

LAKE RONKONKOMA ADVISORY BOARD Meeting
Wednesday, March 9, 2016
Meeting Minutes

Everyone seated around the horseshoe table introduces themselves. Someone has people raise their hands to see who is here for what presentation

People are invited to come up and speak. Carolyn Figg of 240 Victory Drive comes up. She wants to say something but can't say it until after she sees the presentation. She is given permission to come up and speak after the presentation.

Chard Guffree's presentation is moved up first because there are a number of people present about this. Chard Guffree, the Regional Fisheries Manager for the DEC ([New York State] Department of Environmental Conservation), is here to talk about the Lake Ronkonkoma boat ramp. He gave this presentation at the last advisory board meeting (January 13, 2016) but will reprise it as there is a lot of interest. He notes that what he is presenting is just a conceptual idea and he is looking for feedback.

The DEC has had a fishing site at Lake Ronkonkoma which was first built in the 1960s. The site was upgraded in the 1980s. Not much has been done to update it since.

The site has parking spaces for nine cars and trailers and another five spaces for just cars. It has a concrete launch ramp but no loading dock. There are minimal facilities for shore fishing, the main example being that there is no pier. There is not enough parking space to be able to expand to accommodate shore fishing if they wanted to.

Mr. Guffree points out the launch ramp and notes that Lake Ronkonkoma's water level fluctuates quite a bit. The ramp is sufficient most times except when the lake gets really low and the water is very shallow. He described the red-outlined area as the DEC property and the blue-

outlined area as Suffolk County property. The parking area's south side is the red line, indicating that there is no room on the state land to expand.

Designs of fishing access sites have improved substantially over the years with better attention to details such as traffic flow and turning radius for cars and trailers to make them safer, easier to use, and more efficient. The current site does not have the space to incorporate these modernizations and design changes.

Mr. Guffree has known for a long time that the other land was owned by the county. It was recently brought to his attention that this land was not bought with money earmarked for preservation or any specific use. So there is the potential for the DEC and the county to come to some sort of an agreement where the DEC could utilize some of the county property to redesign the fishing access site to make it more efficient.

Mr. Guffree notes the no trespassing signs posted by the town of Islip. There are also signs posted which identify the land as county parkland. But nothing is really done with the property. The area south of Victory Drive is pretty much all invasive species such as Japanese Knotweed, Norway Maple, Locus, Bittersweet, Kudzu, etc. There is also a feral cat colony.

The shoreline is broken concrete. There is some sort of box structure. Mr. Guffree does not know whether that is part of the bio filtration basin structure, whether it's supposed to be, or what it is. Mr. Guffree says it's basically ugly and dangerous. He points out that there is rebar sticking out in various places.

He points out the biofiltration basin, which he believes was constructed in the 1970s. It is believed to get road runoff and is supposed to treat the road runoff before it goes into the lake. When the lake is low, Mr. Guffree is sure that the biofiltration basin treats the storm water. He points out that it is a wetland and that it has wetland vegetation in it which will take out nutrients

and clean the water before the water goes into the lake. But when the lake is high, the biofiltration basin is fully connected to the lake and the storm water goes straight into the lake. There is no treatment of the water at all. Mr. Guffree notes that, when the lake is high, he has driven his boat right into the biofiltration basin. When the lake is high, the biofiltration basin is part of the lake and anything in there goes straight into the lake.

The roadway side of the biofiltration basin is fenced but it is not fenced on the lakeshore side, so people can get in there. It is a functioning wetland but Mr. Guffree doesn't know how high its quality is. He notes the existing recharge basin. Upgrading it might reroute storm water to that basin. Mr. Guffree, having been there a couple of days ago, noted that there is a substantial elevation in the lake where the recharge basin is, so it may not be possible to reroute storm water there. There are other options such as potentially moving the biofiltration basin further away from the lake so it doesn't discharge to the lake and just discharges into the groundwater.

He notes the more modern fishing access site at Forge Pond in Calverten, which was recently completed. It is a one-way drive where you come in, drive around, back your boat into the water, drive around, and park in marked trailer spots. The site has a handicap-accessible canoe and kayak launch. The Forge Pond site has the same capacity as the Lake Ronkonkoma site. It has a total of fifteen parking spaces, ten for cars and trailers and five for just cars.

The DEC couldn't build something exactly like this at Lake Ronkonkoma because the water level fluctuates so much. The parking structure could be the same but the canoe and kayak launch would need to be different. The Forge Pond site does include a loading dock for boats, which would also have to be done differently because of the water level fluctuation. The Forge

Pond site's canoe and kayak launch is a floating dock and something like that could be done at Lake Ronkonkoma.

In the design phase, the DEC employs designers who are engineers trained in fishing access design. Their design would match Lake Ronkonkoma, including a concrete launch ramp, a loading dock, and an ADA- (Americans with Disabilities Act (or handicap-accessible)) compliant canoe and kayak launch. An ADA-compliant fishing pier could potentially be included.

County Parks used to have a fishing pier at the site, but they had problems with the water level fluctuation. When the water got really high, it damaged the approach. Now that the DEC knows what the range is, this problem can be avoided in the future.

The DEC could redesign the biofiltration basin so it is a high quality wetland. They would develop a landscaping plan using native vegetation. They would acquire all the necessary permits. The property would need to be surveyed. Then, the design phase starts, where designs are brought before the public for comments. The DEC can offer several redesigns to see what people want.

The Forge Pond fishing site cost nearly half a million dollars. It was funded primarily through the state Environmental Protection Fund. The DEC Bureau of Fisheries gets environmental protection funding for fishing access development. They also have access to federal sport fish restoration dollars for access development. The DEC gets roughly five million dollars a year for that program, 15% of which has to be spent on fishing access development. There are a number of different funding sources. The DEC can develop the plans and the bid documents and oversee the project from start to finish.

Before anything happens, the DEC has to have a consensus from the community that this is a good option for Lake Ronkonkoma. Mr. Guffree points out that there are houses immediately adjacent to the parking spaces of the current site. It may be possible to move the parking lot and screen the parking lot from the houses with vegetation so the parking and most of the site would be further away from the houses. The DEC can create a one-way entrance from Victory Drive and a one-way exit on another street (not named by speaker.) This would be safer for the fishermen because of the presence of a traffic light. People with trailers would be turning left at an intersection with a traffic light instead of at an intersection with no traffic light. The other street is identified by someone as Richmond.

The biofiltration basin could be moved away from the lake while the parking lot could still be moved away from the houses.

Mr. Guffree has hired a boat steward, who will be stationed at the access site this summer starting in late May until late August. His primary responsibility is to inform users of the access site of the new regulations regarding aquatic invasive species. Anyone launching a boat from any public launch in New York needs to clean any vegetation off their boat, drain the boat, and dry the boat before they put it in. If they're using a DEC access site, when they're taking the boat out of the water, they must clean it, drain it, and dry it again.

The boat steward can also monitor the site usage, who's using the site, and what they're using it for, where people are coming from, and what their goals and needs are with the site. The boat steward will have the direct phone numbers for the environmental conservation officers and can notify environmental conservation officers about illegal use of the site. The boat steward has no enforcement authority of his own. The DEC will be collecting data this summer on the level

of usage of the site, which will help them decide how they want to redesign the site to make it more user-friendly for people using it now and for people who might be using it in the future.

Mr. Guffree reiterates that, before anything happens, the DEC needs to make sure the community is at least on board with the process. He notes that it won't happen overnight. He recalls how, at the last meeting, he said it would take ten years. He has since been informed by folks in Albany that, if the community is on board, the design and building process could take three to five years. But there are a lot of steps to go and, before they do anything, designs and alternate designs would be presented to the community.

Mr. Guffree concludes his presentation and the public is given a chance to make statements and/or ask questions.

One woman asks how many additional spaces would be added to the parking lot. Mr. Guffree notes that nothing is set in stone but describes the DEC's rule of thumb of one space for every ten acres of lake. Lake Ronkonkoma is 240 acres, which means twenty-four or twenty-five spots. Forge Pond is 120 acres and has fifteen spots. He calls it a ballpark. He notes that, if the DEC were to install a fishing pier, they would want more parking spaces for just cars.

The woman then asks if the new lot would be locked up, noting that the current one is not. Mr. Guffree replies that all DEC sites are open 24/7. The woman expresses concerns about drug use and other illegal activities.

The woman quickly moves on to ask if there will be bathrooms, noting that there are Pampers everywhere. Mr. Guffree says there will not be bathrooms. She notes that this is an environmental sensitive area and the DEC wants to put more blacktop down and have more people come to the site. She expresses concerns about runoff from the parking lot going into the lake. Mr. Guffree replies that the parking lot slopes away from the lake. The new parking lot

would also slope away. The Forge Pond site has a gravel parking lot. There's no reason why Lake Ronkonkoma has to have a blacktop parking lot.

The woman describes a recent street-cleaning job and notes how the sewer is clogged with leaves and other debris so water can't even get in there. She wonders if they can't take care of the current small area, how will they take care of the bigger area. She sees people dumping things without anyone enforcing the code forbidding this. Mr. Guffree thinks that if the DEC moves the parking lot into the area where people are dumping things and make it one way, then the presence of people using the site legally will deter people who want to use it illegally. He too notes that, currently, no one is using that area.

The woman notes that people park at the site and go down to the beach. Mr. Guffree says The site does not and will not provide parking for beach access. The boat steward will be able to document illegal activity and call the environmental conservation officers to enforce the regulations. Someone asks how long the boat steward would be there. Mr. Guffree says eight hours is the standard, going from seven to four. The boat steward will be there every weekend day, every holiday, and some weekdays. Someone asks if anyone will be there after four and Mr. Guffree says generally not. The woman notes that, in the evening, people come with their kayaks. Mr. Guffree says the DEC may establish some evening shifts to catch these people as well. He adds that one thing the DEC is doing at the Forge Pond access site in response to similar concerns is install solar-powered lighting with motion detection. When someone drives in, the lights come on and stay on for about fifteen minutes. When asked about cameras, he says that is a possibility. The DEC may install those but they are starting with the lights. Mr. Guffree feels that the lights will be beneficial for people wanting to use the site at nights for legal purposes. He feels the lights will deter illegal activity.

The woman reiterates her concerns about people using the site in the evening for beach access. She is asked to finish up as other people are waiting. She points out there is one garbage pale on the site which is full by Saturday, overflowing by Sunday, and not picked up until Tuesday. Raccoons are getting into the garbage because there are no tops on the cans. She states she isn't against the site and would love to see the biofiltration basin fixed and the environment improved. She is just bringing up ideas. She is just concerned about the impact of twenty-five more parking spots. Mr. Guffree notes it wouldn't necessarily be twenty-five more parking spots. There are currently fourteen spots. If there will only be a launch ramp, another ten spots would be added.

A board member asks if the property that has only the one garbage can is DEC property or county property. The response is difficult to understand. Mr. Guffree then talks about getting two cans with tops out there. When asked about how quickly that could be done, he replies he will talk to the operations people tomorrow and can get the cans out there in probably a couple of weeks. It is a bigger concern when summer comes. The board member asks the woman to let him know if nothing changes in a couple of weeks.

Another woman (didn't hear the name) who lives on Victory Drive comes up. She wonders why the DEC is looking to expand this site if the Bavarian Inn is nearby with its own dock. Mr. Guffree thinks that the county is looking into installing a fishing pier there, which would be a good thing. He thinks the lake can handle more than one fishing pier. It doesn't have to be a fishing pier. The DEC's goal is to modernize the site and improve it. He thought this was an opportunity to clean up a messy area of county property as the shoreline south of the DEC property is really a mess. He notes that the current county property is filled with invasive species.

If the parking lot is moved, it can be screened with vegetation so it can't be seen from local houses.

The woman states she likes the woods currently on the property and claims she was told they wouldn't be touched. She pushed to get the no dumping signs put up. She notes the difficulties with having the police patrol the area and getting lighting put up. She is concerned about an increase in dumping and crime with the influx of summer visitors. She notes that, while it is beautiful, the Forge Pond site is not in a residential area. A board member promises to get in touch with her and the town of Islip about the lighting problems.

The next person is Abby Moreseth. She lives right across from where the parking lot wants to go. She definitely does not want a parking lot across the street from her house. She recalls how the new parking lot would be secluded and notes that the current lot is secluded. Cars enter the current lot at all hour of the night and the police have pulled over cars in front of her house. There is no lighting down there. Mr. Guffree replies that the DEC could and probably would add lighting.

The woman asks if there was a study done as to whether more parking spots are really needed. Mr. Guffree replies that the data collected by the boat steward this year will determine that. The woman states she has been down at the site and has never seen a boat waiting to park. She reiterates the earlier statements about people from outside the community coming and using the site for beach access.

A board member asks, if the DEC decides not to move forward with this proposal, can more lighting be added to the current site? Mr. Guffree replies it is a possibility. The board member notes that this might be intrusive for the nearby residents. The residents, present at the meeting, say it wouldn't be intrusive.

Someone named Larry comes up. He wants to know where the people speaking live as he knows the area and doesn't see houses there. A board member clarifies that two streets meet to form a horseshoe. Mr. Guffree adds that the homes run down the street from the north side of Victory. Larry is confused as to how a new parking lot would be across from anyone's home. Mr. Guffree says it depends where the parking lot goes.

Larry says that someone told him that one of the basins was once part of a hotel complex. Mr. Guffree thinks a lot of the concrete rubble in the area was part of the hotel and their swimming pool, noting that blue tiles can be found in the debris.

A man (didn't give his name) notes that the boat ramp used to be locked up every night when he first moved into the area. Mr. Guffree states that the boat ramp has never been locked up. He adds he's been working for the state for thirty-one years and it has never been locked up during his tenure. The man notes that if the DEC can't maintain the site after hours, then the community doesn't want it. Expanding the site would only make things worse.

A woman (didn't catch her name) who lives on Richmond Boulevard, not Victory Drive (seemed to specifically note this), comes up. The current site's parking lot is to the north and to the east of her property. She notes that the current traffic is terrible and that the local traffic light is a long light. Having to get out behind more cars and boats would inconvenience her. She states the lights in her area are always out. She has called and called the town about it. Finally, last year, a light was put up in front of her house because that area was pitch-black. She does not want the expansion.

Mr. Guffree addresses people's concerns about illegal activity at the site. He gives the DEC law enforcement dispatch phone number, saying there is a real person manning the line 24/7. The person is in Albany but they know which environmental conversation officer are on

duty at the time and can connect the caller to them. The number is 877-457-5640. Someone asks how many officers the DEC has. Mr. Guffree says there are about twenty-five in Suffolk County. He notes that the dispatchers note where calls are coming from and will devote more effort to areas with more calls. A board member compares it to 9-1-1 where the police devote more effort and resources to areas with more calls.

A man, Leaf Easterson, comes up. He thinks people would be there even if the boat ramp wasn't. He thinks there is potential for the redesign to help address the current problems regarding illegal activity. He suggests a new parking lot might not be needed encourages the idea of cleaning up the shoreline. His suggestions are received with applause.

Officer Susan Lavalya has a presentation regarding public safety in the area. She is a Community Liaison Officer for the 4th Precinct of the Suffolk County Police Department. When the community has an issue, she tries to attend meetings like this to remain aware of the problems and relay them back her superiors and try to fix things. She admits not all things are fixable or it takes a long time to fix them.

She states she agrees with the board member who pointed out that people need to call and report problems. She recalls what a woman living on Victory said about the crime by her home. Officer Lavalya had pulled the stats for the past three months in preparation for this meeting and there were no 9-1-1 calls on Victory. She encourages people to call when they think they need police presence. Other municipalities can also be contacted as they all work together. She can't help with lighting but if the lights are being sabotaged, that's a police matter. She offers options for better lighting solutions. She points out that if the police don't get 9-1-1 calls, they don't know to devote resources to that area.

She says extra patrols can be made in the area, noting that it is just starting to get warm and the illegal activity is seasonal. She has fulfilled extra patrol requests for the area in the past but hasn't done so in a while because problems weren't being reported. She stands in support of the community and the DEC. She encourages people to report the activity they're seeing, noting that the department does everything by computer. If 9-1-1 calls are received from a certain area at a certain time and day on a regular basis, the police department can devote resources to address what is happening at that time. She wants people to feel comfortable to call. People often get frustrated and don't want to bother the police as it isn't an emergency. If something is bothering to people, the police can help. She gives an alternative number (852-COPS) for non-emergencies. Calls can be made anonymously but she requests people give as much information as they can.

One woman points out that someone who she might call 9-1-1 about knows what kind of car she drives. Officer Lavalva understands this and says it's all about comfort. She's not asking anyone to approach someone on their own. She encourages people to call anonymously if they want. The police know how to handle that without giving anything away to the subjects of the calls.

Officer Lavalva will put the area on a patrol check to increase patrol in the neighborhood. While something are better suited for code enforcement, ongoing violations are a police matter. Descriptions of vehicles and license plates are valuable information. While it might not be quick, the police, town, and DEC will figure out how to resolve problems. She agrees with Mr. Guffree's opinion that popular legal use of an area will deter illegal activity.

Officer Lavalva encourages community projects to improve the situation. She cites a town park where trees and shrubs were overgrown. After a robbery in the park, the local

residents formed a neighborhood watch. The community and town cleaned up the park, it was used again for legal activities, and the problems were solved. She encourages the residents at the meeting to do the same. She notes it didn't happen in a week but it happened.

The meeting is opened for questions for any of the presenters.

Someone asks about the new regulations regarding boating but they are hard to hear. Mr. Guffree replies the boat steward just needs to visually survey the boat. He adds a high-powered pressure washer isn't necessary. Even hoses aren't necessary. Draining the boat in an area where the water won't go into the lake is often sufficient. The site does not have electricity or public water or a well. Some places have pumps that pump lake water, but the DEC won't be putting that in at Lake Ronkonkoma. This is the first year that Lake Ronkonkoma will have a boat steward and the second that Forge Pond will have one. A visual inspection proved to be enough. There are other invasive species which are harder to deal with, but they are in other parts of the state and rarely found anywhere outside of upstate New York.

Someone asks if the state funding for modernizing the boat ramp will pay for removing the concrete rubble and improving the overall esthetics of the area. Mr. Guffree says the funds will do some of that, but he explains it will depend on what the DEC decides to do. The Environmental Protection Fund could pay for all these suggestions. The Fish Sports Restoration funds are earmarked for fishing access sites and cannot fund cleaning up the beach and moving the biofiltration basin. Mr. Guffree notes that there are other funding sources and intends to work with the county and the towns on an intermunicipal agreement. Since Lake Ronkonkoma is now designated a New York State waterway, other funding sources are also available such as the

Local Waterfront Revitalization Fund. This could be a comprehensive improvement project for the whole area with multiple funding sources being part of this. He again notes what his counterpart in Albany said as to if the community is on board, the project could be completed in five years.

A board member summarizes what was discussed and what concerns were raised. He notes he's gotten phone calls from more people who raise the same concerns. He is not opposed to Mr. Guffree getting designs but fears it might be a waste of time if the project turns into a non-starter. He says that people would be interested in seeing designs, but that requires a commitment to move forward with the project, then, based on people's responses, it wouldn't be a good idea.

Someone asks when the funds for the project would be lost. Mr. Guffree says there currently no funds earmarked specifically for this project. The state gets money through the Fish Sports Restoration Fund every year. He notes that his predecessor is now his counterpart in Albany and that this person considers the project at Lake Ronkonkoma a high priority. Mr. Guffree estimates it would take a year to get designs. First, the DEC must get the property surveyed.

Larry Farrell has a presentation entitled "Restore Lake Ronkonkoma 2016". He lives in the Lake Hills Ronkonkoma side for twenty-one years. He's started a newspaper/website called "My Ronkonkoma" which reaches about 10,000 people. He's learned about the problems in Lake Ronkonkoma through feedback on the site.

The circumference of Lake Ronkonkoma is 2.1 miles. Given all the problems, people are at a point where they don't know what to do with the lake. It has not gotten better over the decades and has gotten worse to some degree. Portion Road is falling into the beach.

Mr. Ferrell notes that there are nice parts of the lake but notes it's like having a half-painted car...the job isn't done yet. He is concerned that he isn't going to see the lake renovated before he leaves in about ten years.

Mr. Ferrell notes that the presentation took him about six hours to put together with four years' worth of photographs. He cites the response his posts about the lake get on his site in comparison to other topics.

He shows a newspaper article from 1987 that indicates that the lake is being fixed. He says there is parts of the lake that look exactly the way they did in 1987. He shows a picture of a biofiltration area that is completely overgrown with Bittersweet. He states that the poor state of the lake lowers the values of people's homes and the morale of living in the area. He shows photos of graffiti which promotes cleaning up the lake. People can't walk around the lake anymore due to blockages which become a dangerous hazard.

He shows a photo of the property that the Bavarian Inn sits on. He notes the lumber lying there. It may not be pressure-treated lumber but was instead part of the dock. The lumber prevents people from walking around that portion of beach.

He notes that a bookstore on the lake which he posted about, talking about its poor state, was burned down three days after the posting. He shows a photo that includes a bag of heroine or other drug which has been left there. He shows a photo of a dock and the littler that is left behind. He notes a hand grenade was once found there.

He shows a photo of snow blocking the entrance to the park because workers piled it there. He shows another photo of a structure blocking people's ability to walk around the lake. He notes that he isn't coming with answers, just with evidence of what the community has been living with.

A board member asks if Mr. Ferrell has a list of specific locations which bear these problems. The board member notes that if that list was made available to the board, they could determine who is responsible for cleaning up different parts of the lake and get these entities to proceed. Mr. Ferrell says he could provide a map of the area.

He continues the presentation, showing a photo of a pine forest. He shows another photo featuring the Seneca property, noting it as an example of what the lake should look like. He shows a photo of forty-foot tall pine trees on Lakeshore Drive. He points out people taking care of various properties and notes there are plenty more who want to improve other properties.

He sorts the views into four categories: street view, treeline, shoreline, and the water. He doesn't have much to say about the water as that's not his field of expertise. He refers to the street view as horrendous. The tree line is disappearing. He tries to take photos of fall foliage every year but there is no fall foliage left.

He identifies the first step as identifying the property boundaries to determine who is responsible for cleaning up where. The second step is to clean up the brush and dead trees. He estimates that 60% of the brush is dead. The third step is to start a community project where people donate pine trees to the lake.

He says there are ways to distract the birds from disrupting the area. He wants to create new entrances to the lake and add cameras and lights for security. He pushes for a follow-up plan for people to maintain their properties on the shoreline. He and others want the lake cleaned up and for it not to be this ten-year monumental thing.

Someone notes that the debris by the Bavarian Inn is due to a leaking oil tank that was left there when the previous inn was torn down. They need DEC clearance to clean up on that

side of the lake. The DEC is currently monitoring that area to ensure the oil doesn't reach the water, which could take a year.

Another presenter, Fred Gorman, is here to speak on some building projects in Smithtown which are awaiting permits. He wants to talk about density and the problems density causes for Lake Ronkonkoma. He wants to make it perfectly clear that density does not effect flooding. Groundwater, which is runoff, and storm water are different.

The problem with groundwater is it picks up all the chemicals north of the lake. There has been a tremendous increase in density in Brookhaven and Nesconset as well as in Smithtown which will affect the quality of the lake. He is referring to the chemicals people are taking which go through their bodies and end up in the cesspools or septic tanks, which doesn't collect them out. All the water north of the lake comes into the lake as groundwater with chemicals that shouldn't be in there. Mr. Gorman gives examples of drugs like heart medicines but doesn't want to get too technical. He says we should be careful about what is developed. He asks the board to get county resources together and possibly get the Environmental Protection Agency involved. He advises that the land all around the lake needs to be looked at and valued to see what it can and cannot be.

He notes that Brookhaven, Islip, and the county all have beaches on the lake and that the county is invested in the quality of the water. If everyone in the area is allowed to do whatever they want, the lake will eventually be poisoned with chemicals. It is a very serious problem. He notices a few people nodding their heads in agreement.

Mr. Gorman presents a map. He points out a parcel of land known as Lilly Pond Park. This land was taken by eminent domain in the 1970s to protect the lake. He then points out a

recharge basin, which occasionally overflows into the lake. He points out another spot by the Bavarian Inn. He points out a 60-acre property of which the owner has just changed his mind in regards to developing the area, a plan he was previously not intending to follow through on. He urges the town and county to work together with the USGS to determine if that area is a wetland and to stop the development.

Someone says that this piece of property is definitely in Lake Ronkonkoma's watershed. Someone else notes that the town board hasn't approved any recent residential building plans. It is clarified that current in-progress building projects were approved by the town board before this person's term started.

The meeting is closed.