

Park cleanup to last

State: Pollutants at ex-Grumman site extend timeline

ONLY IN NEWSDAY

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The long-delayed cleanup of Bethpage Community Park, which for decades was a chemical waste disposal site for Northrop Grumman before the company donated it to the town, will not be completed until 2025 at the earliest, three years later than expected, state officials said.

Oyster Bay Town officials accused the state and the aerospace giant of dragging their feet on the massive remediation project.

The polluted ballfields have been closed to the public since 2002, preventing an entire generation from using the 3½ acre property. Grumman's responsibility to clean up the park was detailed in a 2013 agreement with the state.

State Department of Environmental Conservation officials contend work has progressed steadily on the cleanup.

Oyster Bay Town Supervisor Joseph Saladino, who has written several letters to Gov. Kathy Hochul in recent months calling for an expedited and more thorough cleanup of the property, said the community has waited long enough to get its park back.

"Ten years is way too long to have so little progress," Saladino said.

Community 'fully confident'

DEC Deputy Commissioner Dereth Glance said that while she empathized with town residents, cleaning up such significant contamination takes time.

"We recognize that this has taken a good long time, but we are following the science and making sure that remediation is protective of human health and the environment," Glance said in an interview. "And when those ballfields are back, the community will be fully confident that they're what they want to have their kids playing on."

In a statement, Hochul spokeswoman Katy Zielinski said the



Bethpage Community Park's ballfields have been closed since 2002, to the frustration of community, officials. ■ Video: newsday.com/nassau

WHAT TO KNOW

- **The long-delayed cleanup** of Bethpage Community Park won't be completed until 2025 at the earliest.
- **Residents are frustrated** and town officials say cleanup needs to be expedited by the state and Northrop Grumman.
- **State environmental officials say** work has progressed steadily on the cleanup.



Oyster Bay Town Supervisor Joseph Saladino

state is "fully committed to a thorough cleanup of the ballfield at the Bethpage Community Park. The Department of Environmental Conservation has made significant progress al-

ready and continues to work closely with the community to ensure a complete and rigorous cleanup that meets our stringent and protective standards."

From the 1930s to 1990s, the

600-acre Grumman facility in Bethpage was home to aerospace manufacturing, research and testing, including the Apollo moon lander and military aircraft.

Grumman donated the 18 acres that would become Bethpage Community Park to the town in 1962.

But it wasn't widely disclosed until 2002 that a portion of the land — where the ballfield was built — had been the company's chemical waste disposal site. Both the company and the U.S. Navy, which owned 105 acres of the 600-acre site, are responsible for cleaning up the region's larger area of groundwater pollution.

In recent years, the park has come to epitomize the corporate and regulatory failures that created the larger groundwater contamination now spreading

beneath Bethpage and surrounding communities.

Newsday highlighted the site in "The Grumman Plume: Decades of Deceit," a 2020 investigation that detailed a history of deceptive statements, missteps and minimization that slowed the cleanup of Long Island's most intractable environmental crisis.

Northrop Grumman officials declined an interview request. In a statement, company spokesman Vic Beck said the company continues "to work closely with federal and state agencies, including the EPA and DEC, to remediate the Bethpage Community Park and protect the health of the community."

2022 reopening goal passes

In 2020, Grumman began a long-delayed thermal heating

until 2025



GOOGLE MAPS / NEWSDAY GRAPHIC BY JESSICA ASBURY

system, which removed 1,400 pounds of the soil contamination from the fields, state officials said. Additional contamination was discovered during the process in an adjacent parking lot, once again delaying the remediation process.

At that time, however, state officials were still confident they could finish the cleanup by the 20th anniversary of the ballfield closure — a date that passed in May.

By January 2023, the state and Grumman expect to begin the second round of thermal remediation of the ballfields, in which the soil is heated through more than 200 wells to release and collect volatile organic compounds, which include the carcinogenic solvent trichloroethylene, or TCE. That process should take six months, officials said, lasting into mid-2023, followed by rounds of testing and decommissioning of the equipment.

But that's only half the problem, DEC officials said.

By 2024, work is expected to begin for the first time on a separate cleanup project to excavate elevated levels of toxic metals and industrial compounds polychlorinated biphenyl, known as PCBs, from the soil. The design phase to remove roughly 50,000 cubic yards of PCBs, department officials said, is underway, with the work expected to begin in the latter portion of 2024 and be completed by early 2025.

"I'm very sensitive to the frustration that the community must feel and the way that this looks," Glance said. "You have property that was gifted to the town that ended up being a settling basin filled with PCB and other contaminants that was one of the key sources for this groundwater. And it's a very, very big cleanup project."

State officials insist they have engaged with the town throughout the process but that the issues now being raised by Oyster Bay officials differ significantly with comments they made during the development of the cleanup plan.

Town officials contend they are not satisfied with the state and Northrop Grumman's remediation schedule. They note that the 2013 Record of Decision fails to set a schedule for the cleanup, or provide enforcement mechanisms if the work is not complete.

"We believe that after 10 years, we've waited long enough and that there's been a failure of oversight and compulsion on Grumman to initiate a cleanup action," said Chicago-based attorney Russell Selman, who represents Oyster Bay.

'Worlds apart' on cleanup

The town has spent \$20 million in taxpayer dollars to test and remediate contaminated soil in a separate 7-acre portion of the park, as part of the 2006 construction of an indoor ice skating rink.

Saladino said the money should be reimbursed to the town as part of the \$104 million consent judgment with Grumman, reached earlier this year to clean up pollution coming from the company's former Bethpage operations. A previous lawsuit from the town seeking reimbursement was rejected by a district court judge in 2009.

Gina McGovern, a Bethpage resident, lives less than two blocks from the park and called it a "scandal" how long it's taken to remove the contaminants.

"It's outrageous how long it's taken Grumman and the Navy. They've dragged their heels beyond belief," said McGovern, who has two adult children and a grandson who have never been able to utilize the fields. "It's ridiculous. There's no reason why this shouldn't have been done sooner so the kids can play on the field again."

But the delayed timeline is just one of the town's main complaints.

Oyster Bay long has argued the property should be cleaned to unrestricted use — the highest, and therefore most costly — level of remediation.

But the state insists that cleaning the property to "restricted residential" use is consistent with recreational uses such as public parks.

Unrestricted use, Glance said, is generally utilized only for single-family homes where occupants could plant a vegetable garden in the ground.

"We don't get it," Saladino said. "It just defies common sense to leave the contaminants in the ground. Everyone agrees that this site is one of the main sources of plume contamination, so why wouldn't you force Grumman to remove all of these toxic soils once and for all?"

Oyster Bay Town Engineer Matt Russo said they are "worlds apart" from the state on a remediation plan. "We are looking at years before this is complete."

McGovern, however, said residents just want the park reopened.

"The money it would have taken Grumman to clean this up when this was all first found," she said, "they could find in their sofa cushions."

With Paul LaRocco

911 CALLS DETAIL N.C. MASS SHOOTING CHAOS

The Associated Press

Callers who dialed 911 during a fatal North Carolina shooting rampage described encountering bodies on the streets or front yards of their neighborhood and along a trail popular with runners and bikers, according to newly released recordings.

The 911 calls released late Friday by the Raleigh Police Department illustrate the chaos of the scene on Thursday in which authorities said a 15-year-old boy began firing in a residential neighborhood and then on the walking trail, killing five and wounding two others. The recordings also provide new details about the teen, with multiple callers saying he was wearing camouflage and one caller saying he was carrying a shotgun.

In one of the first calls, around 5:12 p.m. Thursday, a man describes seeing the shooter kill off-duty police officer Gabriel Torres in the Heddingham neighborhood northeast of downtown. The caller frantically asks for help.

"He just walked right through and shot him. He walked by and shot him for no reason," the caller says, adding, in reference to Torres: "It looks like he's bleeding from his chest."

The caller says the shooter was wearing camouflage and was moving toward the Neuse River Greenway Trail that runs behind the neighborhood.

In a separate call around the same time, a neighbor reports hearing multiple shots and people screaming, then looking out her window and seeing two gunshot victims.

"There's somebody that's

laying by the bush and somebody that's laying on the porch," she says.

Minutes later, another caller says the suspect was carrying what appeared to be a shotgun.

"There's a white kid running out here with a shotgun, he shot somebody. . . . He ran back into the woods," the caller said.

A few minutes later, a man tells the dispatcher he was on the trail when he encountered a woman unconscious. Illustrating the confusion over what was happening, the dispatcher tells the man there are reports of an active shooter, and he screams: "What?!"

As he gets closer to the woman and tries to relay details about the location, he interjects: "Oh my god!"

"Sir, what's going on there?" the dispatcher asks.

"Um, um, um. She's bleeding," he says. He then realizes there's another shooting victim on the trail.

"Oh my god, there's another person," the caller says. He can then be heard telling other people at the scene, "Guys, we got to get out of the area. She said there might be an active shooter around here."

The shooting drew officers from numerous agencies to the neighborhood as the suspect eluded capture for several hours. The victims were different races and ranged in age from 16 to their late 50s and were felled going about their daily routines, police and loved ones said.

The suspect was hospitalized in critical condition following his arrest, but authorities have not said how he was injured. His identity has not been released, nor has a motive for the attack been disclosed.



Police responded to Thursday's mass shooting in Raleigh, N.C. The suspect, a 15-year-old boy, was hospitalized in critical condition.