

<https://www.nj.com/hudson/2024/04/dep-asks-liberty-state-park-task-force-what-is-needed-for-active-recreation-in-the-park.html>

## **DEP asks Liberty State Park task force: What kind of fields, courts are needed in the park?**

Apr. 11, 2024 By [Mark Koosau](#) | [The Jersey Journal](#)

**JERSEY CITY** — What is Jersey City missing that Liberty State Park can provide for active recreation? What should the planned athletics hub in the southern section of the park’s interior look like? And can the state assist the city with its recreational space needs outside of the state park?

Those were the questions the state Department of Environmental Protection (DEP) and its consultants asked the Liberty State Park Design Task Force at Tuesday evening’s meeting, the third to take place, as part of the wide-ranging, comprehensive and expensive makeover of the park.

“What deficits are we trying to answer for to better pick among opportunities to develop active recreational facilities?” DEP Commissioner Shawn LaTourette said at the meeting. “There’s been a lot of discussion around what types of facilities are potentially lacking, incomplete or don’t provide enough access.”

The meeting, which took place in the atrium of the CRRNJ Terminal, focused on what’s known in the DEP’s revitalization program as Phase 2 — a master plan for the southern end of the park that includes a 50-acre athletics hub in the southern end of the interior.

The project team asked task force members for feedback on three hub layout concepts: one that has numerous sports fields, such as soccer and football; one that adds a mix of sports fields and courts such as tennis and basketball; and one that adds other assorted sports activities, such as a bike loop and a skateboard park.

Before that, the team presented a map of all available recreational opportunities in Jersey City and LaTourette implored the task force to point out what they think the city is lacking and what the DEP can fill in.

“If we’re trying to plug holes in what’s available for our kids, we need to define what those holes are to begin with,” LaTourette said.

How much active recreation should be in Liberty State Park has been a hot-button issue, particularly as allies of billionaire golf course owner Paul Fireman lobby to transform the park into a sports-and-entertainment mecca with thousand-seat stadiums.

The People’s Park Foundation and Liberty State Park for All, two groups funded by Fireman, have attempted to spread misinformation with claims the DEP is planning to “flood” anywhere from 170 to 200 acres of the park and take away space for sports fields. The DEP has

consistently rebutted those claims as lies and noted that current redesign plans, which it says would mitigate future flooding, call for adding less than seven acres of water.

Task force member Lucinda McLaughlin, the Jersey City director of the Department of Youth and Recreation, said a dedicated cricket field in the city is needed. She noted the city's turf fields are "booked 100% of their permissible times."

Responding to criticism that Jersey City and the school district haven't done enough to develop their own recreational spaces, McLaughlin said the city "can't materialize new space" and that "we have new schools popping up every month," which is just not true.

School district Superintendent Norma Fernandez, a task force member, did not attend.

LaTourette said Liberty State Park can contribute, but ultimately cannot solve the city's recreational space problems. However, he reminded city and school district officials that the DEP can help them acquire land for such needs.

"There are plentiful resources to pursue (the) acquisition of properties beyond what we're able to do here that could support the city in pursuing through our acquisition and development program," LaTourette said.

McLaughlin said in regards to the athletic hub that she'd like to see less of the "everything we could possibly fit inside" mentality, task force member Paula Mahayosnand wants more playgrounds and soccer fields, and Hudson County Board of Commissioner member Jerry Walker suggested accommodations for those with special needs.

Hall of Fame basketball coach Bob Hurley, a task force member allied with Fireman, attended the meeting the day after his son, Dan Hurley, coached the University of Connecticut to its second straight NCAA men's basketball championship in Arizona. He said during the meeting that he was "growing weary of (the) plans and would like to see implementation."

But like the last meeting, Hurley, who has been paid at least \$300,000 to run the Fireman-funded People's Park Foundation, left before the public comment portion, saying he was "tired because I traveled (across) the country." Approximately three dozen people spoke in favor the DEP's plans and protecting the park from special interests.

Other allies of Fireman on the task force such as Walker and former Jersey City Superintendent Franklin Walker stuck around this time during public comments after they exited en masse during the previous task force meeting. Elnardo Webster, attorney and the new director of Liberty State Park for All, did not attend the meeting after his group angered city residents by sending mass robotexts last week claiming the park will be "flooded."

Sam Pesin, a longtime park activist and president of the Friends of Liberty State Park, said in a statement that "it's great and essential that ... so many spoke wisely and passionately in continuing the 47 years of the broad public consensus for a free and green Central Park-type park and against commercialization and privatization."