

Liberty State Park Revitalization Moves Forward With Newly Unveiled Master Plan by Andy Milone August 8, 2025

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The stage is set for revitalizing Liberty State Park, with a newly finalized plan and some reaffirmed state funding.

A 134-page master plan, adopted by the New Jersey Department of Environmental Protection, for what DEP Commissioner Shawn LaTourette dubbed “the people’s park,” was shared with the community on Thursday night.

The document, detailing more than \$1 billion in potential projects, was finalized after five years of formal discussions and public input opportunities, and decades of various grassroots efforts (*against commercialization and privatization*), and the document had a focus on bringing more recreational and athletic “capacity” while preserving the open space and natural beauty.

In the process, there was also seemingly a victory for many in the fight against privatization and commercialization efforts led by billionaire Paul Fireman.

“While some might look upon this vast green stretch along the New York, New Jersey harbor with an appetite for its commercial development or private use, the people’s park is yours because ordinary people just like you have championed its permanent protection and revitalization,” said LaTourette.

Bids are now being solicited for a construction management contract related to the \$60 million of fully funded work for initial “priority” projects on Audrey Zapp Drive’s east end, impacting the Central Railroad of New Jersey Terminal historic train shed and plaza, and adding the new “Marina Green” and “Audrey Zapp Gateway” areas.

As summarized by LaTourette, an executed plan would bring about a network of trails and wooded walks, along with flood protections, climate resiliency features and native ecology restoration.

Plus, the hope is that the old train shed becomes a unique gathering and market space and that the new “Marina Green” will see the addition of flexible athletic fields, picnic areas and play spaces, according to LaTourette.

The “Athletics Hub,” on the southside of the park, would be home to larger regulation-size high school fields, track and courts, while the northern cove hosts outdoor performances.

A revitalized Hudson River walkway would be accompanied by new jetties, amenities and “living shorelines.” Outdoor classrooms and interactive exhibits are part of the plan, too, he added in conclusion.

Though not mentioned, a future community center, on the corner of Johnston Avenue and Jersey Avenue, is described online as a “key element.” Meanwhile, the closed-off larger “interior” of the park is undergoing a five-year cleanup and restoration as part of the goal to preserve and revitalize the nature and habitats there.

LaTourette made it clear to the room full of people inside the terminal building that the plan is finalized in hard copy books and will not sit on a shelf collecting dust.

But it will need continuous support for years to come to see the remaining funding secured and the larger vision realized “over the next 10 years and beyond.”

“It needs you to share its promise, to ensure accountability to its terms, to sow the spirit of community and inclusivity that is at its center and to organize and to advocate for the continuous funding that will be necessary to see through its full \$1 billion implementation,” said LaTourette.

During an interview, LaTourette emphasized that promises have been made and will be followed through on, from halting any “illegal” and “inappropriate” commercialization efforts, to some 60 acres still being dedicated to active recreation and athletic playing fields between Marina Green and Athletics Hub.

“The foundation that we laid for this hasn’t changed,” LaTourette said.

He admitted, though, that those who say, “Athletics don’t belong in a state park,” are somewhat true. Liberty State Park is a unique case, however.

“We had to change our underlying state policies in order to bring athletics capacities into state parks. We do that here, and I think it’s appropriate, particularly in an urban setting for an urban state park. Whereas, if you’re out at High Point State Park or down in Wharton Forest, that’s totally inapt,” the commissioner said, adding: “We can’t assume the work of local or county government in a state park.

Many in attendance agreed with LaTourette that the day was one to be celebrated, that it was a “good start” in the long journey ahead.

Resident Joe Harkins is hoping a glassed-in arboretum is eventually realized in the old train shed. However, he commended the “forward thinkers” who put the “encouraging” plan together to “protect it for the people” in a place he gets choked up while thinking about its history related to immigration.

“Let it be the official New Jersey garden,” he added. “They’re cleaning it up, but let’s make it grand.”

Harkins was one of many people looking at blown-up renderings and narratives, while asking questions of park service staff and design consultants about the initial projects and larger master plan.

Lorraine Freeney, the founder of Jersey City Birds and a member of the Native Plant Society of New Jersey, was excited about the native plantings and trees in the plan and how “in an ideal world, there’d be less scaping (landscaping).”

“Native plants support insects and wildlife in a way that non-native plants do not,” she said.

Jocelyn Cruz-Alfalla, a director of community tennis with the U.S. Tennis Association, attended in hopes of “being a part of the conversation” for the unknown “court” spaces.

“Whenever there is an opportunity to build more tennis courts, that’s overall great for the sport of tennis,” said Cruz-Alfalla.

Peter Delman, an artist whose work focuses on environmental themes, noted that Cruz-Alfalla may be here for tennis courts, but that he’s here for more trees.

“It’s a good compromise,” he said, while talking about the balancing act between building athletic facilities and preserving the wildlife.

“Kids want to play baseball, but they should be learning about nature too,” he added. *(at previous public meetings, the Commissioner made it clear that it was Jersey City’s primary responsibility to renovate and create structured recreation facilities for Jersey City residents).*

Former Mayor Gerry McCann, now a track coach with St. Peter’s Prep, came looking for a track in the plan and found it. **Sam Pesin, president of the Friends of Liberty State Park, added, as part of his lengthy statement, how the Master Plan “has a very similar philosophy to the 1978 Master Plan because they both represent the clear and strong voice of the people.**

“Both plans emphasize green open space for varied unstructured active recreation, passive recreation and the enjoyment of nature and also a sensible amount of structured active recreation,” he wrote.

The full master plan can be found [here](https://dep.nj.gov/revitalizelsp/master-plan/). <https://dep.nj.gov/revitalizelsp/master-plan/>