

Five Gorge Parkway Removal Opponents and Their Silly "Opinions"

A smattering of opinions against removing the gorge parkway between Niagara Falls and Lewiston have been expressed in recent weeks, none of them good, and some even laughable, but they need responses because those who haven't followed the issue closely might be confused by them.

Beth Waters of Lewiston, after she got over her "surprise" that the Niagara Falls Tourism Advisory Board had endorsed total parkway removal, went on to say that the real competition for tourist dollars was with Canada. (Therefore, the parkway should not be removed.) Zach Collister, also of Lewiston, stated that he agreed with her and added an exclamation point, literally. He also said that "Niagara Falls hotels rely on Lewiston to attract tourists." Frank M. Wasco of Lewiston believes Frederick Law Olmsted, from the "horse and buggy days...couldn't foresee the advances that are taking place every day." (And, therefore, Olmsted's ideas are outmoded and we should keep the parkway?) John J. Dombrowski of North Tonawanda, who regards natural forest landscapes as "unkempt woodlots," calls the Niagara Heritage Partnership and other advocates for removal "a shrill extremist minority," who "misleads the public with facts." He puts the word "facts" in quotation marks, as did Walter Trzeciak of Lewiston who added "so-called" in front of "facts" to make clear what he's saying: NHP lies or makes things up. Neither of them offered any examples. It begins to sound as if they've all attended the same workshop on how to malign NHP and, in doing so, to discredit our advocacy for total gorge parkway removal. Trzeciak goes on to say that "modern times call for sensibility and compromise" (as if these weren't good ideas in the past), that previous NHP guest views were "brutally biased" (no examples offered) and that there is no need for "rebuttal" of his letter. He further requests: "Please do not bother to belittle or berate me as you have done to others...just because I have an opposing view...this is America...and I have a right to my own opinion." And so he does--and our response is that his opinions are merely accusations, assertions without supporting details or examples.

For the record, NHP has not belittled people, but ideas. We have not indulged in name calling as others have done. If it is brought to our attention that we (or I) have attacked individuals personally and not their ideas, I will apologize publicly, for what that's worth. In the world of ideas, opinions get challenged all the time, attacked, mocked, disagreed with respectfully, and so on. There's no free pass, where a person gets to sound off in a public forum and can then say, "No need for a rebuttal, now!" That's not the way it works.

Re: "our competition is Canada." For those who want to think in terms of competition, News Flash: Canada has won. Get over it. The best view of the waterfalls is from Canada. This is a geological fact, noted by Olmsted in 1887. This is not an opinion. In Canada, they have developed what you see there to facilitate and take advantage of the view--towering hotels, casinos, an "observation" tower, a Ferris wheel, etc, accompanied by many flashy and some say tacky attractions. People who love that sort of thing (and want to experience the panoramic view) go there, a certain percentage of the millions who visit, and it's been that way for many, many years. Nothing will change that. We can develop our own tacky-tacky and Canada will still have the view; the gorge parkway will continue to detour traffic, including tourists, around the City.

What we have to offer on our side is the up-close experience of the rapids and waterfalls in a park setting of grass, trees, and rock, natural landscapes envisioned by Olmsted, that guy from "horse and buggy days." Olmsted believed that outstanding parks, especially those in the context of unique natural phenomena (such as the waterfalls at Niagara) deserved respect and should be preserved and restored to maintain their natural environments. NHP agrees. Is that now an outdated idea because of "advances taking place every day"? (Perhaps we should take a hard look at Thomas Jefferson and the Declaration of Independence, another legacy from the horse and

buggy era.) Will Lewiston build some more environmentally-destructive tacky stuff to which Niagara Falls can send tourists via the parkway? The jet boat's a good start. Collister praises it.

There seems two choices regarding the gorge rim: 1) Full of Canada-envy, and without an imagination of our own, copy Canada by building tall hotels, private residences, attractions, entertainments, carnival rides, two-headed goat museums, House of Mirrors, trolley tracks with "cute" trains on them, fun houses, haunted houses, wax museums, etc to within 100 feet of the gorge edge, along which will run--the parkway! Just do what they did and turn the whole Niagara experience into an amusement park. Make it the "tourist trap" that Wasco laments us losing to Canada. 2) Remove the parkway and restore the gorge rim with the natural park that extends the Olmsted vision...the naturally growing and maturing old growth forests, long grass wildflower meadows with walking and bicycle paths. Imagine this the focal point from which a new population of ecotourists would embark on trips across Niagara County and beyond (Iroquois National Game Reserve, for example) to the fine wildlife parks and areas our region offers. This would require work and promotion, of course. Otherwise how would they know, for just one example, about the Lewiston Wildlife Refuge, where butterflies rare to our area have been sighted (the Silvery Blue and the Dreamy Duskywing), as well as nesting Grasshopper Sparrows, a species of concern because of shrinking habitat.

For NHP it's a given that all tourists should be treated with respect, not as money sources to be "trapped." They should get services and goods of value for the money they spend. Souvenir-quality county maps should be created, for example, and made freely available, with self-guided tours suggested. This and other ideas related to the proposal for total gorge parkway removal are available at www.niagaraheritage.org, where genuine regional concepts are discussed, unlike the largely rhetorical prattle introduced by Collister, who manages to talk about it at length, while studiously avoiding mention of the waterfalls themselves, and their location at Niagara Falls, New York. He does mention that "forcing" people to drive down Main Street in Niagara Falls "will only put a nasty taste in their mouth" (as if they have but one mouth between them) and "add to their vehicle repair bill." He is clearly unaware that Main Street was repaved nearly two years ago. Collister needs to be better informed about such realities if he has ambitions to function in County government--though we are pleased he has stopped citing his place of occupation and job title to lend credence to his shaky arguments. Perhaps the company for whom he works feels the same way; the letter to them re this matter, to which they have not responded, is posted on the NHP website.

Collister could benefit from visiting the NHP site, but he's not alone. Wasco might learn how to spell "Olmsted." Waters would find additional information about which to be "surprised": not only has the Niagara Falls Tourism Advisory Board endorsed gorge parkway removal, but so has the Niagara Falls City Council, and Paul Dyster and members of his family. Over 2,100 names are on the online petition in support of removal, and we have about 2000 more on paper, many on both lists from Lewiston and Youngstown (congratulations to them for their clear thinking on the issue)—as well as over 80 groups and organizations with memberships totaling over one million. That's a lot of surprises and a broad and deep example of the "shrill extremist minority" referred to by Dombrowski. Any questions? erbaxter@aol.com

Sincerely,
Bob Baxter
NHP Conservation Chair
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