

The Jersey City Times

<https://jcitytimes.com/liberty-state-park-marina-lease-left-unsigned-by-murphy-admin/>

Liberty State Park Marina Lease Left Unsigned by Murphy Admin.

Future of controversial Suntex deal now rests with Gov. Sherrill

by E. Assata Wright January 30, 2026

Weeks after a controversial lease was approved for the operator of Liberty Landing Marina, that lease is still unsigned — possibly leaving the door open for the agreement to be revisited by the new administration of Gov. Mikie Sherrill. There is even a slim possibility the governor could void the lease by vetoing the vote that approved it. This means there could be a narrow opportunity for the lease, which was drafted under the Phil Murphy Administration, to be renegotiated.

On Jan. 15, in the waning days of Murphy's governorship, the State House Commission voted to approve a 60-year lease for Suntex which would allow the marina operator to build a 70-foot-tall, three-acre boat storage warehouse at the entrance to Liberty State Park. At the time, critics of the plan believed the vote had been deliberately scheduled to deny newly-elected Gov. Sherrill the opportunity to review the lease.

After the November gubernatorial election, critics asked Murphy to give Sherrill and her administration the opportunity to revisit the Suntex deal, which was originally negotiated by Murphy's Department of Environmental Protection (DEP), under Commission Shawn LaTourette.

Although the State House Commission approved the lease, it still had not been signed when the Murphy Administration ended at noon on Jan. 20, DEP confirmed. **Now the fate of the deal negotiated by LaTourette rests with Sherrill and Ed Potosnak, her nominee for DEP commissioner.** Potosnak currently awaits state senate approval, and the Suntex matter could become an issue during his confirmation process. (The senate judiciary committee meets Feb. 2 and could advance his nomination at that time.)

"A new lease agreement between [DEP] and Suntex is still being drafted and has not been signed," a DEP spokesman said Thursday night. "General terms of a new lease have been agreed upon."

How much wiggle room there might be to renegotiate the "general terms" is unclear.

The Jersey City Times was tipped off about the status of the lease by longtime environmental activist Bill Wolfe, who has closely followed the months-long drama surrounding the Suntex deal. Wolfe was first to report on his Substack that the lease has yet to be signed.

Wolfe stated that part of the delay in signing the lease had to do with a requested review by the Office of the State Comptroller, a review the DEP spokesman said is not taking place.

“The lease agreement has not been forwarded to the Comptroller’s Office,” he said.

By scheduling the lease vote for Jan. 15, the State House Commission may have also handed Sherrill a slim opportunity to veto the decision. A governor can veto commission meeting minutes within 10 business days, thus nullifying votes at that meeting. The commission had previously been scheduled to vote on the lease a month earlier, but abruptly pulled the item from the Dec. 15 agenda. The 30-day delay in the State House Commission vote, a necessary step in the lease-approval process, means Gov. Sherrill has until midnight Jan. 30 to veto the vote that approved the lease.

When asked whether she planned to take this action, a spokesman for the governor did not return a request for comment.

Under the terms of the 60-year lease negotiated by LaTourette and approved by the State House Commission, Suntex will be allowed to build a three-acre, 70-foot-tall warehouse at the park entrance, which will accommodate about 500 boats. Monthly rent will start at \$900,000, with a 2% increase each year. The state will also receive a percentage of sales receipts at the marina. Suntex and the state will share equally the \$60 million cost of repairing the failing bulkhead along the marina. Suntex will also give up approximately 8.7 acres of land it currently leases so DEP can create Marina Green, part of the Liberty State Park Revitalization Program.

Critics of the lease have argued for months the lease privatizes and mars a sacred public park while generating lower than market-rate rent. LaTourette defended the lease, arguing the negotiated terms allow the state to fix the failing marina bulkhead, get land for Marina Green, and raise income for operational expenses in the park. *(note from Sam Pesin: The former Commissioner who colluded with the multibillion dollar Marina continued his deception to the end because the north side informal athletic fields have been moving forward with construction and potential contractor meetings and will continue to do so, whether there is a new lease or not. Also the original lease gives the DEP the right to establish active recreation in that lawn by the marina. Previous leases show that it’s the marina’s obligation to replace the bulkhead.)*

If the lease language negotiated by LaTourette is signed by the Sherrill Administration several organizations, including Friends of Liberty State Park, said they will explore legal action.

Photo on next page:

Protesters gathered at Liberty State Park to oppose the building of a boat storage facility (E. Assata Wright/Jersey City Times)

