

GET THE FACTS

The future of Liberty State Park is at stake. The Governor's philosophy - that a park that doesn't pay for itself is wasting money - couldn't be more wrong. New Jerseyans have always supported spending on parks. LSP is a priceless public resource. Its vital role as a peaceful urban open space park - "green infrastructure" - and its true purpose as a free park would be severely diminished by these plans which would turn LSP into a commercial venue.

The Governor's 18-page report calling for LSP development is full of myths and misinformation. DEP report: <http://www.nj.gov/dep/sustainableparks/docs/dep-lsp-report.pdf>

Friends 11 page opposition summary statement is at
<http://www.folsp.org/opposition%20statement%20to%20NJDEP%20Commercialization-Privatization%20Proposals%20for%20LSP%2012-20-15.pdf>

False: The Governor's proposal only accounts for a small fraction of the Park's total land area. Liberty State Park has 1600 acres – surely we can develop on 38 of those acres.

Fact: Liberty State Park is 1200 acres, 600 acres of land and 600 acres of water/marsh and not 1600 acres as the DEP report claims. The planned Interior natural area is 240 acres of the 600. Not counting buildings, roads, parking lots, Liberty Walk, already leased land, uplands of two existing natural areas, etc. the 38 acres is a much higher percentage of available open space. Additionally, there's the inevitable impact of weekend traffic jams, new parking lots etc. which will restrict and disrupt LSP's public access, enjoyment and peacefulness and permanently alter LSP's true purpose and landscape.

- The park is heavily used for varied free unstructured recreation without admission fees - for relaxing, picnicking, barbecuing, bicycling, walking, jogging, flying kites, enjoying nature and views, spontaneous ballgames, free concerts, etc. Also, LSP is usually booked with a variety of special events on May through October weekends.

False: Governor Christie is right that LSP should pay for itself and that the park has a "deficit" of \$2 million a year.

Fact: Parks are a Public Good which New Jerseyans have voted in favor of time and again.

- A park is a park and don't have "deficits". Since LSP raises \$1.5 million annually, LSP only needs \$2 million from the \$39 million state park legislative budget. So instead of calling the \$2 million a "deficit", the \$1.5 million raised is a contribution to the park's budget, and decreases the park's share of the annual state park allocation. What is wrong in continuing to take LSP operational costs from the annual State Parks budget? The \$1.5 million comes from the marina and restaurant leases, the ferry concession and special events .LSP should continue to get its share of state park funding from the legislature.

- NY state has launched “NY Parks 2020 – Renewing the Stewardship of our State Park System” and will invest \$900 million in its state parks in the next five years; Governor Cuomo’s letter to New Yorkers begins with “The NY State park system is one of our state’s most treasured public assets, and one of the most prized services State government provides its citizens”.

False: Liberty State Park is underutilized and millions more would come to LSP with the DEP’s commercialization proposals.

Fact: Liberty State Park is jam-packed on spring, summer and warm fall weekends and runs out of parking spaces on many Sundays. Any urban park would naturally see its heaviest usage on weekends. LSP is regularly used by local residents for varied free, unstructured recreation and is enjoyed by New Jerseyans and by tourists from around our nation and world.

- **Over 4.5 million people come to LSP each year** with 600,000 going to Liberty Science Center, 600,000 going to the Statue Cruises ferries, and many for special events such as charity runs, festivals etc. The majority come to enjoy the urban open space and views.
- **Liberty State Park is booked almost every weekend with a variety of special events** every weekend from May through Oct and which are managed effectively by park staff.

False: Commercial development would improve the value of the park.

Fact: LSP is a priceless state and national treasure as the free park behind Lady Liberty and Ellis Island. Green open space is an invaluable asset to local communities. Mounting evidence and numerous studies – including from the DEP itself – show that benefits from public parks include:

- **Increased property values.** Proximity to parks has been found to have a positive impact on property values. In addition to helping homeowners, local governments get increased revenue from property taxes. Some studies have shown this effect to be quite large – for example, one study estimated that the “Central Park effect” increased the aggregate market value of all properties within three blocks of New York’s most famous park by a whopping \$17.7 billion. More residential development is already planned near LSP.
- **An improved quality of life for urban residents.** Parks provide open space for recreational activities as well as a sanctuary from densely populated and concrete areas. No wonder studies show that the closer people live to parks, the happier they are.
- **LSP’s value to its primarily urban users as traffic jams would hinder and discourage weekend free use of the park.**
- **Sustainability and resiliency benefits.** Parks play an important role in preserving and supporting healthy environments. Trees help fight global warming by absorbing carbon dioxide and other pollutants; moreover, tree canopies, garden vegetation, grassy areas, and other green spaces in parks capture and filter rainwater, reducing the amount of oil, salt, and pollutants flowing from roads and lawns into nearby waterways.

False: Advocates like the Friends of Liberty State Park are against any development or commercialization efforts whatsoever.

Fact: Appropriate, small-scale privatization would be fine such as a small Terminal restaurant (but no hotel), temporary winter skating rink, food carts, kayak rentals, current bike rentals, etc. but not leases for large scale facilities, and extra park staff must manage special events, including periodic weekend concerts and Terminal after-hours events, not a private corporation. Governor Christie's plans go far beyond these reasonable park-compatible proposals and would turn LSP into a commercial venue.

False: The Governor's plans are needed to "create a world-class destination".

Fact: LSP is already a "world class destination", as a sacred American public space behind Lady Liberty and Ellis Island and its dramatic and always inspiring views of those national monuments, Manhattan and the New York harbor. The Statue Cruises ferries and Liberty Science Center are enough "tourist" attractions and visitors from everywhere enjoy the expansive open green lawns and beautiful gardens. The nature restoration of LSP's Interior, with diverse ecological areas and trails, will make the park even greater and an eco-tourism destination.

False: "New revenue-producing activity should generate as much income as possible for park operations without intruding on existing park uses - raising revenue without compromising their mission or their availability to the general public."

Fact:

- **These plans will do severe harm to LSP and inevitably will be "an intrusion and compromise the park's use and mission. The negative impact of such facilities and leasing out waterfront lawns to an event company, would go far beyond the immediate acreage** that gets developed, totally altering the nature of the park. Commercializing and privatizing the free park behind Lady Liberty with these plans is not compatible with the purpose, meaning and spirit of the park, envisioned and funded to be a free urban waterfront park behind the world's greatest symbol of democracy
- **It will be impossible for these plans to not "intrude" on park users' access to and peaceful enjoyment of the park** due to the severe negative impact of inevitable weekend traffic jams and taking of free parking spaces, and the noise from regular weekend admission fee concerts disturbing the peace - from weekend large scale events booked on waterfront lawns by private company and in commercial amphitheater for 6000 people, or from an amusement park.
- **The DEP report says "millions more" visitors would come annually** by their proposals – and that will cause traffic jams and open space will be turned into parking lots.

False: It would be fine to restore the Terminal Sheds, costing up to \$100 million and lease it all out for a hotel (train museum would be fine but DEP wants a hotel as revenue-generator).

Fact: Hotels are on Central Park's perimeter, but none inside it. There are several hotels in Jersey City which should get the ratable from hotels, and Liberty Science Center will have a hotel on land it is getting from Jersey City. Also, a hotel would prevent free uses of all or part of the Sheds in the future (and possibly there will be technology to make asbestos removal cheaper or the Shed concrete roof with asbestos can be encapsulated).

Perhaps a train museum with some public space for festivals/fairs would be fine.

False: It is fine to lease out the state and national historic landmark CRRNJ Terminal to a hotel under the Sheds or for a conference and catering space.

Fact: Over \$150 million was spent to restore the historic landmark 1889 Terminal reopened fulltime in 1993) and \$10 million was just spent on a major "Sandy" renovation.

No part of this great public building should be given on a silver platter to a company with a lease. The Concourse should continue to be used for a variety of festivals and a rainsite for various events, and the beautiful "Waiting Room" is used for public exhibits and information counter and the Blue Comet Auditorium is used for public programs. The Terminal, LSP's historic "cornerstone" is a national treasure, where commuters and sixty percent of Ellis Island immigrants passed through, and it is part of the Historic Trilogy with Lady Liberty and Ellis Island.

It would be fine to have after hours events in the Concourse or Waiting Room but to protect this public historic landmark Terminal's use, the DEP can just hire qualified additional staff (to add to the one current special events staffperson) -instead of a private company booking after hours events. The only idea that may be fine would be a small Terminal restaurant/cafe (as Terminal had a restaurant in its commuter era) in the room next to the "Waiting Room" where the National Park Service did security for ferries.