

From: Paul [<mailto:frog2327@verizon.net>]
Sent: Thursday, January 25, 2018 11:21 PM
To: jacobs@nysenate.gov; morinelloa@nyassembly.gov
Subject: Close the West River Parkway and Build the West River Trail

Senator Jacobs and Assemblyman Morinello,

If you want my support in upcoming elections then I need you to do the right thing for Grand Island and Western New York. I want you to know that I am fully in favor of closing the West River Parkway so it can be converted to a multipurpose pedestrian and bicycle trail. I am sick and tired of hearing the same old lame comments from members of the West River Home Owners Association who seem to think they have the inalienable right to usurp public property for their own selfish interests. For decades they have treated the public land adjacent to the Niagara River as if it were their own personal private property. They have attempted to discourage the public from using this property by making verbal threats, engaging in emotional confrontations and illegally posting the waterfront with "No Trespassing" signs.

The West River Parkway is a transportation dinosaur that should have been done away with years ago. There is no great volume of traffic as alleged by the West River Home Owners Association. The construction of the trail will not deny first responder access to the International Border between the United States and Canada. To listen to the rants of people like Frank Greco who presides over the West River Homeowners Association one would think that hordes of unwelcome aliens, smugglers and terrorists are relentlessly assaulting the coast of Grand Island via the West River Parkway corridor. This is utter nonsense. In fact, agents of the US Border Patrol have told me that they are looking forward to the trail because it will add to value to their efforts to patrol and secure our border with Canada.

The West River Parkway does not need to be designated a New York State Scenic Highway as alleged by the West River Homeowners President Frank Greco. All that would do is restrict public access to the Niagara River favoring automobiles over pedestrians and cyclists. This is a profound reversal of a trend that is going on all across New York State and the United States for that matter. Unused highway and railroad corridors have been and will continue to be routinely converted to multi-use trails. The trails built most recently in the City of Tonawanda and the Town of Tonawanda are manifestations of this trend. The West River Trail needs to be built and it also needs to be preserved. The best way to do that is to officially establish the West River Trail as a New York State Scenic Byway not some dysfunctional Scenic Highway. Better yet, the trail should be elevated to the status of a linear state park. It has been done on Long Island so it can happen here.

The West River Homeowners President and his cronies allege that the State is not following some nebulous Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) between the New York State Office of Parks, Recreation and Historic Preservation and the Town of Grand Island. No one in Town of Grand Island government has the authority to dictate the terms of public usage on property that is wholly owned by the State of New York. This is a state project on state land that is fully

funded by a Federal grant and matching Niagara River Greenway funds. During the project planning process many good faith attempts were made to establish a working relationship between the New York State Office of Parks, Recreation and Historic Preservation and the Town of Grand Island. However, all such attempts were thwarted by three misguided Grand Island Councilmen who put their own personal and self-serving interests ahead of those of the general public. This unholy coalition whose hallmark was arrogance and an abject lack of cooperation actually succeeded in curtailing communication favoring instead a relentless position designed only to derail the West River Trail project. Despite all of this, the New York State Office of Parks, Recreation and Historic Preservation was diligent in its efforts to obtain public input exceeding the usual standards set forth in any project planning process. The vaunted MOU has no legal standing. If it was not followed as alleged by the West River Home Owners Association (though there is no proof that anything like that occurred) then it was only through the efforts of these misguided Town Board members who thought it best to block the project rather than discuss it. They are the ones who impaired project communication not the representatives of the New York State Office of Parks, Recreation and Historic Preservation.

As elected officials, you represent all of us and as such you have no business meddling in the outcome of a transparent open project planning process conducted in good faith by a State Agency. The New York State Office of Parks, Recreation and Historic Preservation has done a magnificent job developing this project. They ran an open and objective public involvement process that succeeded in spite of the immature behavior of three of our town board members. The West River Trail project has considerable merit. Its importance is further underscored by the fact that a grant was approved through the highly competitive Federal Transportation Alternatives Program augmented by Niagara Greenway funding. You simply cannot turn your back on this project. The West River Trail is fully funded, it does not impact the New York State budget and more importantly it is a world class project that will draw people to the Niagara River. There is no reason for you to interfere with this project as I am sure that you both understand that using your influence to advance the misguided intentions of a special interest group like the West River Homeowners Association is both unethical and unlawful.

In view of the above, I ask that you let the New York State Office of Parks, Recreation and Historic Preservation complete its work so that they can deliver a trail project that will benefit Grand Island and Western New York, add value to the Niagara River Greenway that was established by the New York State Legislature and enhance economic opportunity in the rapidly growing area of ecotourism.

Paul G. Leuchner