

Minutes
The 79th Meeting
Of the
Niagara River Greenway Commission
DeVeaux Woods State Park
January 16, 2018 3:00 pm

The meeting was called to order by Vice Chair Soluri at 3:04 pm. Angela Berti was directed to call the roll and a quorum of members was determined to be present.

The following Commissioners or their designated representatives were in attendance:

Greg Stevens, Chairman
Sean Edwards, Treasurer
Sam Magavern, CAC Commissioner
Joseph Emminger, Commissioner
Steven Broderick, Commissioner
Ron Hayes, NYS Department of Transportation
Lynn Marinelli, Empire State Development
Lou Paonessa, New York State Power Authority
Mark Thomas, New York State Parks
Chris Bauer, NYS DOS
Tim DePriest, NYS DEC
Richard Soluri, Vice Chair

ANNOUNCEMENTS

- Monday January 22 is the deadline applications to the Buffalo and Erie County Standing Committee. February 28 is the public meeting and announcements are made on March 23.
- Commissioner Steve Broderick is retiring from the Niagara County Sheriff's office at end of January.

PUBLIC COMMENT ON CURRENT PROJECTS

Jo Johnson with Niagara Relicensing Environmental Coalition presented their findings. All projects were found to be consistent except for the Nature's Habitat Certification Project.

PROJECT REVIEW AND VOTE

Buffalo State College Floating Classroom

Presented by Dr. Susan McCartney

This project is based upon a similar project in Georgia. It will be a pontoon boat that holds about 30 people and will be equipped with workspace, plankton nets, microscopes, GIS technology, etc. Buff State will provide specialists and pros that will provide experiential learning. They are collaborating with Buffalo Public Schools, Riverside High, Buffalo Maritime Center, Friends of Time Beach and more and they believe that once they are operating, there will be more collaborators. Buffalo State has a long-standing history of working on the waterfront. They have a coordinator to do water based education.

Commissioner Magavern suggested that they tie in the Greenway in more robust way since we are providing a lot of funding.

Commissioner Paonessa asked for clarification about who gets to use this boat. Dr. McCartney said that in year 2 they would hope to get at least 130 tours out that would be open to the public. They will also be extending opportunities to local high schools and would appreciate our help to get the word out.

Commissioner Thomas asked about where our year funding will come from. Buffalo State will be covering it through fundraising.

Commissioner Paonessa expressed concern about future funding. It would be bad to fund it now with no guarantee of continuation.

Commissioner DePriest commented that this is one of very few projects found consistent that will get kids out on the water. It is a great project.

A vote was taken and it was found unanimously consistent.

Cazenovia Community Resource Center Breakwater Bay **Presented by Pierre Wallinder and Sam Savarino**

This public /private project will complement all the growth on the Outer Harbor and will revitalize an old grain silo.

Public access to the water will be provided at this location which is underdeveloped right now. An existing building will be converted into a comfort station and a new building will be built that will serve as a community gathering area. Additionally, there will be enhanced trails, new transient boat slips, a launch greenspace for games, and other amenities. This public access will all be in alignment with the vision of the private landowner who will also be adding beachfront cottage rentals, a restaurant etc. There will also be opportunity to rent boats. The private owners have a track record of good projects that enhance waterfront access and they are very focused on ensuring that the public can enjoy.

Commissioner Broderick asked if the grain elevator staying? Savarino responded that it will be used and restored and lit up. They will also do some native plantings around it to make the area below it more attractive.

Commissioner Soluri asked the cost and it was indicated that it is \$1 million in hard construction plus \$350,000 a year over a period of years.

Commissioner Edwards asked if there was an end to the \$350,000 funding request and Wallinder responded that it is a total of \$750,000 to complete the public component. Numbers are still being worked out.

Commissioner Thomas reminded the group that there are no motorboats permitted on the north side. Wallinder sees that as a positive so that there can be diverse usage. Boats currently launch from the Buffalo First Marina to launch.

Savarino said the public would have access to all areas but some areas where the private investment is, such as the cottages, will be secured.

Wallinder indicated that there has been a request for a location such as this.

Commissioner Broderick asked if the shelters can be rented. Wallinder responded that yes and there are areas for picnicking.

Commissioner Magavern asked how “green” the parking lot will be. Savarino said it is not their vision to create a large asphalt lot but it is up to city code. They would like to just keep it a stone lot, small and used for marina storage in the off season.

Commissioner Broderick asked for the term of the lease? It is a 10 year lease with another option for 10 years.

Commissioner DePriest commented that the Cazenovia Community Center have already implemented two projects successfully but this project can serve as a good example in dealing with the concern that most of the waterfront land is in private ownership. This is a good example to show how public can gain access to private land.

A vote was taken and it was found unanimously consistent.

City of Niagara Falls Frederick Douglas Memorial Plaza **Presented by Tom DeSantis**

This project compliments the Harriet Tubman plaza which was previously funded by the Greenway and connects the story of the Underground Railroad.

The memorial is located on the property of the church where Frederick Douglas spoke several times so he has a direct connection with our area.

It is off the actual Greenway focus area but there is a direct connection and story to be told and with the anticipated revitalization of Main St., this is part of a larger strategy for historical interpretation on the Greenway.

Commissioner Soluri says that this is a compatible project with the removal of the Parkway and connecting to Main St.

DeSantis indicated that the project will cost \$280,000 including landscaping and interpretation.

Commissioner Thomas commented that there will be several nodes in that area where people can get a multifaceted look at history. DeSantis stressed that though the Underground Railroad Heritage Center itself is small but the other spaces that will be created by parkway removal project will help tie it together.

Commissioner Thomas also stated that in the case, the statuary is part of a whole experience as opposed to standalone statues that have been previously found consistent.

Commissioner Magavern asked that other Underground Railroad attractions along the Greenway—Riverside Park and Lewiston—be included in interpretation. DeSantis indicated that they do work with the Lewiston stop already.

A vote was taken and it was found unanimously consistent.

WNY Land Conservancy Natures Habitat Certification Program **Presented by Nancy Smith**

Smith discussed the importance of the book called “Bringing Nature Home” which focuses on homeowners who control so much of what happens in our ecology. We can increase our positive impact on the Greenway by engaging private landowners. They do this in Canada.

This project is modeled after a project in Oregon where in 9 years they have engaged over 3000 landowners.

There are huge impacts when the public gets involved including less tangible outcomes as well such as raising the visibility of the Greenway and engaging young people to appreciate nature.

The goal is to have 750 home owners and 50 business certified by 2020.

By the way, the author of “Bringing Home Nature,” Doug Tallamy will be in Niagara Falls as part of this Greenway project. More information will follow.

Commissioner Magavern said it is a great proposal but could be stronger if there were more targeting of homeowners in the focus area and find the most critical parts. The Land Conservancy plans to do some major outreach and agree with the idea of connectivity.

Commissioner Thomas asked about partnering with the cooperative extension? Smith responded that they partner with them a lot. There are several others we could partner with but we want to take the lead on rolling this out. Commissioner Thomas says it makes sense to create clusters and using other resources would be helpful.

Commissioner Paonessa confirmed that the Land Conservancy is looking for operations fund but not actual improvement? He suggested that the Ecological Standing Committee may have concerns but the Land Conservancy already met with them and they are interested.

Smith clarified that the ask is \$150,000 a year for 3 years plus the impact of whatever homeowners spend.

Commissioner Paonessa asked how this project is different than the one Waterkeeper tried. Smith responded that it covers more properties and they are engaging landowners. The Waterkeeper program was more direct restoration.

Commissioner DePriest stated that this is a certification program. It acknowledges landowners who work to enhance the Greenway on their own and it will help make the Greenway greener.

Commissioner Bauer asked if it is meant to create a friendly competition between neighbors? Smith said absolutely!

Commissioner Marinelli asked how success will be measured? Smith said that they may present it as a pilot but at the end of 3 years they hope to have 750 homes and 50 business involved.

A vote was taken and it was found consistent by a vote of 11-1, with NYPA voting no.

Greenway Land Protection Program

Jajeen Rose-Burney

This project is a way for us to help build the Greenway. The Land Conservancy has been around for 26 years and have protected more than 6000 acres on over 80 properties, including Stella as an excellent example. The mission of the Land Conservancy is to connect people to nature and now we want to focus on interested landowners.

There are four target communities – Grand Island, Lower River, Niagara Escarpment, and the North Tonawanda Audubon Nature Preserve with some other parcels around it.

There is a set process to do this and there will be outreach to landowners and they will be prioritized. While the Greenway would be a key funder the Land Conservancy would work to find others to help.

This project is modeled on a program in Clarence called Greenprint where public money was used to buy greenspace.

Commissioner Magavern asked that there be more focus on Greenway goals and include some public access in order to help meet the connectivity goals.

Commissioner Paonessa commented that this appears to be a request for a study and not the direct protection of land.

Commissioner Thomas mentioned that an unintended consequence is that if we give approval, because they are not identifying specific properties, we are giving a blanket approval to any project in the Greenway under the umbrella of this project. There would not be a need to come back for consistency for each project and that is a slippery slope. Rose-Burney stated that they really are focusing on land in or very near the Focus Area but the Escarpment project would be broader and is considered an important linkage in the Greenway Plan.

Commissioner DePriest stated that the idea of acquiring every parcel with good value along the Greenway is not an attainable goal. That is why the idea of protecting the current aesthetic value of private property is key. Private property owners can do anything they wish so if there is an incentive that you will maintain the natural resource values, that is a win and a way to protect the resources we still have.

Commissioner Paonessa asked if funds will be sought from other sources once properties are identified and would the Greenway want to fund projects on private property? Smith indicated that individual projects might come back to the Commission for consistency but Commissioners Thomas and Paonessa said it would not have to, which speaks to Commissioner Thomas' earlier concern.

Chair Stevens commented that the biggest problem Greenways have across the county is how to acquire private land. We have no way to do this so this is a valuable initiative for us. Perhaps we can work with the Land Conservancy to prioritize the focus area. This project is a significant part of creating a whole Greenway. How we manage it is the questions.

A vote was taken and it was found unanimously consistent.

Vision Niagara Illuminating History and Connectivity
Barbara Rowe , Board President of Vision Niagara

This proposal is for a feasibility study to look at illuminating the bridges and underpasses along the Greenway/ Niagara St Corridor.

The idea is that they are illuminating Buffalo's front door.

While people see the bridges and underpasses, they don't understand the history or what they are. With the growth of this neighborhood, this project would tie in really well.

There are 10 sites from the Peace Bridge north to Arthur Street.

Rowe was involved with a group evaluating submissions for the 1% for the Niagara Street Public Art Program and this was one of the projects advanced. During that process there were questions about ownership, maintenance, cost, etc. which is why a feasibility study is needed.

Additionally, lighting these dark areas will be a boon to public safety.

The group is aware of costs and issues completing the project and will look at foundations and other sources.

This project will give visual markers to the Greenway, provide clear identity of the place, will involve several partnerships, and will spark revitalization and renewal.

Commissioner Paonessa suggested being prepared to talk about matching funds and what will it leverage. Rowe responded that there has been a lot of in kind time at this point but the study would be all Greenway funding.

Commissioner Thomas stated that in most cases, these structures are DOT regulated. Would be wise to engage consultants who understand that agency. DOT may also be able to help with financial resources.

Rowe indicated that they are also working with CSX Railroad.

Commissioner Thomas also stressed the value this lends to public safety and urged Rowe to stress that.

Rowe reiterated that the lighting will help create awareness of the Greenway by people who do not use it. used.

Commissioner Magavern said to be explicit about how to make the lighting efficient and include that you would be looking at lighting as well as marketing to tie everything as one project and part of the Greenway.

Rowe confirmed that the funding request is for \$71,000.

Commissioner Hayes informed the group that every two years, the DOT comes out with the Transportation Enhancement Program grants which could be helpful in the next phase.

Commissioner Broderick again restated that there be marketing geared toward connecting the project to the Greenway so that there is awareness.

A vote was taken and it was found unanimously consistent.

New Business

There was no new business

Public Comment

There was no public comment.

Adjournment

A motion to adjourn at 4:51 pm was made by Commissioner Edwards, seconded by Commissioner Paonessa and the motion carried.

Submitted by,

Angela Berti, Acting Director
Niagara River Greenway Commission