

LONG ISLAND

Brentwood residents seek input in park's cleanup

BY SARAH ARMAGHAN

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Residents near Roberto Clemente Park in Brentwood want the state Department of Environmental Conservation to include a community advisory board in the plan to clean up the estimated 50,000 tons of toxic debris illegally dumped in the park since last June.

Many residents at a Wednesday meeting about the dumping complained of “mixed messages” from different elected officials or governing bodies and not receiving current information that had been distributed to others.

Fern Rostas, 67, who lives on Timberline Drive next to the park, said she watched bulldozers last summer working seven days a week, clearing the fields before the dumping began and is concerned for her family's health in the years to come.

“From the start the construction was going on at the park, I was getting the runaround from everyone about what was happening,” Rostas said after the meeting. “I think we need to make sure we’re getting the information we need right from the people who are running this.”

The inclusion of selected community representatives to meet with the DEC, county and town officials would create a clear channel of information for residents, said Adrienne Esposito, executive director for Citizens Campaign for the Environment, a nonprofit that hosted the forum. Esposito, who headed the meeting, is running as a Democrat for State Senate in Suffolk's 3rd District, which includes the park.

Officials from the DEC said in a statement yesterday that the agency “strongly supports a public outreach and participa-

tion process to keep the community fully informed . . . DEC will determine the components of the public outreach as part of its review of” a cleanup plan.

Inez Birbiglia, the town's deputy commissioner in the parks department, said yesterday that the public is being informed and will have input. Town officials “will continue to inform the public as it has every step of the way,” she said, adding that residents will have a chance to submit input for the rebuilding of the park.

Suffolk County health officials have said the public health risk now is low, but acknowledge it is impossible to know the health threat while dumping was going on. The dumping at the Brentwood park and three other sites in the town are under a criminal investigation by the Suffolk County district attorney.

The full remediation plan for Clemente Park was to be submitted by the town to the DEC for approval at the end of August but is behind schedule. The first phase, to install groundwater monitoring wells, has received approval and is expected to be implemented in the coming weeks.

Elsa Ford, 82, founder of the Brentwood/Bay Shore Breast Cancer Coalition, said several of her members who have battled breast cancer live near the park.

“I'm especially concerned with those people that are vulnerable, who have had cancer, to not have it come back,” Ford said. “I think it's going to be the best protection for the people in the community to be involved, to be empowered with the information so they can make choices about their health and their children's health.”