



December 10, 2019

RE: Liberty Park Protection Act, S-3357 and A-4903

Dear Senate President Stephen Sweeney and Assembly Speaker Craig Coughlin,

I am writing to you on behalf of the Jersey City Environmental Commission, JCEC. The JCEC is comprised of highly qualified environmental professionals appointed by the Mayor, and we serve as an advisory board to Jersey City's City Council. **As the city's advisor and advocate for environmental matters, I am writing today to express the JCEC's full support of the Liberty State Park Protection Act.** The Liberty State Park Protection Act is a popular and necessary piece of legislation to protect this urban oasis from privatization and development. We therefore urge you both to post this Act as soon as possible.

It has recently come to the attention of the JCEC that the Liberty National Golf Course is lobbying to exclude protections for the Caven Point Peninsula from the Act. The JCEC expresses strong opposition, as we did on March 26, 2018, to any plan to develop the Caven Point Natural area. The Caven Point Natural Area consists of a sandy beach, the largest stretch of natural beach in the Upper New York and Hudson Bay; saltwater marshland; tidal pools; mud flats; and an upland maritime forest. The ecosystem services provided by this area include water purification, flood protection, and habitat for aquatic and terrestrial flora and fauna. Some notable species that have been reported include snowy owl, deer, northern diamondback terrapin, peregrine falcon, osprey, harbor seals, horseshoe crab, yellow-crowned night-heron, black-crowned night-heron, red knot, black skimmer, northern harrier, American oystercatcher, blue heron, horned lark, and Atlantic sturgeon.

Caven Point is particularly important for migratory birds. Given the ecological sensitivity of this ecosystem, access on the interior boardwalk and natural beach are closed between April and October in order to protect nesting habitat for seasonal birds. Migratory birds in the New York City metropolitan area are under increasing threat resulting from reduced stopover habitat, light pollution, and glass buildings. Within the metropolitan area, valuable land is being restored to provide stopover habitat, as ornithologists know this densely populated area is lacking such habitat. Why, we ask, would it be appropriate to replace this existing nesting, breeding, and stopover habitat with a golf course? A proposal that swaps out natural wetlands and stopover habitat for a manicured golf course is beyond irresponsible and should be rejected by the Department of Environmental Protection. Attached is a study, *Mass Changes of Migratory Landbirds During Stopover in a New York City Park*, by Chad Seewagen and Eric Slayton highlighting the importance of conserving remaining green spaces in the New York City area for migratory bird stopover habitat.

Moreover, beyond the arguments for preserving the peninsula as a natural space for residents and migratory birds, there is another benefit: flood resilience and mitigation through natural defense. The peninsula offers a protective barrier to the existing golf course. During Hurricane Sandy, storm surge and tidal flooding crested in this area at approximately eight feet of water. Any disruption to the structure of this sensitive natural defense would drive the risk of flood and storm surge damage to the golf course's coastline just behind the peninsula.



JERSEY CITY
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In an area as densely populated and developed as Jersey City, access to natural environments is tremendously rare. It is estimated that more than 4 million people visit Liberty State Park annually, and for many this park is the only access to the serenity of nature within the highly urbanized environment. Liberty State Park offers its visitors spectacular views, extensive open lawns and natural spaces, wildlife viewing, picnic and barbecue areas, playgrounds, and such historic sites as the newly restored CRRNJ Terminal and the World War One era Black Tom Explosion Site.

Liberty State Park is a truly unique national treasure, and it is imperative that the integrity of the Park, and the public's full and free access to and use of LSP, remains intact and free from the continued threat of privatization. Privatization plans have continuously threatened the quality and integrity of LSP over the years. Had it not been for the watchfulness of dedicated groups like "Friends of LSP" and the NY/NJ Baykeeper and many other local, regional and statewide groups and thousands of or other concerned citizens who successfully opposed and rejected them, they might have succeeded in altering the present nature of the park to the detriment of the park itself and all its visitors who simply love and appreciate the park in its present state (i.e., open and free from large scale commercial development) and wish to keep it that way in perpetuity. It is precisely for this reason that the passage of Senate bill S-3357 and Assembly bill A-4903 is of critical importance to finally protect LSP in its present state forever.

Should you have any further questions or concerns, I can be reached at JCEC@jcnj.org.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Alison Cucco".

Alison Cucco, Chair
Jersey City Environmental Commission