

An Open Letter to Gov. Andrew M. Cuomo Regarding the Proposal to Build a Lodge on Goat Island

I am writing to ask you to please reconsider your proposal to build a lodge on Goat Island.

I am a professor at Niagara County Community College, a former commissioner of the Niagara Falls National Heritage Area, and I currently serve on the board of the Niagara Falls National Heritage Area, Inc., a non-profit organization that manages the national heritage area. I am also a founding member of the Niagara Heritage Partnership, a community-based organization that formed in 1997 to advocate removal of the Robert Moses Parkway along the Niagara Gorge.

In 1996, I co-wrote and produced a television documentary called "Fading in the Mist," which aired nationally on PBS. This documentary looked at the history and ongoing struggle for scenic preservation at Niagara Falls. Sadly, in the intervening years, the intrusion of commercial structures on the natural landscape at Niagara, on both the American and Canadian sides, has only gotten worse.

One of the few remaining places where visitors can still experience a relatively natural setting at the falls is on Goat Island. And, those special spots have become fewer in number and more difficult to find with each new "improvement" project at the park. Whenever a proposal is announced for making such improvements, the name of Frederick Law Olmsted invariably gets mentioned, apparently as a way to bestow some sort of magical blessing on the project and imply that the legendary landscape architect who created the park—the very first state park in the U.S.—would somehow approve. Unfortunately, many of these improvements contradict Olmsted's philosophy, design concepts, and original intent to create a natural reserve (rather than a park) at Niagara Falls. He specifically warned against the encroachment of commercial developments and visitor amenities on the natural environment of Goat Island.

I would suggest, as an alternative site for your lodge idea, that you consider repurposing the Schoelkopf building, which currently sits unused on the DeVeaux campus, also a state parks property. The old stone building is architecturally distinctive and historic. The grounds surrounding it are beautiful and it is adjacent to scenic areas such as Whirlpool Park, the Niagara Gorge, and Devil's Hole. Best of all, it is not on Goat Island.

As someone who was born and raised in the City of Niagara Falls and who has lived his entire life in the area, I am encouraged to see you take an active interest in helping to revitalize this long-neglected part of the state. There are a lot of good things starting to happen here and there are many wonderful ideas for improving the area's economy and quality of life. However, the idea to build a lodge (a.k.a. hotel) on Goat Island is not one of them. Please reconsider this ill-advised proposal.

Sincerely,
Robert H. Borgatti
Lewiston, NY
January 27, 2017