

STATE OF NEW YORK
DEPARTMENT OF ENVIRONMENTAL CONSERVATION
625 BROADWAY
ALBANY, NEW YORK 12233-1500

In the Matter

- of -

the Adoption and Implementation of the Statewide Greenway
Trails Plan

- by the -

**NEW YORK STATE OFFICE OF PARKS,
RECREATION, AND HISTORIC PRESERVATION.**

HEARING REPORT

by

/s/

James T. McClymonds
Chief Administrative Law Judge

January 21, 2021

HEARING REPORT

The New York State Office of Parks, Recreation and Historic Preservation (State Parks) prepared a plan for a comprehensive Statewide system of non-motorized multi-use trails (Greenway Trails) as directed by legislation signed by Governor Cuomo in November 2019 (<https://legislation.nysenate.gov/pdf/bills/2019/A5035B>). The Statewide Greenway Trails Plan (Plan) identifies trail user types, addresses trail needs and trends, and discusses the benefits of trails. Input from a variety of State and local stakeholders as well as from the general public was solicited in the creation of the draft Plan. The draft Plan compiles a GIS inventory of existing and proposed Greenway Trails across the State. The Plan provides a vision, goals and recommendations intended to guide future planning and development of Greenway Trails in the State. The final Plan is intended to guide decision-making, influence greenway trail development policy in State and local governments, and inform communities, organizations and individuals engaged in trail development and management.

Potential environmental impacts associated with adoption and implementation of the Plan, as well as mitigation measures that could be taken to reduce potential impacts, are included as a part of the Plan which, in its entirety, constitutes a draft generic environmental impact statement (DGEIS) under the State Environmental Quality Review Act (ECL article 8 [SEQRA]). The draft Statewide Greenway Trails Plan/DGEIS is available for review at <https://parks.ny.gov/inside-our-agency/master-plans.aspx>.

A SEQR notice of completion of a draft GEIS and a notice of public hearing and public comment period were published on November 18, 2020, on OPRHP's website at <https://parks.ny.gov/inside-our-agency/master-plans.aspx>. Notice was also published in the November 18, 2020, edition of the Department of Environmental Conservation's (DEC's) electronic *Environmental Notice Bulletin* and in the November 25, 2020, edition of the New York State Register. The notices scheduled a public comment hearing on the draft Plan/DGEIS for January 6, 2021, at 6:00 p.m. via electronic webinar. The deadline for written comments was set for January 19, 2021.

The public comment hearing was held as noticed before DEC Chief Administrative Law Judge (ALJ) James T. McClymonds. Approximately 18 persons attended the hearing. The hearing began with a presentation on the draft Plan/DGEIS by State Parks staff Christopher Morris, Tana Bigelow, and Nancy Stoner. Thereafter, four members of the public offered oral statements.

The first speaker was Jeffrey Anzevino, director of land use advocacy at Scenic Hudson, Inc., who spoke in favor of the Plan. Mr. Anzevino offered his congratulations on the opening of the Empire State Trail, which he stated provides not only recreational benefits, but economic benefits to local business in the Poughkeepsie, Newburgh, and Kingston area. He also expressed his appreciation that the first goal of the Plan is to provide trail access to people in underserved communities. Mr. Anzevino noted that several important trails are in the Plan,

including the Hudson Highland ski trail, the riverwalk under the Governor Mario M. Cuomo Bridge, the CSX rail line in Poughkeepsie, and the Danbury line in the City of Beacon. Mr. Anzevino asked that several additional trails be included in the Plan, including the Tioronda Bridge in Beacon, and the Quassaick Creek Greenway in Newburgh. Mr. Anzevino also asked that additional trails that don't technically meet the Plan's criteria also be included subject to different design and engineering standards, such as connector trails. These include the proposed Hudson to Olana trail, the Trail of Two Cities between Beacon and Newburgh, and the John Burroughs Black Creek trail between Lloyd and Esopus.

The next speaker was Dylan Carey, project director for Parks and Trails New York, who also spoke in favor of the Plan. Mr. Carey stated that the draft Plan provides a comprehensive summary of the importance of Greenway trails and the benefits they offer, and takes advantage of the current momentum for trail development. Mr. Carey urged that the final Plan could be improved if several recommendations are adopted. Those recommendations include revising the Plan's vision to include primary corridors beyond the Empire State Trail; revising the vision to include the importance of closing the gaps in existing trail networks; replacing on-road sections of long-distance trails with off-road trails; establishing specific goals for geographic distribution of Greenway trails and outlining a clear process for accomplishing those goals; specifying beyond a generic list of potential stakeholders those partners that would lead the implementation efforts, particularly the groups that would be responsible for the development and expansion of Greenway trails in underserved communities; adding details about how the State can achieve universal accessibility on Greenway trails in the future; and integrating recommendations that are presented at the end of the Plan into the body of the planning document so that how those recommendations relate to the findings in the different sections can be clearly seen, among other recommendations. Mr. Carey also urged State Parks to revisit the legislative recommendation requirements for the Plan and explicitly address them, and provide a tangible blueprint and clear strategy for future development opportunities. Mr. Carey strongly suggested that the final Plan identify exactly which topics, goals, and recommendations will be pursued as a result of the 2020 planning process and which organizations would lead the efforts.

The next speaker was Melissa Whittington, president of Chautauqua County Equestrian Trail System, Inc., a 501(c)(3) that operates trails in the Boutwell Hill State Forest and surrounding area, including in Arkwright, Sinclair, Charlotte, and Cherry Creek. Ms. Whittington expressed her excitement about the Plan and stated that she would like to see the Plan become the plan for all trails in New York State. Ms. Whittington recommended that the Plan address the current inconsistency in trail signage. She also recommended that the Plan include photographs depicted more diversity in trail use types, such as horseback riding, snowmobiling, and cross-country skiing, in addition to hiking, walking, and biking. Ms. Whittington spoke in favor of horseback riding in particular as providing greater accessibility and health benefits for trail users that are unable to hike or bike. Ms. Whittington also stated that horseback riding brings in tourist dollars to the businesses that service the riders and horses.

The final speaker was Jim Jones, an engineer with GObike Buffalo who is working on the Southern Tier Trail project. Mr. Jones stated that the Southern Tier Trail project is part of the planning going on in western New York to develop a significant network of trails in that area. Mr. Jones stated that he appreciated the timing of the Plan and the coordination among the State and entities involved in trail development. Mr. Jones concluded with questions regarding the SEQRA process and how the draft GEIS related to SEQRA requirements for individual projects.

There being no further speakers, the hearing concluded at 6:49 p.m.