

Niagara Heritage Partnership
PO Box 1495
Niagara Falls, NY 14305

October 25, 2007

Hon. Louise M. Slaughter
28th District Local Office
1910 Pine Avenue
Niagara Falls, New York 14301

Dear Representative Slaughter,

A few years ago, the membership of Niagara Heritage Partnership was very pleased to learn about the funding you'd made available for trail construction from the Village of Lewiston, up the Niagara escarpment, and south along the gorge rim. We'd been advocating for hiking and bicycling trails along the Niagara gorge rim since 1997.

At the same time we recognized the funds had the potential to be used in an inappropriate way that the legislation couldn't have foreseen, which would also run counter to our central advocacy—the removal of the Robert Moses Parkway between Niagara Falls and Lewiston and the restoration of natural landscapes. Unfortunately, this potentially inappropriate and counter-productive use of the funding now seems on the verge of happening.

The Town of Lewiston has announced its intention to use the funding (with money from the Niagara Greenway initiative) to create a trail that assumes the parkway will remain in place, which is far from certain. The town board has already voted to move ahead with contractor study. In our estimation, this is hurrying to build something before final decisions and related regional plans are complete.

A trail with the parkway retained will require multiple overpasses for walkers and bicyclists, a convoluted inelegance of planning that is likely to absorb a half to one million or more extra dollars which will result in a trail that expects eco-tourists to hike and bicycle alongside a commuter route. Spending millions to create this "overpass" trail would then become its own rationale for parkway retention, a position Lewiston officials are on record as favoring.

Town supervisor Fred Newlin and Lewiston Village Mayor Richard Soluri are both members of the "Parkway Preservation Committee." Soluri is also a Niagara River Greenway Commissioner whose public actions in that capacity were sufficiently partisan to cause twenty-two citizens from across Niagara County to sign a letter to the New York State Ethics Commission requesting an investigation into his behavior (see attached). But their actions need not be purposefully manipulative to serve the function of influencing a decision to keep the parkway in place.

With the parkway gone, common sense would guide the trail segment on the steep escarpment slope into a graceful configuration of switchbacks with several or more level rest areas, perhaps with benches, which would make the trails far more friendly to family cyclists and casual hikers.

We urge you to oppose this precipitous action of the Town of Lewiston to inappropriately utilize funding in this fashion, which ignores a broad coalition of grassroots support for parkway removal (list attached). Further, we'd welcome the opportunity to meet with you to provide additional information about our advocacy. We believe our parkway removal proposal to be compatible with the concept of a genuine greenway, existing regional revitalization plans, and the goals of the National Heritage Area. Paul Dyster, Niagara River Greenway Commissioner, chairman of the Citizens' Advisory Committee, would be welcome at such a meeting.

Thank you for your consideration.

Sincerely,

Bob Baxter, Conservation Chair
716-791-4611

cc:

Tom J. DeSantis, Senior City Planner, City of Niagara Falls
Paul Dyster, Niagara River Greenway Commissioner
Christopher J. Schoepflin, President, USA Niagara Development Corporation
Paul Tronolone, AICP, Project Manager, USA Niagara/ Empire State Development

Enclosures:

Niagara Heritage Partnership Organizational Support List
Letter to NYS Ethics Commission

Postscript

No meeting ever took place. Rep. Slaughter declined to explain her rationale for refusing to intervene in this matter. In violation of its own guidelines, the Niagara River Greenway Commission endorsed the "scenic trail" concept on 19 May 2009, and awarded the idea \$210,000 a day later although funding wasn't requested. A copy of this NHP letter to Rep. Slaughter had been provided to the Commission previous to their decisions together with a note urging the Commission to withhold endorsement of the concept at this time.

Niagara Falls Mayor Paul Dyster voted in favor of the Lewiston "scenic trail" concept in what turned out to be a unanimous vote of the Commission. Greenway Commissioner Mark W. Thomas (also Director of the Western District of NYSOPRHP), voted for the project, though his endorsement appears to be in conflict with the ongoing OPRHP study to determine the future of the parkway, including total removal.