

Hampton Bays Business Owners, Residents Optimistic About New Plans For Good Ground Park

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[By Kyle Campbell](#) Many Hampton Bays business owners and residents are optimistic that long-awaited development plans for Good Ground Park—once billed as the hamlet’s future “Central Park”—could bring more foot traffic and a new identity to their downtown.

After a decade of debate and deliberation, Southampton Town now seems poised to move forward with plans to develop the mostly wooded 36-acre lot that sits north of Main Street and west of Squiretown Road into a mixed-use venue boasting an amphitheater, extensive walking trails, a playground and off-street parking.

In response to public input, the town’s recently approved plans call for most of the land acquired from the Rosko family in 2003 for \$3.5 million to be left intact and natural with walking trails cutting through parts of the forest. The proposed park, which is expected to cost millions to complete, would be connected to the back of several Main Street businesses and would host concerts and other community events.

Town officials announced last week that they will apply for a \$125,000 grant from the state Office of Parks, Recreation and

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Historic Preservation, money that is expected to cover about half of the projected design costs, though they have yet to lay the groundwork to help pay for the actual construction.

Still, the recent action taken by the Town Board gave some locals reason to celebrate.

Simone Scotto, the owner of Scotto’s Pork Store on West Montauk Highway, said the park would draw people into the business district and generate much-needed foot traffic that the hamlet currently lacks. His store is located across the street from the pocket park that will serve as an entrance to Good Ground Park once it is constructed. He said the park, once finished, would be a standing attraction that would benefit all the businesses along Main Street.

“There’s nothing like that in this town and we need something to bring people to this town,” Mr. Scotto said. “Obviously, we don’t want any more buildings. We need to redo what we have, enhance what we have and maximize all the potential in this town rather than do other stuff that’s not pertaining to this community. I just think a park is a big draw.”

Hampton Bays resident Chris Kilminster said while his hamlet is known for its beaches, it lacks the thriving Main Street that can be found in other parts of the town. Mr. Kilminster, who tends bar at the Squiretown Bar and Restaurant, located on West Montauk Highway and next door to the pocket park, said casual foot traffic is almost nonexistent in Hampton Bays because there is not much to do downtown other than eat or run errands.

“They’re here for a purpose—to go to the drugstore, to go to the pork store, to eat out,” he said of the those who now visit Main Street. “There’s nothing really drawing people here for no reason where [a park] would bring people into the area and they would explore around the rest of town.”

Others remain more skeptical about what actual impact the park will have on the downtown.

Shinnecock Hills resident Roger Torrey, who estimates that he visits downtown Hampton Bays about four days a week, said the park's true benefit will depend on how many people actually visit it on a consistent basis.

"It's hard to say whether people will really use the resource—it's really hard to say," Mr. Torrey said. "It's better than just woods with nothing built on it. Any civic improvement is a boon to the community, I think. I don't know how much foot traffic it's gonna draw."

Debates regarding how the property should be utilized have raged since before its acquisition by Southampton Town, with early discussions calling for a hotel, conference center and senior housing complex, among other possibilities, to be built there. Even after the decision was reached to keep the tract of land for a park, plans continued to vary and included proposals to dig out man-made ponds and clear up to eight acres of trees to create an oversized lawn similar to Brooklyn's Prospect Park.

After a public meeting in May confirmed a consensus desire for a largely passive park, the current plan was drafted by the town.

Not everyone is on board with the project, however. Hampton Bays resident Lauren Chambers agrees that the hamlet could use a central attraction to draw more visitors to the downtown area, but does not think it should come at the expense of existing natural resources. Ms. Chambers, an artist who has featured parts of the wooded lot in her landscape paintings, said she would welcome an amphitheater in Hampton Bays but would rather see it put on an already developed property.

"Why destroy more of the natural beauty here?" she said. "Choose something that's already a parking lot or something and build there."

Sag Harbor resident Jill Commins, who grew up in Hampton Bays and occasionally visits the pocket park, said she does not want to see any new development that will intrude on the ecosystem.

"We just believe you should never cut down a tree—dead or alive," said Ms. Commins, who owns the Plant Parentage nursery on David Whites Lane in Southampton. "Even if a tree is dead, you should leave it there for the owls to live in."

Those who would welcome the park said they hope the push for its creation does not lose steam when the time rolls around to fund its creation.

"This all started 10 years ago, and they haven't followed through on it," Mr. Scotto said of the town. "I just hope that now that they've rejuvenated this plan, they follow through. Once we start, I don't want to stop until it is done. Hampton Bays has been deprived for a long time, and we need something like this."



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