

November 10, 2006

Dear Editor,

The following brief Niagara Frontier history lists a number of events, many of which involve the process by which the New York Power Authority (NYPA) avoided its responsibility for making restitution regarding the negative impacts of the Robert Moses gorge parkway, and how others, intentionally or not, helped them to do so. As in most historical accounts, some minor editorializing is included.

1997, Niagara Heritage Partnership (NHP) proposes removing all four lanes of the gorge parkway between Niagara Falls and Lewiston; organizational and international support for the proposal now total about one million individuals. List at www.niagaraheritage.org.

2000, WNY Relicensing Consensus Committee (RCC) is founded, where NHP successfully moves a request for parkway removal study through two subcommittees, though Lewiston Mayor Soluri is an opposing voice in one of them.

12 Mar 2001, Office of State Parks, Recreation and Historic Preservation (OSPRHP) begins a "pilot" project, closing two of the four gorge parkway lanes to vehicular traffic.

28 Mar 2001, NHP criticizes "pilot" to Tom Lyons of OSPRHP, letter available at www.niagaraheritage.org.

2002, NHP begins to participate as stakeholder in NYPA relicensing process; NHP requests studies of NYPA gorge access road, OSPRHP maintenance garage on gorge rim, and gorge parkway removal which are postponed as too "project specific."

Dec 2003, OSPRHP & DOT declare "pilot" project a success. (Evaluation report includes anti-parkway removal letter from Mayor Soluri.)

Feb 2004, NHP declares "pilot" a failure. Report at www.niagaraheritage.org. Also notes OSPRHP decision is a bad faith action of a major stakeholder since the parkway is a relicensing issue.

Soluri delivers "Ode to a Road" soliloquy at NYPA relicensing session over the objections of the facilitator who asks him to stop; he describes the "flowerful" road from Queenston Heights to Niagara-on-the-Lake, Ontario, concluding that Lewiston needs the gorge parkway.

NYPA relicensing talks continue; parkway removal study request established in RCC does not survive in its original form, becomes a catalogue of options and complexities (see Niagara Power Project, FERC No. 2216, Impediments and Opportunities for the Future Use and Disposition of the Robert Moses Parkway); NHP files a "correction" card to no avail.

Sept. 2004, Gov. Pataki signs Niagara Greenway legislation into law; greenway funding to come from NYPA.

NYPA directs NHP to take the parkway removal study and other "project specific" concerns to the Greenway Commission.

24 May 2005, The Niagara Heritage Partnership response to Niagara Power Project (FERC 2216) Preliminary Draft Environmental Assessment, concludes with "The Niagara Heritage Partnership does not endorse the PDEA or the relicensing application." Available at www.niagaraheritage.org.

30, May 2005, Soluri is appointed to the Commission (via a Sen. Mazariz nomination) and later assumes Acting Vice Chair of the Greenway Commission (temp.).

Greenway Commissioners select Wendel Duchscherer (WD) as greenway planner.

Part of the WD planning team is HOK from Toronto, Canada; also Advanced Design Group (ADG), a Lewiston-based board member of the Lower River Region Chamber of Commerce (LRRCC).

The LRRCC is dedicated to retaining the gorge parkway.

Soluri is in his words an "active" ex-officio LRRCC board member.

Aug 2005, Niagara Greenway meetings begin: WD announces gorge parkway removal or anything to do with the gorge parkway won't be part of their plan, because (over a span of 4-5 meetings) "it's too controversial," because it's too big a project, they don't have time, it's "against environmental law" and because other agencies "are working on it."

NHP asks on whose instructions and with what authority WD is permitted to ignore such an important greenway boundary feature. Question is not answered.

NHP notes that Greenway legislation requires the planner to work with other agencies to formulate a greenway plan. No response.

NHP publicly questions possible conflicts of interest involving ADG involvement with greenway planning and with Soluri's political agenda as Mayor versus responsibilities as Greenway Commissioner, notes, with others, the appearance of violation of Public Officers Law, Ethics in State Government, especially as discussed in No. 74 Code of Ethics (74.2; 74.3 a,d,e, and h), found at www.dos.state.ny.us/ethic/ethics.html. No response.

NHP is reminded (repeatedly) that continuing to advocate for parkway removal as part of the greenway plan is both futile and stupid: Lewiston (Soluri), Youngstown, et al, have veto power over the completed greenway plan, as does Power Coalition Standing Committee; (OSPRHP then has final approval, which is yet another level of potential veto).

NHP response is that it would be a farce to have a "greenway" without planning for a gorge rim free of all parkway lanes, that WD should be charged with formulating the best plan possible. If others want to kill it, that's their decision.

Greenway meetings continue: NHP listens to contortionist arguments for a county-wide greenway river corridor.

NHP, along with 18 other groups with a combined membership of 100,000, including the Niagara County Environmental Management Council, speak in support of a river-focused greenway.

Oct 2006, HOK courthouse design for Main Street, Niagara Falls is revealed as having been designed for some other Main Street somewhere else. It does not recognize the architectural history of its location, but is fronted by huge concrete columns supposed to evoke the penstocks of the power plant. Some of us think this design for a Church of the NYPA Conception is a vulgar joke on us.

Oct 2006, LRRCC, Lewiston, Youngstown, et al, form a "committee" for parkway "preservation." Soluri is a co-chair; the committee "hires a PR firm, E-3 Communications, to "get their message out." ADG, also a part of the greenway planning team is a member of this "committee."

Parkway removal advocates ask, "And what message would that be?" and brace themselves for the appearance of "Northtowns committee" bumper stickers that will read "We're selfish. Get over it." The actual words might be "Save the parkway," but they'll mean "We're selfish. Get over it."

16 Oct 2006, a Buffalo News editorial concludes, "... the parkway was a mistake...the complete removal of the (gorge) parkway between Niagara Falls and Lewiston...is far better than continuing to abide the mistake that was made decades ago."

31 Oct.- 6 Nov. 2006, a Niagara Falls Reporter editorial concludes, "...in Niagara Falls, we've allowed our riverfront to be cut off from the residents, taxpayers and tourists who might utilize it in favor of preserving a junior league expressway that didn't even make sense when 100,000 people lived here."

After nearly ten years of responding to irrational comments against gorge parkway removal, we all appreciated reading those reasoned editorial conclusions.

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