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LIBERTY STATE PARK
REVITALIZATION PROGRAM

LSP DESIGN TASK FORCE BRIEFING

October 16, 2023

Background

Liberty State Park (LSP) is one of few remaining contiguous open green spaces along the highly developed Northern New Jersey/New York City waterfront. LSP is comprised of ~600 acres of uplands and ~600 acres of riparian area and open water, including the 21-acre Caven Point peninsula, which is one of the last undisturbed natural areas within the greater Hudson River Estuary. All lands and waters of LSP are encumbered by federal and state law restrictions that limit development of LSP and restrict its use to natural resource conservation and public outdoor recreation purposes.

Industrial Legacy & Interior Restoration

Approximately 235 acres located in the center/west of the park, known as the LSP *Interior*, have long been fenced off and unavailable to the public due to the contamination of environmental media from historic industrial activities. Through a state-federal partnership between the NJ Department of Environmental Protection (DEP) and the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers (USACE), plans to clean up the legacy industrial pollution, conduct ecological restoration, and construct nature-based solutions that would serve critical flooding and climate resilience functions for the communities west and north of LSP were proposed in September 2020.

Early Public Engagement

Between December 2020 and June 2021, DEP hosted four well-attended public meetings solicit and respond to concerns of community members and park stakeholders interested in the restoration of the Interior and its integration with the presently accessible areas of LSP. In response to early public and host community feedback concerning the need for active recreation amenities such as dedicated or multi-use athletic fields, DEP suggested that significant park acreage be reserved for the development of public outdoor active recreation amenities both within and beyond the Interior.

Initial Task Force

In August 2021, Commissioner LaTourette established the Liberty State Park Design Task Force by way of [DEP Administrative Order 2021-18](#) to advise DEP on iterative park planning and design decisions and, most importantly, to support DEP in operationalizing public feedback to ensure that park improvement decisions were responsive to and likely to meet the diverse needs of the public. The Task Force met six times between September 2021 and June 2022 and prepared a suite of general recommendations that had broad consensus, which were committed to a written [Summary of Advisory Group Consideration & Recommendations](#) dated March 2023.

Identification of Park Improvement Phases

The September 2020 to June 2022 public process clarified that a phased approach to the revitalization would be most appropriate, especially considering the vast size and scale of LSP, the lag in availability of land for improvement given time-consuming contaminant cleanup needs, and the varied legal limitations on use that apply to the individual parcels of land comprising LSP.

The three-phase [Liberty State Park Revitalization Program](#) would restore and enhance natural features; provide active outdoor recreation amenities, including athletics facilities; add arts, cultural, and community spaces; expand passive recreation opportunities; improve transportation to and within the park; and build resilience to flooding and climate change through nature-based solutions.

Phase 1A: Cleanup, Restoration & Resilience (Interior Section)

This phase includes the cleanup of the presently inaccessible 235-acre Interior area and construction of natural resource restoration projects that also serve as critical flooding and climate resilience functions.

- Cleanup of 230+ acres long closed to the public due to legacy industrial contamination
- Conduct ecological restoration and construction of nature-based solutions that serve critical flooding and climate resilience functions for the community
- Reintroduce native tidal and non-tidal wetlands, meadows, and urban forest
- Create hilltop scenic overlooks with NJ/NY harbor and skyline views
- Bound together all features in a 5.6 mile walking and running trail network
- Include cleanup at the site of the future Southern Athletics Hub, which will be planned concurrent to the remediation for development in Phase 2 following the cleanup

Phase 1B: Immediate Active Recreation, Arts & Culture (Northern Section)

This phase includes the design and construction of public outdoor recreation, arts, and cultural facilities along the Audrey Zapp Drive corridor at the park's northern end, including a Northern Athletics Hub, which could commence construction in 2024, providing more immediate opportunities for the public while the interior cleanup proceeds and land is prepared for the future construction of a Southern Athletics Hub.

- Construct public amenities along the Audrey Zapp Drive corridor, *i.e.*, from Jersey Avenue to the Central Railroad of New Jersey (CRRNJ) Terminal Building
- Create the *Northern Athletics Hub* for public outdoor active recreation amenities, including multi-purpose athletic fields and support facilities
- Rehabilitate and repurpose historic CRRNJ train sheds as covered outdoor public community space and marketplace
- Develop arts and cultural spaces, including public outdoor amphitheater with harbor/skyline backdrop
- Add playground, concessions, and other public gathering spaces
- Evaluate and begin transportation and internal circulation improvements

Phase 2: Holistic Long-Term Master Plan (Southern & Waterfront Sections)

This phase includes the preparation of a holistic Master Plan that evaluates park-wide revitalization opportunities, integrates revitalization completed in Phases 1A & 1B, and develops specific designs for the construction of the Southern Athletics Hub. The Master Plan, which will be developed through a continuous engagement process, would:

- Assess opportunities and plan improvements for the park's Southern Area (*i.e.*, Morris Pesin Drive Corridor) and Waterfront Area (*i.e.*, the Freedom Way Corridor)
- Create the *Southern Athletics Hub* to complement Phase 1B recreation amenities with specific elements selected through public process
- Public athletics could include track and field center, integrated multi-use fields, basketball courts, racquet courts, skate park, and support facilities

- Evaluate feasibility of potential community pool, aquatics center, community gardens
- Enhance coastal wetland habitat and resources in the southern and waterfront areas
- Integrate elements of earlier phases into holistic parkwide network
- Develop long-term parking and intra-park transit solutions

Expanded Task Force

In July 2022, the Legislature passed [P.L. 2022, c. 45](#), which acknowledged the Task Force established by [DEP Administrative Order 2021-18](#) and expanded it from 17 to 23 members. The legislation retained the original 17 Task Force members and added two appointees each from the Governor, Senate President, and Assembly Speaker. These appointments were complete as of October 10, 2023, and the expanded Task Force will meet for the first time on November 28, 2023.

Anticipated Task Force Business

The Task Force is charged with advising DEP on:

1. Short-term action items designed to improve public use and enjoyment of conservation and recreation areas within Liberty State Park; and
2. A long-term master plan for Liberty State Park that includes the (a) improvement of park facilities, programs, and amenities, (b) creation of new transportation and mobility services to the park to ensure equal access for all community residents to the park and within the park, and (c) further preservation of the park's natural resources and wildlife and protection against climate change.

Consistent with these charges, DEP anticipates that near-term Task Force business will include providing advice and recommendations on:

1. **Immediate Active Recreation, Arts & Culture (Phase 1B) Design Alternatives.** DEP has retained park design and engineering professionals to develop design alternatives to prompt public and Task Force feedback. Public comment on design alternatives will be solicited at an October 18 open house and online. The Task Force will be presented with more detailed design choices and asked to advise the DEP on alternatives for elements such as: the *Northern Athletics Hub* for public outdoor active recreation, including multi-purpose athletic fields, as well as arts, cultural, and community gathering spaces, including a public outdoor amphitheater, revitalized CRRNJ train shed options, and public outdoor art installations.
2. **Master Plan (Phase 2) Launch.** Considering the amenities to be included in Phases 1A and 1B, as well as the public comment to date, the Task Force will be asked to advise DEP on elements for suggested inclusion in the development of the Phase 2 Master Plan. Alternative Master Plan concepts will then be developed by park design professionals for further consideration by the Task Force and solicitation of public comment in early 2024.

LSP Revitalization Program Materials

All planning and design materials are available for review at <https://dep.nj.gov/revitalizelsp/>, including:

- Plans and Reports
- Public Stakeholder Meeting Presentations
- Public Stakeholder Meeting Recordings

LSP Design Task Force Members

The following list comprises the full members of the 23-member Task Force pursuant to [P.L. 2022, c. 45](#) as of October 13, 2023.

1. **John Cecil, Co-Chair**
DEP Assistant Commissioner for State Parks, Forests & Historic Sites
2. **Maggie McCann-Johns, Co-Chair**
DEP Administrator of Urban State Parks & Initiatives
3. **Charles Brian Shankle**
Superintendent of Liberty State Park
4. **Stacey MacEwan**
DEP Bureau Chief, Office of Natural Resource Restoration
5. **Sam Pesin**
President of the Friends of Liberty State Park
6. **Elnardo Webster**
President of Liberty State Park For All
7. **Hon. Steven Fulop**
Mayor of Jersey City
8. **Lucinda McLaughlin**
Jersey City Director of Recreation and Youth Development
9. **Hon. Jerry Walker**
Hudson County Commissioner for District 3
10. **Michael Ascolese**
Hudson County Chief of Division of Parks
11. **Norma Fernandez**
Jersey City Public Schools Superintendent
12. **Richard T. Smith**
NAACP, New Jersey State Conference President
13. **Charles Mainor**
NAACP, Jersey City Branch President
14. **Jane Cohen**
Public Member appointed by the Governor
15. **Paulina Banasiak**
Public Member appointed by the Governor
16. **Edward Oatman**
Public Member appointed by the Senate President
17. **David Passante**
Public Member appointed by the Senate President
18. **Tonya L. Keyes**
Public Member appointed by the Speaker of the General Assembly
19. **Franklin Walker**
Public Member appointed by the Speaker of the General Assembly
20. **Luz Guzman**
Jersey City Resident Appointed by Co-Chairs, approved by DEP Commissioner
21. **Robert Hurley, Sr.**
Jersey City Resident Appointed by Co-Chairs, approved by DEP Commissioner
22. **Meera Jaffrey**
Jersey City Resident Appointed by Co-Chairs, approved by DEP Commissioner
23. **Paula Mahayosnand**
Jersey City Resident Appointed by Co-Chairs, approved by DEP Commissioner