

Senator Maziarz: There Oughta Be A Law

Years ago the Sunday comics published a cartoon series entitled “There Oughta Be A Law,” which a young boy named George may have enjoyed. When he grew up to be Senator George Maziarz and began to write legislation of his own, however, some of his efforts weren’t so funny.

He wrote legislation that permitted the Niagara Falls School District to enter into agreement with the Office of Parks, Recreation and Historic Preservation (OPRHP) to take over historic buildings at DeVeaux Woods State Park. He did this in full knowledge that Niagara River Greenway plans were in formative stages and that school administrative offices at DeVeaux were outrageously inappropriate to such plans. Assemblywoman DelMonte cosponsored this legislation. Niagara Falls is not in Maziarz’s district. What private agenda was being served here?

Chemical Waste Management (CWM) legislation: A Maziarz bill (#1) to protect the environment and future generations of citizens was promptly vetoed by the former administration, an outcome he may well have expected. For the next go-around he introduced new legislation (#2) favorable to CWM, and for six months refused to withdraw it in favor of #1 in spite of widespread public opposition. DelMonte did not cosponsor # 2. Currently, it appears both bills are still alive. We wonder what manipulations Maziarz has planned to achieve the passing of # 2 and why he wrote it in the first place. If he’s not protecting the environment to ensure public health, who gains from such legislation? Does the answer involve campaign contributions? Inquiring minds want to know.

Most recently, Maziarz has written legislation that seeks to alter the financial structure of OPRHP, stipulating half of its Niagara parking revenues be used in Niagara County state parks. DelMonte has announced she has no plans to introduce such a bill in the Assembly. Park’s Commissioner Ash notes Maziarz seems uninformed about actual park’s revenue and expenditures. Maziarz, nevertheless, already has plans for how the money should be spent. Funds can be used to “make our parks look like the parks over there,” he said, referring to Canada. He also wants to spend on “transportation infrastructure,” and we’d guess to correct the condition of non-compliance with ADA regulations he claims exists at Joseph Davis State Park, which he says should be “an embarrassment.” Desperate to sound as if he’s suddenly an expert on parks management, Maziarz also wants to “upgrade” softball diamonds at Reservoir State Park.

What should be an embarrassment is his willingness, in spite of his appalling lack of knowledge, to grandstand at a press conference, and on a later radio show, while he appeals to a broad range of constituents: those who believe that Canada’s Niagara Parks are “better” than those on the American side; the disabled, handicapped, and wheelchair users; members of softball teams, their families, fans and friends; and those who want the gorge parkway retained.

Tens of thousands of people are aware of Niagara State Park's historic legacy, which Maziarz apparently isn't, and the last thing they want is that "our parks look like those over there." There's no question Canadian parks are beautiful, flower beds mulched, ablaze with blossoming plants set out in pleasing arrangements. The park land originally donated by Sir Harry Oakes reflects the tradition of the English flower garden, much copied around the world, including the decorative flower beds around many American homes.

The Falls park on the New York side, by contrast, was created by the world-famous and respected landscape designer Frederick Law Olmsted (and Vaux) to be natural, forever wild, an homage to American wilderness environments, compatible with the plunging waterfalls. Here, various foliage-rich river edges were to frame glimpses and vistas of rushing water, and dappled sunlight was to filter through the trees where ferns and wildflowers such as the indigenous red trillium graced the forest floor. It's a different kind of beauty, more subtle, but unique near an urban setting and much appreciated by many.

Contrary to what Maziarz claimed, all conditions at Joseph Davis State Park appear to provide handicapped and wheelchair accessibility: handicapped parking is available, picnic benches constructed to accommodate wheelchairs are available and in proximity to outdoor grills, access to the fishing dock is properly sloped and ramped, restrooms are handicapped accessible. If the Senator knows of ADA infraction in the park, minor or otherwise, we suggest he pick up the phone, stop by in person, or otherwise contact State Parks about it rather than getting all self-righteous and mysterious at a press conference to advance his agenda.

At the press conference, Richard Soluri, Mayor of the Village of Lewiston, and Niagara River Greenway Commissioner, currently under investigation for ethics violations by the New York State Ethics Commission, commented about regionalism "linking" our river parks, while Maziarz all but invited an amendment to his bill to develop "trolley service" from park to park. He was more direct during the radio interview, calling for a people-mover, "up and down the gorge." Does anyone smell an emerging scheme to commercialize the gorge parkway as a retention guarantee (Soluri's years-long-intention), a trolley route on which tourists would be trucked on down to Lewiston? The Maziarz reallocation of parks funds may have little chance of passing, but he's undoubtedly reaped some "atta-boy" points for his efforts.

If he'd like cleaner park restrooms and litter picked up more thoroughly, that's good. If he wants the Olmsted vision, once he finds out what it is, more completely realized, that's good, too, and lots of people would be ready to help him on that. As far as "upgrading" softball parks at Reservoir State Park, he should sponsor a bake sale as a fund-raiser. The proceeds could be added to the 3 million dollars of greenway money OPRHP will get annually for the next half century, part of which is already earmarked for such improvements at Reservoir State Park.

When Senator Maziarz advocated Lewiston as the best location for a NCCC Culinary Arts Institute, which on behalf of the Niagara Heritage Partnership I argued against in favor of Niagara Falls, I also made a suggestion to the Senator and others: propose legislation requiring new Niagara County buildings to be highly certified green buildings. The Niagara County Environmental Management Council had already, in its advisory capacity, sent a similar request to the County Legislature. This suggestion, which has the potential to save taxpayers millions on payouts for future energy bills, was responded to with profound silence. Taxpayers should call Senator Maziarz at 716-731-8740 and also their legislators to ask what action they're taking on the green building idea.