation of native species."

Enrico Nardone, director of the Seatuck Environmental Association, said a dam would destroy "2 miles of free flowing, cold water stream habitat" as well as 128 acres of "freshwater meadows, with a robust restoration underway."

"In every ecological way, that habitat is better for more species of native wildlife in its current condition," Nardone said, than the old Stump Pond.

### **DEC urged full study**

The vote to proceed contradicted the state Department of Environmental Conservation's strong recommendation to conduct a full study and to consider alternatives such as building a lower dam, with a smaller pond, leaving a large area of free-flowing river and marshland. "It's troubling that the county is disregarding the counsel of the state," Sara Cernadas-Martin, director of New York ecological restoration programs at Save the Sound and a 17-year Suffolk County resident, said.

She said it's clear the pond would negatively affect the emerging marshland. Because of the flourishing wildflowers, "now we have pollinators that are bringing birds. There's wildlife data that shows 12 new species that were never ever seen before at the park."

After the vote, County Supervisor Edward P. Romaine released a statement thanking the legislature for its vote "to advance the process of rebuilding the dam at Blydenburgh Park."

The county would need to secure multiple permits from the DEC, including on dam safety, freshwater wetlands, water quality, before any dam can be built.

Englebright also warned there could be grounds for lawsuits against the county for not doing a proper investigation before voting to proceed.

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