

# Liberty State Park Design Task Force Meeting

Saturday, March 2, 2024  
10 a.m.: 1 p.m.

Liberty State Park, Central Railroad of New Jersey Terminal, Blue Comet Auditorium  
1 Audrey Zapp Drive, Jersey City, NJ 07305

Task Force Member or Attendee	Attendance
<b>Shawn LaTourette</b> DEP Commissioner	Present
<b>John Cecil, Co-Chair</b> DEP Assistant Commissioner for State Parks, Forests & Historic Sites	Present
<b>Maggie McCann-Johns, Co-Chair</b> DEP Administrator of Urban State Parks & Initiatives	Present
<b>Charles Brian Shankle</b> Superintendent of Liberty State Park	Present
<b>Stacey MacEwan</b> DEP Bureau Chief, Office of Natural Resource Restoration	Present
<b>Sam Pesin</b> President of the Friends of Liberty State Park	Present
<b>Elnardo Webster</b> President of Liberty State Park for All	Present
<b>Hon. Steven Fulop</b> Mayor of Jersey City	Represented by Barkha Patel
<b>Lucinda McLaughlin</b> Jersey City Director of Recreation and Youth Development	Present
<b>Hon. Jerry Walker</b> Hudson County Commissioner for District 3	Present
<b>Michael Ascolese</b> Hudson County Chief of Division of Parks	Present
<b>Norma Fernandez</b> Jersey City Public Schools Superintendent	Absent
<b>Richard T. Smith</b> NAACP, New Jersey State Conference President	Absent
<b>Charles Mainor</b> NAACP, Jersey City Branch President	Present
<b>Jane Cohen</b> Public Member appointed by the Governor <i>Former Director of the NJ Governor's Office of Climate Action</i>	Absent
<b>Paulina Banasiak</b> Public Member appointed by the Governor <i>Vice President at the Zita Group</i>	Present
<b>Edward Oatman</b> Public Member appointed by the Senate President <i>Union County Manager</i>	Present
<b>David Passante</b> Public Member appointed by the Senate President <i>NJ Business Owner, Royal Printing Service</i>	Present

<b>Tonya L. Keyes</b> Public Member appointed by the Speaker of the General Assembly <i>Jersey City Business Owner, Keyes Red Door Realty &amp; Associates</i>	Present
<b>Franklin Walker</b> Public Member appointed by the Speaker of the General Assembly <i>Former Jersey City Public Schools Superintendent</i>	Present
<b>Luz Guzman</b> Jersey City Resident Appointed by DEP <i>Jersey City Environmental Commissioner</i> <i>Friends of Lincoln Park Member</i>	Present
<b>Robert Hurley, Sr.</b> Jersey City Resident Appointed by DEP <i>Former Jersey City High School Basketball Coach</i> <i>President, People's Park Foundation</i>	Present
<b>Meera Jaffrey</b> Jersey City Resident Appointed by DEP <i>Retired Jersey City Public School Teacher</i> <i>Member of the NJ Sierra Club and Jersey City Reservoir Alliance</i>	Present
<b>Paula Mahayosnand</b> Jersey City Resident Appointed by DEP <i>President, Jersey City Parks Coalition</i>	Present

## Meeting Notes

1. **Call to Order (Co-Chairs John Cecil, Assistant Commissioner, Parks, Forests, Historic Sites & Maggie McCann-Johns, Urban Parks Administrator)**
  - a. Call to order and roll call by John Cecil
  - b. Quorum met
2. **Commissioner's Welcome (Commissioner Shawn M. LaTourette)**
  - a. LSP Design Task Force Charge
    - i. Short-term action items to improve public use and enjoyment of conservation and recreation areas within LSP
    - ii. Long-term master plan that includes
      1. Improvement of park facilities, programs, and amenities
      2. Creation of new transportation and mobility services to and within the park
      3. Further preservation of the park's natural resources and wildlife and protection against climate change
    - iii. Task Force members are required to consider public comments; these comments should inform the advisory recommendations that are shared with DEP
  - b. Revitalization Status
    - i. LSP-Interior (Phase 1A)
      1. Cleanup, restoration & resilience
        - a. Broke ground on a 234-acre cleanup and restoration in October 2023, Phase 1A will add climate and flood resilience features that better protect LSP and neighbors from both 100: and 500: year storm events
        - b. These efforts are contracted, 100% designed, fully funded, and in progress
    - ii. LSP-North (Phase 1B)
      1. Active recreation, arts & culture
        - a. Includes the immediate development of new amenities along the Audrey Zapp Drive Corridor, the restoration of the CRRNJ train sheds, a Northern Athletics Area, and a waterfront amphitheater

- b. Today, the Task Force provides recommendations in view of ~2,700 public comments collected
    - c. Next, the DEP will finalize the plan based on comments and recommendations, contract engineered designs needed to bid and begin construction, inform legislature of additional funding needs
- iii. LSP-South (Phase 2)
  - 1. Southern & waterfront area
    - a. The goal is to create a master plan for the Morris Pesin, Thomas McGovern, and Freedom Way Corridors
    - b. Plan and design the 50+ acre Southern Athletics Hub, outdoor public recreation and conservation improvements, and secure and improve unstructured spaces capable of hosting large public celebrations
    - c. Today, the Task Force provides recommendations for uses and features throughout LSP-South

### 3. LSP-North (Phase 1B) Design Recommendations

#### a. Task Force Review of Public Comments

Collected data:

- i. 209 live public comments on 10/18/2023, 2,511 online public comments

Categories:

- ii. Trainshed
  - 1. **Lucinda McLaughlin:** Encouraged by positive reactions overall, wants to focus on positives and possibility of success in this area
  - 2. **Meera Jaffrey:** Opportunity to highlight diversity (in music, dance, theater)
  - 3. **Sam Pesin:** Supports fairs, markets, and events in trainshed, emphasizing need to focus on open spaces for the public
    - a. Started with criticism of parking and chair availability at meeting, moved onto a general comment of support, was asked to specify the comment to trainshed
  - 4. **Franklin Walker:** Emphasizing the need to protect the history of the area but not at the expense of the public and their use and enjoyment of the park
  - 5. **Edward Oatman:** Asked about fencing around the baseball field, overall loved the Trainshed concept, asking how GO budget address affects the plans for this
    - a. Commissioner answered with we have funding to get things started, including using lawsuit funds
  - 6. **Luz Guzman:** Who would be managing this space and have you considered the role of nonprofits?
    - a. Commissioner answered with importance of inclusive programming, imagines that some type of contractive management will be put in place, will not be privatized, run by the State Park Service
  - 7. **Elnardo Webster:** Question about ancillary activities around trainshed (parking, vendors, etc.)
    - a. John Cecil answered with this is a high-level discussion about ideas and programming, parallel to that detailed planning process includes discussions about parking considerations and more
  - 8. **Paula Mahayosnand:** Agrees that opening that space up for the public is heartening, NJ Historic Preservation conference will be held at LSP in June and that is exciting as well
  - 9. **Barkha Patel:** Encourages going beyond minimum standards accessibility to incorporate things like audio/visual accessibility as well
    - a. John Cecil brought up sensory trail idea, Maggie emphasizes going beyond ADAy compliance
- iii. History/Culture
  - 1. Folks are in agreement, no one had specific comments as there was a lot of overlap with the trainshed and this category

iv. Athletics

1. **Maggie McCann-Johns** emphasized the wide range of comments that were given by the public, importance of location and creation of multi-use spaces
2. **John Cecil** presenting alternatives to the current plans in place
  - a. Alternative 1: Two sports fields with a running track and flexible open field
  - b. Alternative 2: Flexible sports field surrounded by a running track
  - c. Alternative 3: Flexible sports field without a running track
  - d. Alternative 4: 6 basketball courts, 4 tennis courts, 6 pickleball courts
3. **Paula Mahayosnand**: Feels she may let someone down because they might build one thing first versus the other, wants to make sure the Task Force is meeting the recreational needs for the community
4. **Franklin Walker**: Importance of being inclusive in the design, community needs at forefront, recognize the need to attract folks to come here, promote this place, and spend their day here! Train people in developing behavior that supports safe movement.
5. **Sam Pesin**: Friends feel any one of the 4 alternatives could work, need more community input on exactly which one to go with
6. **Barkha Patel**: Glad we are revisiting the placement of the fields and wants to highlight bike parking places embedded in with vehicle parking, thinking about cross-sections and increasing the width of those. Lighting needs should meet dark sky standards, keeping in mind wildlife and environmental considerations. Incorporate more wilderness quality of the environment (an opportunity to not highlight the parking lot first).
7. **Tonya L. Keyes**: Emphasizing the need for day-use areas
8. **Lucinda McLaughlin**: Thinks that the responsibility of the Task Force is to think about every single person and their comments. Emphasizes the idea of connectivity and forward-thinking to think about Phase 1B in line with Phase 2, looking at an example of somewhere with a mix of active and passive recreation options (Turkey Brook Park). Build up and renovate other acreage and not focus on next to marina if we don't need to. Not appropriate to focus only on needs of marina parking lot users, need to think about accessibility in terms of bringing *everyone* to the park. Creating a hub of active recreational facilities.

v. Art

1. **Maggie McCann-Johns** summarized the need for careful selection of art and artists with integration in the park and the need for local focus in art
2. **Lucinda McLaughlin**: Raising maintenance concerns for amphitheaters
3. **Sam Pesin**: Separate fast and slow paths, North Cove field is perfect place for all this since there are already concerts and things happening there
4. **Edward Oatman**: Consider wheelchair accessibility, add in a ramp
5. **Richard T. Smith**: Echoing Edward Oatman's comment, adding on that each level of the amphitheater should be wheelchair accessible, highlighting that it is not fair to place all those folks at the back for the sake of accessibility
6. **Franklin Walker**: Wanted more time with the comments and opportunity to provide more comments
7. **Paula Mahayosnand**: Emphasizing need for no obstruction, concerns about trash, emphasizing need to respect the park
8. **Lucinda McLaughlin**: Considerations of equipment and need to highlight the activities that are already happening, perhaps formalizing the activities in their locations that are already happening

4. LSP-South (Phase 2) Planning Recommendations

- a. **Richard T. Smith**: Asked clarification question about graphic shown
- b. **Sam Pesin**: Focus on public comments on how to break up the acreage into amount of fields/their types. Freedom Way Corridor should be mostly left alone, the "great waterfront lawn." Need to update the jetties as they are eroding for fishing access, and other activities.

- c. **Lucinda McLaughlin:** Smart for consultants to help Task Force to in their forward-thinking. Asked about the latest technology in sports fields and finding moveable parts for use in multi-purpose fields, in establishing athletics if the Task Force focuses on 3-4 fields of the same type. Including family sports such as playground inclusion by using a holistic family approach.
- d. **Luz Guzman:** Asking about 2026 World Cup and their fan fest activities. Are there going to be viewing stands for folks near athletic fields?
- e. **Elnardo Webster:** Does not want fields to be used as stormwater management
- f. **Edward Oatman:** Suggestion for a Task Force only closed session to bounce ideas off of each other
- g. **Paula Mahayosnand:** Southern part of the park lends itself to better transportation planning, opportunity for this hub to be very accessible. Lack of amenities on the south side.
- h. **Jerry Walker:** Revenue opportunity for the State, what was the process of selecting consultants?
- i. **Franklin Walker:** Wants to be sure the needs of the community are driving plans and not the plans driving needs
- j. **Tonya L. Keyes:** Also wants a closed session to bring up concerns and talk through specifics
- k. **Luz Guzman:** Posits that there should be someone with database access to analyze the deficit of Jersey City residents in park/fields/recreation access
- l. **Jerry Walker:** The reality is in JC there are very few safe spaces, and the kids on the south side deserve an opportunity for those safe spaces and gathering places
- m. **Robert Hurley:** Also wants a closed session. Encouraged by progress.

## 5. Open Public Comment

- a. The public had the opportunity to provide comments. There were comments from folks physically in the room as well as those watching on zoom.

## 6. Adjourn

- a. The meeting ended at 4:30 p.m.