



Parks, Recreation and Historic Preservation

ANDREW M. CUOMO
Governor

ROSE HARVEY
Commissioner

MARK W. THOMAS
Director

February 26, 2018

Christopher L. Jacobs
Senator, 60th District
65 Court Street, Room 213
Buffalo, NY 14202

Honorable Senator Jacobs,

Thank you for your letter regarding the Grand Island West River Parkway. To immediately alleviate your initial concern, the property in the existing parkway corridor is entirely within the jurisdiction of State Parks and as such it is and will remain State Park property.

I am, however, concerned by the implication that the public process was flawed as we exceeded the required number of public meetings so as to facilitate and encourage robust discussion. We have received many positive comments on the project from members of the public who attended these presentations and were pleased with the intended direction. We have also received some negative responses which were almost exclusively from neighboring residents, but those represent only a portion of the homeowners that border the park. Many of those in opposition expressed a strong desire to have nothing change, regardless of the plan offered. As an agency responsible for the stewardship and protection of valuable parkland on behalf of all New York state residents, we believe that the restoration and naturalization of a grossly underused roadway is in the best interest of all New Yorkers.

The possibility of future development of the park land corridor is little more than a rumor initiated by those with a specific agenda. This was not a topic raised by State Parks in the many public meetings we hosted as the area is not intended for any type of development. The goal of this project is to better utilize a rare stretch of scenic waterfront park to encourage health conscious enjoyment of the WNY area. Private or public development of this narrow corridor would be both impractical and detrimental to the project goals and would not be supported by Parks.

Regarding the maintenance plan, we have had multiple discussions with Town of Grand Island elected officials. We greatly value public input from our stakeholders and patrons to inform desired amenities, but do not typically assume community members will have the working knowledge of park budgets, staffing capabilities and available equipment to inform a sustainable parks operation and maintenance plan. To develop this we rely on our park staff, which in this case would be from Beaver Island State Park along with our experienced regional landscape architects and engineering staff. We are aware of the preferences of some neighboring residents as was relayed to Parks by the West River Homeowners Association and the Town Board. We are considering their input along with the aforementioned operational considerations while developing the long term maintenance plan. To meet their stated desires of a manicured

lawn would place an unfair fiscal burden on all taxpayers who would be forced to fund a program greater than what is truly necessary. The concept at this time would include mowed and unmowed areas, which will create a more visually stimulating aesthetic while also promoting wildlife habitat for which the river corridor is well known. It is also State Parks' intention to address some of the viewshed concerns by initiating a program to remove invasive plants and selectively prune remaining flora which we expect will improve the view for many residents. Although not complete at this time, we anticipate a continued dialogue with Town officials before a plan is finalized.

State Parks is grateful for the continued and ongoing support of elected officials as this and other area improvement projects are designed and built. We mutually appreciate the challenges faced as we work to ensure the very best is delivered to the citizens. Specifically with this project, we have done our very best to provide an engaged and thoughtful public design process to inform a project we believe will be a tremendous benefit for the people of the State of New York and especially residents of Grand Island and the Western New York region.

To facilitate greater public awareness and alleviate concerns, we have established a project website that will include regular updates as this project continues to progress. For more information, I invite you to visit the project website:.

<https://parks.ny.gov/inside-our-agency/documents/WestRiverGreenwayConnectorTrail/RiverViewConnectorSummary.pdf>

Respectfully,



Mark Thomas
Western District Director

Cc Nate McMurray, Supervisor, Town of Grand Island
Beverly A. Kinney, Councilwoman, Town of Grand Island
Mike Madigan, Councilman, Town of Grand Island
Peter Marston, Jr., Councilman, Town of Grand Island
Jennifer L. Baney, Councilwoman, Town of Grand Island