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## Shinnecock Burial Grounds Preserved at Sugar Loaf Hill

📅 July 23, 2021 👤 Beth Young 💬 0 Comments

*Pictured Above: The property to be preserved at the summit of Sugar Loaf Hill*

The Peconic Land Trust has closed this week on the purchase of a 4.5-acre property at the summit of Sugar Loaf Hill, the Shinnecock Nation's ancestral burial grounds, with the intention to preserve it.

The Southampton Town Board voted unanimously June 8 to spend \$5.3 million to purchase the development rights on the property from the Peconic Land Trust through the Community Preservation Fund and return control of the site to the Shinnecock Nation.

**The property**, at 536 Montauk Highway, owned by the Nappa family, was listed by Douglas Elliman Real Estate for \$5.9 million, and included a six-bedroom house and swimming pool on a bluff overlooking Shinnecock Bay. Native people on Long Island had traditionally built their burial grounds on hills overlooking the water.

Roger Waters of Pink Floyd, who lives on the South Fork, contributed to financing the land deal, along with other local donors including local philanthropist Barbara Slifka, according to Peconic Land Trust President John v.H. Halsey, who added at the June 8 Southampton Town Board vote that donations are still being accepted for the transaction costs and conservation of the site.

The property stands at the summit of Sugar Loaf Hill, which had been the Shinnecock Nation's burial grounds for thousands of years before the land was taken from the Nation by New York State and Southampton Town in 1859.

The house is slated to be demolished, with the care of the burial grounds turned back over to the Shinnecock Nation, while Southampton Town and the Land Trust will build walking trails that


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educate the public about the history of the Shinnecock Nation.

The cause of returning sacred properties to the Shinnecock Nation gained steam last year after the release of Treva Wurmfield's documentary "[Conscience Point](#)," about Shinnecock tribal member Rebecca Genia fight, and the fight of the Shinnecock Nation, to raise awareness of their burial grounds at the Shinnecock Hills Golf Club during the 2018 U.S Open, which was played there.

## #PreserveShinnecockHills



**Chenae Bullock** started this petition to Jay Schneiderman and 1 other

The Shinnecock Hills are the sacred burial grounds of the Indigenous People of Long Island.

12,918 have signed. Let's get to 15,000!



**Raven Mays** signed 2 hours ago

**Yoana Rojas** signed 2 hours ago

First name

Last name

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Riverhead, 11901  
United States

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*A 2019 change.org petition asking Southampton Town to do more to preserve Shinnecock burial grounds.*

Also in 2018, not far from the summit of Sugar Loaf Hill on Hawthorne Road, developers working on a construction site found human remains on a property that has since been acquired by Southampton Town through its Community Preservation Fund, spurring the town to [adopt a local law last year](#) to protect unmarked indigenous graves, along with a moratorium on development in the area.

New York State is one of just four states in the U.S. that does not have a law on the books protecting Native gravesites.

"The summit of Shinnecock Hills is extremely important to the Shinnecock people. It's their ancestral burial ground," said Southampton Town Supervisor Jay Schneiderman as the board voted to approve the land deal on June 8. "There's documented burial pits there, and according to people that I know from the reservation, this is the most sacred site to them. This is probably the single most meaningful thing the town can do."

"This is a long time in the making and there is literally some sadness that this area that is so sacred to the Shinnecock people through the years they've watched development here and other places as well," he added. "We can understand but never feel quite the pain they must feel because of that. I think it is a significant step forward in terms of recognizing some of the harm that has been done, but taking a small step toward cleansing a wound that is really quite deep."

"It was not that long ago that we were standing here clapping for the Graves Protection Act. Now we're here with our neighbors on something that means so much to the Shinnecock people," said Shinnecock Tribal Chairman Bryan Polite at the June 8 vote. "I cannot express how grateful the Shinnecock Nation is to put away some of the past friction between the Shinnecock Nation and our neighbors. This doesn't just affect us. It affects the entire neighborhood."

"Our ancestors thank you. I thank you," he added. "As 382-year-neighbors, we have a lot to address, but this is a huge step forward. It's not every day that a town board works with their local indigenous people with something so special."

Roger Waters, who was with members of the Shinnecock Nation at the June 8 town board meeting, thanked the board but declined to speak in response to the vote.

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 631.329.2200  
**NYS Mental Health Hotline:**  
 1.844.863.9314  
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**Mental Health/Substance ER:**  
 90 Adams Ave., 631.952.3333  
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 northforkaa.com  
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 www.fsl-li.org

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**Beth Young**  
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Jun 23, 2022



**Beth Young**

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"This is about a hill, a summit, the most sacred place to the Shinnecock people, a place where their ancestors were buried 3,000 years ago, and I acknowledge for all parties involved that the land we live on here in Southampton is the ancestral land of the Shinnecock people," said Peconic Land Trust Chairman John v.H. Halsey. "This acquisition also represents the possibility for a new paradigm basis for greater trust between the Shinnecock people and the Town of Southampton and everyone else who lives here ... It is about building a new bridge, a bridge to one another based on hope and mutual respect."

"It is our intent to manage this land, with the Shinnecock people, as a place for their ancestors to rest in peace, as well as a place for the public to enjoy its beauty and learn about the history and culture of the Shinnecock Nation," he added.

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**Beth Young**

Beth Young has been covering the East End since the 1990s. In her spare time, she runs around the block, tinkers with bicycles, tries not to drown in the Peconic Bay and hopes to grow the perfect tomato. You can send her a message at [editor@eastendbeacon.com](mailto:editor@eastendbeacon.com)

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