



City agency dreams up idea for Formula One racing in Liberty State Park

Tuesday, May 04, 2010

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The roar of big engines. The checkered flag. Crowds packing the bleachers.

It all could be coming to Liberty State Park in Jersey City if a city-funded agency charged with boosting tourism has its way.

But activists are trying to apply the brakes to a plan they call "obscene" and "wrong-headed."

Destination Jersey City, an entity funded by the city's Economic Development Corporation, has reached out to Formula One, the racing conglomerate, in an effort to land a Grand Prix race in the state park in 2012 and continue for at least five years.

The promotional materials even include a proposed design for a 3.6-mile racetrack that traverses the 600-land-acres at the state park.

"With the incredible backdrop of the New York City skyline, selecting Jersey City for the 2012 Grand Prix Auto Race Circuit will not only boost ticket sales as the Grand Prix returns to the United States, but will provide striking television footage," one line in the come-on reads.

Local protectors of the park were quick to blast the idea.

"People come to LSP to seek a haven, oasis, refuge and sanctuary and such a Grand Prix racing event that needs all park roads is contrary to the spirit and essence of an urban open space park," Sam Pesin, president of the Friends of Liberty State Park, wrote in a letter to Jersey City Mayor Jerramiah T. Healy.

Freeholder Bill O'Dea compared Liberty State Park to New York's Central Park and said neither venue is appropriate for construction of a race track.

"There's plenty of places we can have a Grand Prix and Liberty State Park is not one of them," he said. "What are they going to do, pave over the cobblestone? It doesn't make any sense to me whatsoever."

Both O'Dea and Pesin said they have no problem with events like the All Points West concert that do not permanently alter the park.

Officials with the city's Economic Development Corporation and Destination Jersey City couldn't be reached last night to comment.

Healy spoke with Pesin yesterday, then released a statement about the proposal.

"This was a response to an overture made by Formula One and Jersey City is one of several cities they are pursuing. There have been a few, preliminary conversations and this is very much in the exploratory phase," Healy said. "However, this may not be something that is in the best interest of Jersey City or Liberty State Park."

The CART IndyCar series held a Meadowlands Grand Prix in the Giants Stadium parking lot in 1984. In 1988, the course was changed to include streets around the then-Brendan Byrne Arena, now the Izod Center. The race was held annually until 1991 and never drew significant crowds.

