

Jersey Journal editorial

Redouble efforts to save LSP from billionaire's vision

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Was that the fetid odor of desperation we detected Tuesday night when a legendary Jersey City basketball coach reduced himself to telling a handful of people that on a recent trip to Liberty State Park he and his wife spied only one bird?

When he derided the jewel of the state park system as merely a parking lot for people heading to and from ferries for the Statue of Liberty?

When he refused to answer a question about why all his efforts are focused on building a sports and entertainment complex – “for the kids,” no doubt – in a state park, as opposed to pressuring Jersey City to upgrade and expand its facilities for youth recreation?

When he reiterated — without any proof — fearmongering propaganda that the state's plan to create lakes (*wetlands*) in the park will flood the property?

When he tried to get ahead of any criticism by telling the people gathered for his meeting, open to the public in a well-known pub, that some will say they were there just for the free food?

When he played the victim, saying, “This is so insulting, what we've gone through for so long”?

Good heavens, if Bob Hurley wasn't getting paid six figures – undoubtedly more than anyone in the room, with the possible exception of a billionaire's son-in-law seated nearby – we'd almost feel sorry for him.

But we don't.

And while Hurley's arguments as the titular head of the People's Park Foundation are getting flimsier and flimsier, the true defenders of Liberty State Park cannot let down their guard.

The sad reality is that deep pockets are funding Hurley's charade – pockets large enough to purchase high-paid lobbyists whose job it is to play the long game, do an end run around the wishes of the public, and convince people in power to do the wrong thing.

Having accomplished their stated aim of getting active recreation facilities included in plans for the upcoming redevelopment of the park, Hurley and company are now disingenuously dismissing the state Department of Environmental Protection's ideas for an initial 14.5 acres of playing fields and a community center. *(and also 50 acres of free active recreation in the south side of the interior)*. And they are resurfacing their own architectural renderings for a garish sports and entertainment complex that would take away acres and acres and acres of free and open parkland.

Hurley and his lobbyist chums aren't interested in discussion. They want what they want – period.

As we know, all the funding for this multimillion-dollar campaign is coming from a foundation run by Paul Fireman, the billionaire who owns the Liberty National Golf Club adjacent to the park. Fireman has long sought to expand his golf course into the public's treasured oasis on the waterfront.

Fireman is a generous donor to politicians and their friends. Follow the money, as they say, and you'll see that people getting money from Fireman's foundation, including Hurley, make up a good portion of the advisory task force on the park's redevelopment ordered up by the Legislature.

They cannot be allowed to prevail.

Local officials, local and state legislators, and Gov. Murphy must assure us that the park is not for sale, literally or figuratively.

A true conversation about how to better Liberty State Park and serve the needs of its neighbors is welcome. A sham would simply be shameful.

The task force's next meeting is scheduled for 10 a.m. next Saturday, March 2 *(with public speaking at 12:30pm)*, at the park's historic Central Railroad of New Jersey Terminal and via Zoom. Public comment will be allowed.

We encourage public participation so all the people who aren't being paid by Fireman can have their say, too.

To register for the meeting, go to dep.nj.gov/revitalizelsp/design-task-force (or <https://dep.nj.gov/event/liberty-state-park-design-task-force-public-meeting-20240302/>)

Below is a screenshot of a rendering of Liberty State Park makeover proposal from the People's Park Foundation. In it, athletic and concert facilities dominate.



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