

SUMMARY OF ADVISORY GROUP CONSIDERATIONS & RECOMMENDATIONS

Liberty State Park Design Task Force

Pursuant to DEP Administrative Order No. 2021-18



March 2023



New Jersey Department of Environmental Protection
State Parks, Forests & Historic Sites

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1. Introduction & Background

Liberty State Park (LSP) located in Jersey City, Hudson County, is comprised of approximately 1,200 acres of state-owned lands and waters situated along the mouth of the Hudson River where it meets the Upper New York Bay. LSP represents one of the last remaining contiguous open green spaces along the highly developed Northern New Jersey/New York City waterfront. Held in trust and managed by the Department of Environmental Protection (DEP) for public outdoor recreation and conservation purposes, LSP is New Jersey's most visited state park with over four million visitors annually.

Approximately 235 acres situated within the interior of LSP (Interior) has been unavailable to the public for decades due to the contamination of environmental media from historic industrial activities that were once common in this area of New Jersey. DEP committed to develop and implement a plan for the remediation and restoration of the Interior and, in October 2020, commenced a public participation process to solicit, consider, and respond to the questions and concerns of community members and park users interested in DEP's planned restoration of the Interior and its integration with the presently accessible areas of LSP. This process also served to identify additional active recreational amenities to enhance the Interior restoration and resilience project, which includes tidal and non-tidal wetlands, grasslands, meadows, and forests, complete with trails and other passive recreation features.

In response to early public and host community feedback concerning the need for active recreation amenities such as dedicated or multi-use sports fields, DEP suggested that significant park acreage, including portions of the Interior previously identified for natural resource conservation, be reserved for the development of public active recreation amenities. DEP also identified additional opportunities for potential active recreation amenities outside the restoration area. Simultaneously, DEP conducted public surveys to solicit specific feedback on the types of amenities the public was interested in having available at Liberty State Park.

In August 2021, DEP Commissioner Shawn M. LaTourette established the Liberty State Park Design Task Force (LSP-D Task Force) by way of Administrative Order 2021-18. The LSP-D Task Force was convened by the Commissioner for the purpose of operationalizing public feedback on DEP's ongoing LSP planning and design process. The LSP-D Task Force was charged with providing advice and recommendations to DEP and its professionals to inform their iterative planning and design decisions, its advisory role focused on supporting DEP in its work to ensure that outcomes are responsive to and likely to meet the diverse needs of the public.

This report summarizes the deliberations of the LSP-D Task Force, including its advisory considerations and recommendations, identifies implementation considerations and areas for further inquiry and evaluation, and includes within its appendices other concepts generated outside the auspices of the LSP-D Task Force but presented to its greater membership.

2. Members

The LSP-D Task Force, as administratively ordered, was comprised of the following members in addition to select DEP officials and staff:

- The Mayor of Jersey City, ex officio, or a designee;
- The Director of the Jersey City Department of Recreation and Youth Development, ex officio, or a designee.
- The Hudson County Commissioner for District 3, ex officio, or a designee;
- The Chief of the Hudson County Division of Parks, ex officio, or a designee;
- The Superintendent of the Jersey City Public Schools, ex officio, or a designee;
- The President of the NAACP, New Jersey State Conference, ex officio, or a designee;
- The President of the NAACP, Jersey City Branch, ex officio, or a designee;
- The President of the Friends of Liberty State Park, ex officio, or a designee;
- The President of Liberty State Park for All, ex officio, or a designee; and,
- Not more than four Jersey City residents selected by the Co-Chairs and approved by the Commissioner.

In addition to select DEP officials and staff, the following individuals routinely participated in the LSP-D Task Force:

- The Honorable Joyce Watterman, Jersey City Council President
- The Honorable Denise Ridley, Jersey City Councilwoman
- The Honorable Jermaine Robinson, Jersey City Councilman
- The Honorable Jerry Walker, Hudson County Commissioner
- Lucinda McLaughlin, Director, Jersey City Parks & Recreation
- Byron Nicholas, Supervising Transportation Planner, Hudson County Office of Engineering
- Franklin Walker, Superintendent, Jersey City Public Schools
- Norma Fernandez, Interim Superintendent, Jersey City Public Schools
- Sam Pesin, President, Friends of Liberty State Park
- Elnardo Webster, Counsel, Liberty State Park for All
- Bob Hurley, President, People’s Park Foundation
- Luz Guzman, Friends of Lincoln Park
- Paula Mahayosnand, President, Jersey City Park Coalition

3. Process

Following the establishment of the LSP-D Task Force, the group convened in September 2021 for its inaugural meeting. In December 2021, two site visits were conducted to help orient task force members to Liberty State Park, including the parcels being considered for active recreation development. In February 2022, the LSP-D Task Force convened again, with some changes in membership due to retirements and changes in elected representatives. The LSP-D Task Force then held two additional meetings in June 2022 to refine a suite of general recommendations that had broad consensus.

4. Interior Restoration and Resilience Project

Prior to establishment of the LSP-D Task Force, DEP committed to the design and implementation of plans for the remediation and restoration of the presently inaccessible 235-acre Interior. In partnership with the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, DEP proposed plans for the cleanup and the construction of natural resource restoration projects within the Interior, which will also serve as critical flooding and climate resilience functions.

In a 30% design engineered plan [presented for public input in September 2020](#), DEP proposed a suite of Interior restoration projects primarily focused on ecological and passive recreation features. With the aid of a year-long public participation process, including thousands of surveys completed by members of the public, DEP identified the need for active recreation amenities, such as dedicated or multi-use sports fields, at LSP.

This public process prompted substantial revisions to DEP's 2020 plan and resulted in:

- (1) the reservation of 50-acres of the Interior for active outdoor public recreation amenities, which land would be remediated and prepared for development concurrent with the Interior restoration and resilience project, meaning that active outdoor public recreational facilities could be developed upon cleanup completion (i.e., in approximately 3 years); and,
- (2) a commitment by DEP to the near-term development of additional active outdoor public recreation facilities in other areas of the park beyond the Interior.

As these commitments reduced the scale and scope of the Interior restoration and resilience project, the Interior plans were refined and re-engineered. The revised Interior plan now includes tidal and non-tidal wetlands, grasslands, meadows, forests, and hills with scenic overlooks that are bound together in a 5+ mile walking and running trail network, as well as other passive recreation features. Together, these features will provide substantial benefit to the public by linking previously developed and restored components of the park into one cohesive whole. This will allow for seamless public access to the park, increase active outdoor recreational amenities available to the public, and provide high-quality greenspace and wildlife habitat in one of the most densely developed areas of the state and nation.

DEP's Office of Natural Resource Restoration is currently progressing through the pre-construction and engineering design phase of the resilience and restoration elements of the Interior. The planning process reached the 60% design phase in late 2022 and 100% design is anticipated by the end of 2023.

Groundbreaking on the Interior is anticipated by September 2023 to commence cleanup. Multiple opportunities for public engagement and milestones are anticipated throughout 2023, and interior construction is anticipated to begin in Spring 2024. The Interior restoration and resilience project is anticipated to be complete and publicly accessible within three years of the start of construction.

5. Considerations and Recommendations

The opportunities to develop world-class outdoor recreational amenities while also connecting future generations of residents living in the most densely populated areas of the United States to nature and the outdoors are potentially transformational. Liberty State Park, in its present form, serves as an outdoor oasis for those seeking a respite from urban living, while also providing unique opportunities to engage with history, ecology, and visit neighboring amenities such as the State of Liberty and Liberty Science Center. The park hosts dozens of community events annually and is a destination for filmmakers, photographers, and special events that enable the park to generate revenue to support its outdoor recreation and conservation functions.

While visitation to LSP is anticipated to increase given the significant development occurring around the park, the addition of the interior restoration and resilience project as well as the development of outdoor active recreational amenities will only further drive visitation and use of Liberty State Park by the public. Presently, transportation to and within the park is, and will continue to be, an overriding challenge that must be addressed as part of the park's revitalization. The park already fills to parking capacity on the weekends, and the addition of amenities increases these pressures.

Following the series of meetings described above, including touring aspects of Liberty State Park, the LSP-D Task Force found broad agreement around several concepts for the park, many of which will require additional refinement before proceeding to a detailed engineering design phase. The LSP-D Task Force, and individual members who privately conducted evaluations outside the auspices of the Task Force, also identified several concepts for which there was not broad consensus, but present opportunities for further exploration.

The primary considerations and, where consensus appeared to materials, recommendations, are summarized here:

a) Outdoor Recreation Hub within the Park's Interior Section

Following DEP's commitment to reserve significant acreage for development of active outdoor public recreation amenities, many LSP-D Task Force and stakeholder discussions concerned the nature, scope and scale of recreational features and supporting amenities. The LSP-D Task Force discussions did not result in a clear consensus as to scope and scale, but the majority views were anchored by two main concepts: a complete track and field complex, and an array of multi-use fields. Additional recreational amenities that could be integrated with either concept were also discussed and included such elements as basketball courts, racquet courts, and a skate park. There was consensus among the Task Force that this space should feature the requisite restrooms and concessions facilities to support the hub.

The Task Force did not reach a clear consensus on the precise nature and size of the active outdoor public recreation facilities or the associated seating that would be necessary, but some consensus was built around the prospect of utilizing the natural slopes of the Interior restoration area to support open space seating as a part of the design of active recreation facilities within the Interior.

There was consensus among the Task Force that a potential track area should be a space that could be utilized by park patrons for exercise daily, but also capable of serving as a training ground for local athletes and for hosting local youth sports competitions. Some consensus was also built that an array of

potential multi-use turf fields could also support several local athletic teams and leagues, as well as potentially serve to host occasional regional soccer or other tournaments.

Transportation and parking to support the outdoor active recreation hub was identified as a significant issue, especially as the concepts considered could draw significant numbers of people into the park. There was consensus among the Task Force that future designs and development should not utilize a large amount of valuable potential recreational or open space to create surface parking, and that off-site parking and shuttle options should be explored in detail.

b) Community Center (Johnston Ave & Jersey Ave Parcel)

The Task Force reached a clear consensus to support the development of a community center at or near an entrance to the park. The Task Force had robust discussion around creating a year-round indoor space, with potential amenities like an indoor track, basketball and other court-type sports, a swimming pool, an ice rink, or community meeting and gathering space.

The Task Force discussed the existing and applicable restrictions on the appropriate uses of state-owned park land, which present barriers to the development and operation of indoor public recreation facilities. However, DEP committed to evaluating the parcels comprising the park that may be suitable for such facilities and to exploring the mechanisms, including any appropriate partnerships, that could enable the development and operation of a community center.

The roughly 4.25-acre parcel located near the northwestern entrance of the park at the intersection of Johnston Avenue and Jersey Avenue was identified as a prime location for a potential community center. This location affords both pedestrian access from the surrounding neighborhoods, as well as easy access to the existing Light Rail station. Additionally, a large number of new residential developments will be occurring in close proximity to this parcel.

The Task Force agreed that the, the exact size, scope, and development of the potential community center requires further evaluation.

c) Central Railroad of New Jersey Train Sheds

There was consensus among the LSP-D Task Force participants that the deteriorating state of the Central Railroad of New Jersey (CRRNJ) train sheds is currently an incredible missed opportunity. While less of the LSP-D Task Force's energy was focused on this space, there does appear to be a desire among all to rehabilitate the space for any number of potential uses to enhance visitor experience such as for arts and culture, farmers markets, community and public events, and other uses that provide opportunity for small business and community engagement, and could incidentally generate ancillary revenue to support park's outdoor recreational and conservation purposes.

d) Amphitheater / Performance Space

One additional concept that appeared desirable to all the Task Force participants, albeit without clarity on the location within the park, was the desire for a more formal amphitheater-style space.

While there was disagreement on the potential scale or permanence of its associated features, the participants did feel it could be beneficial to have a space dedicated to the performing arts. The Park itself has considered development of an amenity like this before, particularly in the North Cove area adjacent to the Ferry parking lot, which could provide ample space as well as be programmed by Park staff to not conflict with peak ferry usage and utilize the existing parking facilities.

e) Freedom Way Parcel

The roughly 4.5-acre parcel identified on the east side of Freedom Way, north of the Park's "Green Ring" area, was discussed as a short-term opportunity for the development of multi-use fields. The LSP-D Task Force was in general agreement that this area, which is already capped with 1 foot of clean fill, is relatively flat, and is already open to the public, could be quickly turned into an area that could serve as practice fields for local school teams and used by sporting groups and other organizations.

Some modifications would be needed including lighting, turf, and other improvements, but this area could potentially be the quickest to develop into usable active outdoor public recreation space of those considered. However, the area presents significant transportation and parking constraints to support its use. Were those constraints addressed and a field developed, as additional active recreation amenities come online over the course of time, the short-term development of such multi-use fields could be revisited, and other amenities considered or the area returned to open space.

f) Morris Pesin Drive Parcel

Conversations related to the two-acre area located in LSP parking Lot #1 that was identified as a potential parcel for active recreation centered around the idea of an aquatics-related center. Given the proximity to the park's public boat launch and kayak launch areas, as well as the nearby historic location of the LSP swimming pool, there is a clear nexus to water-based activities in this area. More consideration will need to be given to the scale and scope of what might be feasible in this area, as well as impacts to existing parking.

g) Other Indoor and Outdoor Recreational Opportunities Presented to but not adopted by the LSP-D Task Force

During the course of the 2021-2022 LSP-D Task Force discussions, some task force members independently pursued an evaluation of parkwide opportunities for indoor and outdoor recreational development and other features. While this evaluation was conducted outside the auspices of the LSP-D Task Force, the members who privately sponsored the evaluation shared the resulting concepts with the LSP-D Task force members and presented concepts at LSP-D Task force meetings and elsewhere.

The private evaluations presented to the LSP-D Task force including concepts for use of the park land for various recreational uses including, but not limited to, a public indoor recreation facility that includes a community center swimming natatorium, four (4) full size basketball courts, two (2) 2,000 seat NHL size hockey rinks, an indoor track, health center, concessions and/or restaurants, and community space; an enhanced waterfront area with kayak launch, community gardens and greenhouses, extensive walkways to explore the park, 7,000 seat open concert and event venue, 5,000 seat open, lighted football/soccer/multi-use complex with fields and stands for spectators, Olympic level open space 400 m 8 lane track

and field facility, and a three (3) season open community activity center for use for farmer’s markets, craft fairs and for flex space.

The LSP-D Task Force discussed but did not endorse these concepts, although certain of the outdoor public recreational elements therein are consistent with some of the consensus items discussed above.¹

6. Additional Considerations

a) Parcel-specific limitations

Another major challenge to some of the proposed uses identified by the LSP-D Task Force may be the current restrictions associated with the funding sources of the parcels in consideration which require use exclusively for outdoor public recreation. This includes both New Jersey’s Green Acre’s regulations and Federal restrictions like those associated with the Land and Water Conservation Fund. Funding from both sources was used to acquire LSP lands, and the restrictions associated with those funds limit the ability to utilize certain parcels for the development of indoor recreation amenities (i.e. a recreation center) or other amenities that would not be available for use by the general visiting public. A thorough analysis will need to be conducted, particularly in areas where indoor recreation facilities are contemplated, to determine if there is potential compatibility between the concepts and the allowable uses.

b) Transportation Planning

Transportation, both into and within LSP, remains one of the most significant operational challenges for the park. There was consensus among the participants that the park needs greater mobility, and the addition of both the interior restoration and any combination of additional amenities will only further exacerbate the parking and people movement challenges on the ground.

To best serve both the surrounding communities and the public at large, it was recommended that a transportation study be implemented to identify mass transit / shuttle bus solutions to transport patrons both to the park and within the park.

This study must consider not only the park as it is, but also the anticipated growth in amenities and uses being considered. In addition, given the large, planned developments taking place on the periphery of park property, due consideration must be paid to the potential for the park to work with Jersey City to incorporate additional parking requirements on these developments to serve the public by facilitating additional vehicular access to LSP. Further consideration should be given to aligning park transportation development with [Jersey City’s Vision Zero plan](#) and [Complete Streets](#) efforts.

c) Leases, Licenses, Concessions

Some of the improvements and new amenities contemplated by the task force may require the exploration of new agreements to be developed between the Department and other entities. These

¹ These concepts were reiterated to DEP Commissioner Shawn M. LaTourette in a March 14, 2023 letter on behalf of the Liberty State Park for All Coalition, which stated that the “Task Force prepared an alternative design concept for the park land, which all members of the Task Force are fully in support of implementing.” This statement is incorrect. The referenced concept was presented to the Task Force following its private and independent procurement. The concept was not sought by or adopted under the auspices of DEP Administrative Order No. 2021-18.

could include food concessions, transportation shuttle services, vendor licensing, and others that would improve the visitor experience and support park operations. Some of the facilities contemplated may be more appropriately operated on an ongoing basis by an intergovernmental partner, which would come with additional challenges and opportunities that will need to be vetted.

d) Service, Safety and Security

Any additional facilities and amenities introduced, along with the associated patrons, places an additional burden on the State Park Service and State Park Police, to serve visitors and ensure security. Careful consideration will need to be given to the impacts to traffic flow, parking, pedestrian movements, and other issues as amenities are considered. Further consideration, pending the availability of resources, should be given to staffing and security measures such as appropriate lighting and CCTV contemporaneous with each planned improvement.

7. Reference Materials

- LSP Attendance

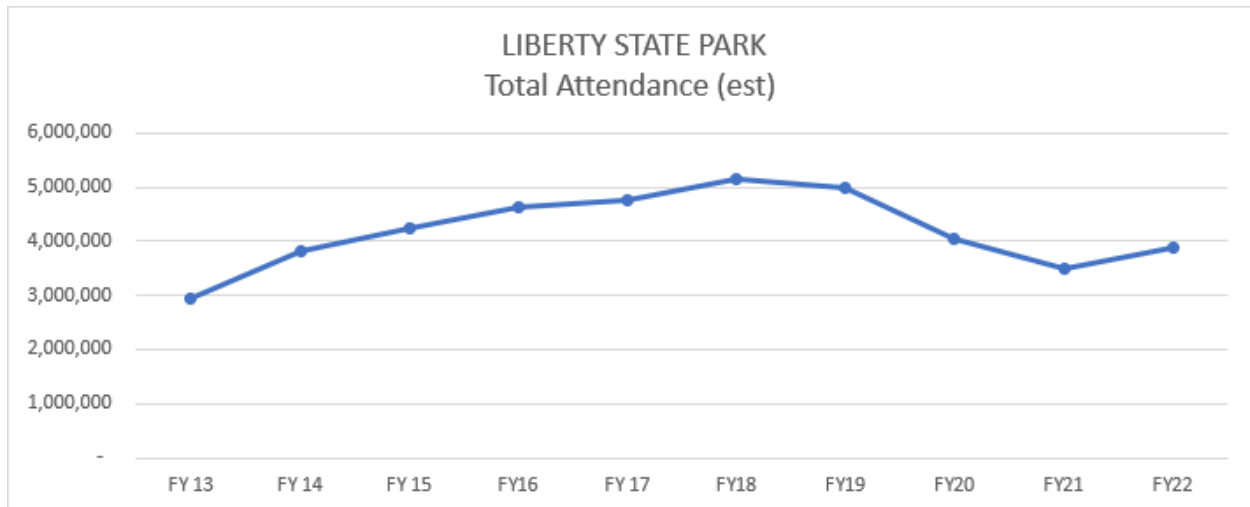


Figure 1. Liberty State Park Annual Attendance by Fiscal Year

- Previous LSP Planning Materials
 - o [LSP Master Plan Summary 1978.pdf](#)
 - o [LSP Master Plan Maps 1978.pdf](#)
 - o [LSP General Management Plan Aug2001.pdf](#)
- [Liberty State Park Circulator CBA 31May2013.pdf](#)
- Liberty State Park Public Stakeholder Meeting Recordings
 - o 30% Design Concept - Oct 20, 2020 - <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=QtMzOASx5bs>

- Remediation of the Interior of Liberty State Park - Jan 7, 2021 - <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=w6--fSs9ZiM>
- Options for Active Recreation Amenities - Jan 21, 2021 - <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=oBMYHzlCgnY>
- Ecological Restoration at Liberty State Park - Feb 4, 2021 - https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ppctJ_rDmt0
- Interior Restoration and Active Recreation Updates - June 3, 2021 - <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=1vk12YKfdeo>
- Liberty State Park Public Stakeholder Meeting Presentations
 - [LSP Remediation Stakeholder Mtg 21Dec2020.pdf](#)
 - [LSP Active Recreation Stakeholder Mtg 21Jan2021.pdf](#)
 - [LSP Habitat Restoration Stakeholder Mtg 4Feb2021.pdf](#)
 - [LSP Interior Rest and Active Rec Updates Stakeholder Mtg 3June2021.pdf](#)

8. Appendices

- [AO 2021-18 Liberty State Park Design Task Force 5Aug2021.pdf](#)
- Liberty State Park Active Public Recreation [Survey Results](#) (Jan. 14, 2021)
- Liberty State Park Design Task Force Meeting Presentations
 - [LSP DTF Inaugural Meeting Presentation 21Sep2021.pdf](#)
 - [LSP DTF Meeting Presentation 28Feb2022.pdf](#)
- [Letter from Liberty State Park for All Coalition to DEP](#) (March 14, 2023)
- [Liberty State Park for All Coalition Independent Concept Plan](#) (Jan. 12, 2022)
- [FoLSP Statement for LSP DTF Report 4Jul2022.pdf](#)
- [FoLSP Statement July 4 2022.pdf](#)
- [FoLSP Statement March 9 2022.pdf](#)