

# THE FRIENDS OF LIBERTY STATE PARK

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## **Position Statement Opposing Liberty State Park Formula 1 Permanent Race Track**

The Friends of Liberty State Park urge Governor Christie and NJDEP Commissioner Bob Martin to be wise protectors of Liberty State Park. It would be totally wrong regarding the true purposes of a free and green urban park behind Lady Liberty to allow the insane, obscene, and destructive Formula 1 Grand Prix permanent race track plan "on the table".

When DEP officials soon meet with representatives of this English company owned by Great Britain's wealthiest person, Formula 1 Grand Prix car racing CEO Bernard Ecclestone, the "stewards" of our state parks should stand up for one of New Jersey's and America's greatest public spaces and firmly say LSP is a special park behind Lady Liberty and Ellis Island and that a permanent race track will never be considered. The Governor should fight for American values by nipping this in the bud so it doesn't become another negative, wasteful fight like against the golf course or waterpark plans.

Let Formula 1 propose building a race track in London's Hyde Park, in New York's Central Park, or on the Washington D.C. Mall. Most people worldwide would laugh at anyone pushing such a shameless, insane and repulsive commercial plan for sacred urban open space. Letting a British company arrogantly ruin the inspiring free park behind our national shrines to democracy would betray the spirit of the American Revolution.

LSP's plans are completed now after decades of the vast majority strongly and repeatedly supporting a peaceful open space park for unstructured recreation activities, and nature trails in the Interior, where nature is making a dramatic recovery from its railroad era.

When Republican Governor Whitman, 15 years ago, rejected the golf course plan, she told the media her reason was "overwhelming public sentiment". Governor Christie should realize that an inevitable grassroots statewide battle will ensue and that he'll have the same choice as Governor Whitman, listen to the voice of The People or destroy LSP. Former NJDEP Commissioner Scott Weiner stated during the multi-year LSP golf course controversy that "any proposal for LSP must have a broad public consensus."

A conservative should see the reality that this is a very wrong use of public land with a highly questionable economic benefit for NJ with nearby NYC attractions, restaurants and hotels. We've heard from an enthusiastic Formula 1 follower that the net economic impact of hosting/building a Formula 1 track has been negative except for a few insiders.

This plan threatens LSP's heart and soul. Building a LSP permanent race track throughout our beloved urban oasis, needed and deserved as an escape from crowded and concrete Hudson County, is the opposite of the essence and spirit of an open space family park. Once a permanent race track is built for an annual Grand Prix weekend, there would be pressure to use it regularly for other admission fee car races and other sporting events.

Other than building a permanent landscape-dominating race track, the Formula 1 and other races would need staging areas for the teams and all their support vehicles, runoff space and grave traps on the outside of every corner, space for spectators, etc.

The loud noise from Formula 1 cars or cars in other races would disturb the park's peacefulness, residents living in nearby neighborhoods, and the park's varied wildlife. Plus the traffic congestion in neighborhoods and on the turnpike would be terrible.

LSP is a park and not a commercial venue and should only be the location for very periodic and suitable ticketed events such as All Points West or the Red Bull Air Race weekend which leaves no permanent infrastructure in LSP. The Air Race, with its family entertainment, wanted to build an airplane runway in LSP and the DEP rejected the idea. With APW and RBAR, the south, north and western sides of the park are open to traffic but this race track would mean the closure of the park, confiscating it for a private event and violating the Mission Statement of Liberty State Park regarding public access.

The Friends thanks JC Mayor Jerramiah Healy, who reviewed his clueless tourism official's proposal and withdrew it, stating he'd only support "appropriate plans which will have the least impact upon the quality of life of our residents and our community."

The Governor should immediately tell Bernard Eccelstone to look elsewhere and let the people enjoy LSP, one of the most meaningful and beautiful public spaces in America and the world. Why even start a public hearings process on this radical permanent race track plan for this public park when it's obvious most reasonable people will oppose it.

The Friends is an all-volunteer 22 year old park group with over 900 members. We are an "ORFO", an "officially recognized friends organization" of the NJDEP's Division of Parks and Forestry. Our goals are to protect and improve LSP for future generations.

We call on Governor Christie to "do the right thing" and not threaten LSP with a crazy plan. Please, in the words of First Lady Nancy Reagan, "just say NO!"

Sam Pesin, president on behalf of the Friends' Board of Trustees