

LSP task force members' ties to misinformation unacceptable | Jersey Journal editorial

Apr. 06, 2024

By Jersey Journal Editorial

Last month, members of the Liberty State Park advisory task force aligned with billionaire golf club owner Paul Fireman thumbed their collective nose at the process by walking out of a task force meeting before the public comment portion commenced.

They probably knew they wouldn't like what the vast majority of the people would have to say over the next four hours – that they welcome improvements to the park but don't want anything like the sports and entertainment complex the Fireman group has been hawking.

Now, as we head toward the task force's next meeting – at 6 p.m. Tuesday, April 9, at the park -- the contingent is trying a tactic that harks back to the despicable mudslinging campaigns waged a few years back, putting out a slick video ad, some fliers and a text message barrage, all filled with misinformation, in an effort to scare people into coming over to their lonely side.

Sadly, although the text message landed on hundreds of area residents' phones on April 1, it was no April Fools Day joke.

The group's allegation that the state Department of Environmental Protection and "Trenton" are looking to "flood" the park and "almost 200 acres will get washed away" is patently false, proved by the fact that they point to no real source for this supposed information and no expert opinions and that they reduced themselves to selective, deceptive editing of an online interview DEP Commissioner Shawn LaTourette recently did.

Jersey City Ward E Councilman James Solomon's reaction on X characterized it well:

"If you received this text yesterday about Liberty State Park, then you got another taste of what corporate & developer money in politics looks like," he wrote. "The information is categorically false and fully refuted. We will continue to stand up for our free, green, PUBLIC park. #SaveLSP"

As laid out in the legislation that created the task force: "No later than nine months after the date of enactment of this act, and after holding at least three public meetings at which members of the public may participate and submit written comments, the task force shall consider the public comments and submit to the department recommendations to consider

in the development of a master plan that outlines long-term plans and capital projects designed to address the items enumerated in subsection a. of section 4 of this act and paragraphs (1) through (6) of subsection a. of this section.”

Strip out the legalese and you'll see the panel's mission is to hear what members of the public at large have to say, think about what they say, and take their input into account when making recommendations to the DEP.

Significantly, it was mostly just members of the task force aligned with Fireman who ditched the last meeting before public comment: Bob Hurley, the high-paid president of the People's Park Foundation funded by the Paul and Phyllis Fireman Foundation; county Commissioner Jerry Walker, whose community organizations have received generous donations from the Fireman foundation; former Jersey City schools superintendent Franklin Walker; NAACP state President Richard Smith; NAACP Jersey City branch President Charles Mainor; and attorney Elnardo Webster Jr., head of Liberty State Park for All, also funded by the Fireman foundation and long dormant until this new round of misinformation.

Kudos to the members who stayed to hear what the more than 70 people who waited on long lines and over Zoom had to say, although, really, it's the job they signed up for so no pats on the head should be needed.

Because the task force's formation had a slow start, the “nine months” mentioned in the legislation section we quoted above passed a year ago, but that shouldn't detract from its members' duty to make recommendations that will serve the needs of parkgoers and the community at large for decades to come.

In fact, the Fireman contingent's apparent inability to listen to no one but their billionaire pal should disqualify them from the privilege of sitting on the panel.

We know that's just a pipe dream because the task force's makeup was set with heavy input from Fireman's lobbyists, but they could at least have the courtesy to stick around for the public comment portion of their meetings and pretend to care what people have to say.

In the end, it's Trenton's feet that must be held to the fire to ensure the plans that get the green light are responsive to true public input.