

NEWS

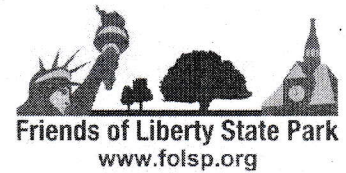
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NJ environmental groups sue State House Commission over approval of Liberty State Park marina lease

The groups are urging Gov. Mikie Sherrill to direct NJDEP not to sign the proposed 60-year lease for the marina in Jersey City's Liberty State Park.

JERSEY CITY, NJ — Eight environmental groups across the state have jointly filed a lawsuit as co-appellants against the New Jersey State House Commission to appeal the Commission's approval of a 60-year lease for Liberty Landing Marina in Jersey City's Liberty State Park. The lease would allow for the development of an enormous boat storage warehouse along the park's northern entrance.

During Governor Murphy's administration, the New Jersey Department of Environmental Protection (NJDEP) proposed the 60-year lease agreement with Suntex Marinas. Suntex, which manages more than 90 inland and coastal marinas in the United States, currently operates Liberty Landing Marina and has 20 years remaining on its existing lease.

The environmental groups that filed the lawsuit include the Friends of Liberty State Park, New Jersey Conservation Foundation, New Jersey League of Conservation Voters, NY/NJ Baykeeper, New Jersey Environmental Lobby, Pinelands Alliance, New Jersey Highlands Coalition, and Ramapough Culture and Land Foundation. New Jersey Appleseed Public Interest Law Center is representing the groups.

The groups deem the proposed lease to be a grave environmental and financial injustice to the people of New Jersey, and against the public's best interest. The proposed lease has sparked public outrage, with more than 1,000 people expressing their opposition through comments to NJDEP and the State House Commission. Fewer than 10 public comments were submitted to NJDEP and the Commission in support of the lease.

“We hope the State House Commission’s lease approval will be invalidated, and that Governor Sherrill will respect the overwhelming broad public consensus of nearly 50 years against the privatization of Liberty State Park,” said **Sam Pesin, president of the Friends of Liberty State Park**. “The 60-year lease, allowing the construction of a massive boat storage warehouse, would severely damage the park’s character, openness, purpose, and legacy.”

The warehouse would be 70 feet high, cover 2.3 acres, and include 500 boat dry racks. This would be an expanded private commercial use of public parkland that violates limits on the park’s use as per a 1990 Record of Decision from the National Park Service (NPS), reaffirmed by NPS in 2008, which requires the boat storage warehouse to be no greater than one-half acre in size.

The warehouse was never mentioned during the public engagement efforts for NJDEP’s Liberty State Park revitalization plans that guided the new official master plan for the park. NJDEP began the public engagement efforts in October 2020 with a series of virtual meetings and expanded these efforts over several years to include five open house-style events focused on identifying park users’ preferred improvements to the park. The master plan was unveiled at an open house on August 7, 2025, just two weeks before NJDEP’s first public hearing on the proposed lease.

“The governor has the opportunity to direct NJDEP not to sign this lease, and to perform a more careful assessment of the value of the marina and the parkland before deciding how best to utilize this public property. We must protect the public’s interest in Liberty State Park and the marina in a way that is consistent with the park’s master plan,” said **Emile DeVito, manager of science & stewardship at New Jersey Conservation Foundation**. “The best use for the marina at Liberty State Park must be based on public input and consideration of future real estate market values, development costs, and climate projections.”

NJDEP has not formally appraised the 60-year lease. Because the lease extension was offered exclusively to the existing lessee, there was no opportunity to solicit alternate proposals from other potential marina operators, which is unfair to New Jersey taxpayers.

The State House Commission has neither memorialized its approval of the lease in writing nor stated its reasons for approving the lease, which violates the public process the state itself created for this kind of agreement.

“Liberty State Park belongs to the people — not political insiders. The Murphy Administration and State House Commission pushed through a lease with Suntex Marinas for an outsized boat warehouse, skipping the required appraisal meant to protect

taxpayers,” said **Greg Remaud, executive director of NY/NJ Baykeeper**. “We join the Friends of Liberty State Park in appealing this dodgy backroom deal.”

“New Jersey’s state parks should not be treated as revenue centers. If portions of Liberty State Park — the most-visited and arguably the most iconic of our state parks — are commercialized and reserved for a select few, no state park or forest is safe,” said **Anne Poole, president of New Jersey Environmental Lobby**. “Other state parks will be targets for private interests that want decades of rights to our natural resource assets.”

“The protection of these forever sacred lands remains at the forefront, not just for the citizens of the State of New Jersey, but also for us Munsee Peoples whose ancestors were slaughtered there in the Pavonia Massacre,” said **Chief Vincent Mann, acting chief of the Ramapough Lenape Indian Nation**.

“We are proud to stand with our partners to protect this priceless resource,” said **Allison McLeod, interim executive director of the New Jersey League of Conservation Voters**. “Liberty State Park must remain open to working families and the public not only in Jersey City, but across our state. The shadow of the Statue of Liberty reminds us that the People’s Park is for everyone, not just for the wealthy.”

“The Highlands have a deep historical connection with northern New Jersey’s eastern cities, including Jersey City, dating back to the early interactions between the native Munsee-speaking Lenape and European settlers,” said **Elliott Ruga, policy and communications director of the New Jersey Highlands Coalition**. “These historically significant sites should be preserved and appropriately commemorated within the world-class public space of Liberty State Park, rather than being handed over to private interests for exclusive use.”

“The Pinelands Alliance joins our colleague organizations in this appeal in order to hold the State House Commission and the New Jersey Department of Environmental Protection accountable to protect important public assets and resources,” said **Michael W. Klein, director of government relations**. “Projects at New Jersey’s state parks must consider the implications of climate change and sea-level rise. We are equally concerned about the public’s right to participate in public meetings, which was compromised by technical difficulties when the State House Commission discussed and approved the marina project.”

About Friends of Liberty State Park

The Friends of Liberty StatePark is an all-volunteer, non-profit, 501(c) (3) organization. It is dedicated to preserving, protecting, improving, conserving, and promoting Liberty State Park, the inspiring urban state park on the Jersey City waterfront behind Lady Liberty and Ellis Island.

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