

Jersey Journal editorial

Keep Liberty State Park free and open |

Oct. 25, 2023

Last week brought two positive developments for Liberty State Park.

First, ground was broken for the cleanup of some 200-plus acres of contaminated parkland that have been behind locked fences for decades. The remediation won't be completed quickly or easily, but when it's done, the usable space in Liberty State Park will grow by an amount nearly 10 times the size of Berry Lane Park, Jersey City's largest municipally owned recreational space.

Just as important, though, design concepts unveiled by the state Department of Environmental Protection show the park will evolve in ways that support its long-established mission to serve both as a place for New Jerseyans to have fun and to celebrate the Hudson waterfront's natural beauty.

At a community meeting ("open house") last Wednesday, the DEP showed off renderings for a bevy of new amenities -- from playgrounds to sports fields to a community center -- envisioned for the park's northern edge.

What stood out most in these exciting drawings was what's not in them: no 10,000-seat stadiums, no NHL-regulation hockey rinks, no massive concert arenas, no ticket booths.

By holding at bay the out-of-scale visions promoted by golf course owner Paul Fireman and his People's Park Foundation, **the DEP, under the leadership of Shawn LaTourette, has done the public a great service. It is imperative that the park -- a park, not to be confused with a complex like the Meadowlands -- remain free and open to the public throughout its acreage and that we respect its natural location and habitats.**

Perhaps the rendering that most clearly sends the message that a state park is no place for a massive sports and entertainment complex is the one envisioning an amphitheater. Rather than seeing a building or area that would be locked up when not in use, the designers show a series of graceful steps built into a hill with performers on a waterfront boardwalk. (Note: The Friends of LSP support a fantastic **Band Shell** for cultural events in the North Cove Field right behind the ferry parking lot, and oppose an amphitheater with concrete benches on a slope - because the North Cove Field continues to be needed for free and admission-fee festival space, the start/finish of many nonprofit groups' 5K Runs/Walks, free Sunday lawn concerts, etc.).

The DEP is still working on the plans and seeking public input. Surveys and comment boxes on various elements can be filled out at dep.nj.gov/revitalizelsp/comment-on-phase-1b/ through Nov. 17.

Included in the link are ideas and solicitations for comment regarding new transportation options. While this is already a vital conversation to be had because of the limited public transportation currently available, it will become even more pressing when the new amenities are open and more traffic will be expected.

A future phase of the ongoing project will reconsider the park's southern edge. **Leaders in both Trenton and Hudson County should give the DEP the support it needs to ensure that the entire park remains free, open to the public, and a place of beauty and wonder in the midst of one of the nation's most crowded places.**