

Parkway Preservation Committee Nonsense

At 9:00 in the morning, on 23 October 1997, the Niagara Heritage Partnership (NHP) introduced its proposal for the total removal of the Robert Moses gorge parkway. Richard Soluri, who was then the Mayor of Lewiston, after careful, thorough, and thoughtful consideration, declared his opposition to the proposal about thirty-three seconds later. Over the years, in the face of irrefutable argument, documentation, and mounting evidence in support of total removal, his opposition has remained steadfast.

Soluri's most recent argument for parkway retention is actually not new, but he has taken to repeating it in a variety of venues as if mere repetition will give it legitimacy. It can be summed up as follows: "There's always been a road there. Every planner back to the Olmsted Brothers in 1926 imagined a road there. Therefore, the parkway should remain." That's a condensation and a paraphrase, of course.

Soluri would have us believe that "planners" swoop down on us like flocks of blackbirds, unannounced and uninvited, to leave us with plans for a road along the gorge rim, free of charge, out of their infinite wisdom and the goodness of their hearts. In truth, these planners were hired or encouraged to submit proposals by municipalities, government agencies, commissioners and others--and were given instructions, directions on what to plan, produce, or submit. They were paid, in other words, or given promise of future hire. Now Soluri presents the "evidence" of these plans as a reason for the present parkway to continue to exist. Obviously, this is nonsense.

The Office of Parks, Recreation and Historic Preservation (OPRHP) first introduced this "1926 Olmsted rationale" to justify their actions in their gorge "pilot" project evaluation, which was published in December of 2003. NHP replied (February 2004) in "The Niagara Heritage Partnership Response to the NYOPRHP and DOT Pilot Project Evaluation Report," which is posted on the NHP Web site. But Soluri evidently liked the OPRHP reasoning, and the "Olmsted rationale" subsequently surfaced, virtually unchanged, as a feature on the homepage of the Parkway Preservation Committee Web site. (Copyright, 2007.) We encourage readers who are interested in this issue to visit that site and witness for themselves the foggy thinking that characterizes those opposing parkway removal.

At the top of the homepage, for example, is an aerial view of the lower Niagara gorge, Niagara Falls to Lewiston, with the caption "Connecting two natural wonders!" This phrase probably refers to the parkway, which is represented by a yellow line, rather than the gorge. The letters are white, except for the word "natural" which is also yellow and larger than the other words. At each end of the depicted gorge is a circle.

Inside each circle is a scene: at the Niagara Falls end, a picture of the waterfalls, and at the Lewiston end--a picture of three sailboats. So the three sailboats are a "natural wonder"? The next thing these people will be trying to tell us is that the four concrete lanes of parkway are natural wonders. Who put this stuff together, anyway--and they have such a high opinion of themselves to copyright it? Who'd want to steal it? "Parway Preservation Committee"? "Desgin

by Beyondus."? They can't even spell "parkway," or "design" (or take the time to use spell check), and we're supposed to believe their thinking is clear on the issue?

The NHP rationale for gorge parkway removal remains the same: 1) traffic would no longer be encouraged to detour the City of Niagara Falls, but would be redirected to the business districts of the city (and business investments would follow), and 2) the ecological restoration of the gorge rim would create natural landscapes (with hiking and bicycling trails) that would be attractive to a new population of eco tourists--and which would serve as a focus destination, permitting the direct marketing of the rest of the region's parks and natural environments. Further details, documentation, and rationale can be found at www.niagaraheritage.org. We welcome readers to visit our site, where they will also find an online petition for those who support total gorge parkway removal.

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