The Trailblazer

The Niagara Group of The Sierra Club • http://newyork.sierraclub.org/niagara/ • Vol. 46 No. 1 Jan2011

Banning Hydrofracking

In an historic vote, the New York State Assembly enacted a temporary ban on hydraulic fracturing which will remain in effect until May 15, 2011. The bill, A11443SB/S08129B*, dubbed the fact moratorium that has been in effect for the past two years can be attributed to Governor Paterson because he ordered the NYS DEC to prepare a new environmental impact standards for issuing permits for high-volume hydraulic fracturing and the DEC has yet to finalize its work.

• Although the Governor signed the bill, he did extend a ban on drilling in the Marcellus Shale. He didn't want to ban all types of drilling everywhere, he said, but did put a halt toward the proposed hydrofracking in an extremely vulnerable area, so on the whole environmentalists applaud that move.

• On November 17th Pittsburgh became the first city in the nation to ban drilling outright. Residents of that city already have had a taste of fracking - literally. Beginning in 2008 the city's water supply was contaminated by fracking water. More than 1,000 people showed up to voice their displeasure with this wastewater give-away, the disruption jet boat wakes cause for small craft fishing, sailing, damage to fish spawning areas, shoreline erosion so severe that plants rare to our region have been destroyed along with the substrate they grew in, and general noisy intrusion of a carnival amusement ride into an otherwise scenic river that extends far beyond the Village.

For the aforementioned reasons, the Niagara Heritage Partnership strongly supports Williams in his efforts to curtail the Whirlpool Jet Boat activities in the lower Niagara River. The Buffalo-Niagara Riverkeeper also supports this efforts. (It is NHP's hope that the jet boat operation will be "curtailed" out of existence.) To find out more and join in the fight, check out: www.savehelvowniagarariver.com Let your voice be heard!

Bob Baxter, Conservation Chair
Niagara Heritage Partnership

Opposition to Jetboats Grows

For years Lewiston resident Jerry Williams watched jet boats roaring up and down the lower Niagara River, at first just a few of them, then more. There was a lot not to like about them, including that they were detracting from the quality of life in the Village, the quaint, serene place that so many appreciate, but what really pushed the issue too far was when the Village sold a sizable chunk of public waterfront property to the Whirlpool Jet Boat business for one dollar.

When Williams called for a meeting in the Village Pub on 29 November, well over 100 people showed up to voice their displeasure with this waterfront give-away, the disruption jet boat wakes cause for small craft fishing, sailing, damage to fish spawning areas, shoreline erosion so severe that plants rare to our region have been destroyed along with the substrate they grew in, light pollution from Canadian docking areas, fleets of tourist buses parking in the Village, and the general noisy intrusion of a carnival amusement ride into an otherwise scenic river that extends far beyond the Village.

I attended the meeting at the Niagara Falls Public Library on Nov. 30, and am now submitting my comments. Thank you for considering them.

1. It is obvious that there are totally opposed opinions on what should be done. That means it is time for those in decision making roles to take everything into account and make a decision, even if it is an unpopular one. Do the right thing, not politically, but for the long range good of the area.

2. The person presiding did a fantastic job; it isn't his fault there is no consensus.

3. Here's a story to illustrate a point. I lived in E. Aurora before the Aurora Expressway (Route 400) was built. When it was proposed, and people who lived on Maple Road in E. Aurora heard that there would be an exit onto their street, they were up in arms! Too much traffic on a residential street, etc. But that exit onto Maple was done and it wasn't as troublesome as they thought. Now nobody protests it; everyone is used to it.

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Niagara Group Elects Officers

Six persons were chosen to serve on the Executive Committee of the Niagara Group in the fall election. They will serve 2 year terms, joining 6 others who have one year remaining in their terms. Those elected are: Larry Beahan, who led the ballot, Bob Ciesieliski, Art Klein, Angie Knaisley, Tim Tielman, and Paul Maine.

None

Comments on Robert Moses Parkway

by Charles Lamb

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An Author To Be Commended

Our Executive Committee member Larry Beahan writes for various purposes. Sometimes he writes informative and hard hitting letters to public officials on our behalf. Often he writes letters to the editor to alert the public to environmental concerns. He has also authored several books.

Now we see his picture and articles frequently in the Buffalo News as he writes on matters of human interest. Recently there was an intriguing article about the trolleys of days gone by, and how much they are missed.

While the article was nostalgic, it also was environmentally sensitive, reminding us of the better life we had when public transportation was more available.

GROW WNY Has Information for You

by Angela Knisely

The Niagara Group of the Sierra Club has joined the Western New York Environmental Alliance (WNYEA) and is now part of the GrowWNY Website - http://growwny.org

GrowWNY (Green Renaissance of WNY) is a local source of information about living green—powered by more than 150 organizations collaborating for our regional environment.

Here, you can find information on everything from living greener to ways to enjoy the many natural resources our region has to offer. You can also find out how to get involved in the many projects being led by the nonprofit partners around the region. These projects range from beach clean ups to tree plantings to meetings where advocate support is needed to show policymakers why green votes are important votes.

GO TO OUR WEB PAGE

www.newyork.sierraclub.org/niagara

Read the following longer articles there:

• Chris Burger's Fact Filled Presentation on Hydrofracturing & Horizontal Drilling

• A report by Nan & Walter Simpson of Bill McKibben's speech about climate warning.

• Lynda Schneckloth's report on the WNY Environmental Alliance 2010 Congress

Sierra Club Niagara Group
P. O. Box 371
Williamsville, NY 14231-0371
Letter from Lynda Schneekloth
Concerning the Buffalo Waterfront

TO: Erie Canal Harbor Development Corporation
RE: BuffaloWaterfront

Dear Corporation,

You have the responsibility and privilege to plan for Buffalo’s most public waterfront. I restate that this is the public waterfront, and any plans and expenditures should come with the blessing of this community. That being said, I strongly support the current proposal by PPG and others for you to halt all activity for a given period of time so that the larger community can be involved in this process in light of the withdrawal of Bass Pro, your centerpiece.

This moratorium should also be instituted because of changes in the region and world at large. The planning process when begun was focused on a ‘festival’ market idea – a great idea for the 1970s and 1980s. It is now 2010, climate change is no longer disputed, we are in a major recession, and the world as we had anticipated even as late as 2004 is no longer here. It is time to reassess what this front room of the City of Buffalo might be, and how to make it work for all the citizens. I am going to go through a series of proposals for different parts of the waterfront that I believe should be considered as you move forward. All are premised on four ideas:

- the waterfront belongs to everybody and should be totally publicly accessible;
- the process by which any development occurs should be equitable and used for public services, not subsidies;
- the public infrastructure improvements should focus on public transport and not cars;
- people are going to move back to places like Buffalo from the southwest because we have water and food security; we should be preparing urban neighborhoods for them.

Let’s start with the Erie Canal Harbor area, the hot spot of our current dispute. The 2004 plan that was painfully constructed with a sophisticated and enormously open participatory process should be the foundation of any movement here. This should be an authentic experience of a reconstructed Erie Canal that is in place, and small scale buildings along the various historic streets. (No more canals!) This should include retail and commercial on the 1st and 2nd floors, and living above. We should no longer build areas without housing as people are going to increasingly need to be able to move on public transport or their feet.

I deeply regret your decision to tear down the Memorial Auditorium in pursuit of a fantasy of Bass Pro. That has left a giant whole in the fabric of the city – one that should NOT be filled by a parking garage. The building could have become a Buffalo Performing Arts Center (as was proposed), and if protected from weather, would have found a public reuse overtime. At this point, there is no demand for the scale of building that is needed to be built on this place, so I suggest that it be turned into a large green gathering space for concerts, pick-up sports, and so on. ‘Don’t just leave it with a wall around it, care for it in an inexpensive way until there is a demand for its development.

Other comments: Clear the port of CWM!!! Spend the NYPDA money you have received not to build parking garages, but to clean up the Hamburg dump site so that the water in the Erie Canal is safe. This might involve working with neighborhoods along the main arteries of this drain, back into the center of the city.

Do not build a ‘bridge to nowhere’ across the Buffalo River! Leave the Outer Harbor as the region’s Great Lawn with a few recreational amenities supported in the warm season through water taxis that move people back and forth across the Buffalo River. We have an empty city and to create internal sprawl by building on the Outer Harbor in the year 2010 is unfathomable in light of the need for compact and sustainable urban places to live. Existing housing belongs in or adjacent to existing infrastructure and services – such as the Erie Canal Harbor or Erie Street or the East Side.

Look again at the proposal for Erie Street in the city’s own CWM Expansion Plans, if you think it is the way to go. For the future of the Buffalo Waterfront Corridor Initiative: A Strategic Plan for Transportation Improvements. The best way to connect the City of Buffalo to its waterfront is to start at the edge of the city and build down to the water’s edge. The proposal to straighten Erie Street to its historic character, and then build mixed use retail, commercial and housing will bring people from the downtown in the same way that the Erie Canal Harbor will. These two projects, connected along the waterfront’s edge, restore Buffalo’s connections between the city center and the various waterfronts. It is time to replace endless parking lots with building fabric – places where people can live.

There are many other waterfronts in the city, but this area at the confluence of the Buffalo River and Lake Erie is your responsibility. This area is not a blank slate; it has a history and it contains the desires of many. Treat it with loving care, make it open and welcome. This can be done in small and incremental steps, nourishing small things, programming, and maximizing the connections between land and water.

Take a breath. Institute a moratorium and public planning process.

For more news, archives, and upcoming events, visit: http://newyork.sierrclub.org/niagara/