

The Record

Editorial

LET LIBERTY STATE PARK BE A PARK FOR EVERYONE

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IN THE next few weeks, Governor Whitman is expected to make the final decision on whether 150 acres in the heart of Liberty State Park will become a golf course, or a people's park.

The choice is between a quick fix that will tie up the middle of the park for 30 years and a gradual greening process that would create a public space for all New Jerseyans to enjoy. The farther into the future you look, the more obvious the choice becomes. To reach its full potential, Liberty State Park doesn't need fairways and sandtraps that would serve relatively few people. It needs great lawns and picnic groves.

The park, located on the Hudson River waterfront in Jersey City, is already New Jersey's most popular state park, with more than 2 million visitors a year. Major draws include the Liberty Science Center and the Circle Line ferries to nearby Ellis Island and the Statue of Liberty.

But the park's potential is in its infancy.

Once fully restored, the majestic brick Central Railroad terminal, which served as the gateway to America for millions of immigrants and which offers one of the most breath-taking views of New York harbor, will also be a draw. And planned light-rail service along the waterfront from Bayonne to Ridgfield will make the park more accessible by public transportation.

The Liberty State Park Development Corp., the private non-profit group that operates the park, has been touting the golf course as the only quick and cost-effective way to develop the 150 acres. What the golf-course plan would do, above all else, is to put the middle of the park off-limits to the vast majority of the public for three decades the length of the golf course lease.

The development corporation says that the golf course, backed by \$20 million in taxpayer-supported bonds, will pay for itself. If the corporation is wrong, as several experts contend, then all New Jerseyans

will help foot the bill for a golf course used by a tiny percentage of the public.

Aside from the pressure being exerted by the development corporation, there is no great sense of urgency to develop the remaining part of the park. At state hearings this summer, speaker after speaker representing regional civic and environmental groups urged that the park be developed gradually, with the help of volunteers, as state, federal, and private funding become available. Thousands of New Jerseyans echoed those sentiments in letters to Mrs. Whitman.

To build a golf course on this precious real estate is to sell Liberty State Park short. To lay the groundwork for a people's park is a decision that will benefit New Jerseyans for generations to come.

The choice, and Liberty State Park's future, is in Mrs. Whitman's hands.