November 12, 2020

A meeting of the Citizens Advisory Council, Palisades Interstate Park Commission, New Jersey Section, was held on November 12, 2020 by teleconference. The meeting was called to order by Chair Kevin Tremble at 1:36 p.m. Participating were CAC members Daniel Chazin, Susan Gordon, Martha Lieblich, Tony Martin and Kevin Tremble, Commissioner Sophie Heymann and Assistant Superintendent Chris Szeglin.

1. Minutes. The minutes of the October 8th meeting were approved as submitted.

2. Chairman’s Report. Kevin Tremble reported on the following items:

   a. Appointment of New CAC Member. Kevin Tremble reported that the Commissioner of the New Jersey Department of Environmental Protection has appointed Tony Martin as a member of the CAC. He noted that there are still two vacancies on the CAC which need to be filled. Kevin Tremble pointed out that he knows two people who live in Tenafly who might be considered for membership on the CAC, one of whom is a bicyclist and the other of whom was active in the fight against the proposed LG headquarters building in Englewood Cliffs. He also encouraged the other CAC members to suggest potential candidates.

   b. Fort Lee Historic Park. Kevin Tremble pointed out that the phone message recording for the Fort Lee Historic Park states that the visitor center is open and gives the hours when it is open, although the visitor center is currently closed to the public because of the Covid-19 pandemic. Chris Szeglin stated that he would work on correcting the erroneous phone message.

   Kevin Tremble also reported that he has acquired a color map of the Retreat Route used by the Continental Army in 1776. He stated that he has laminated this map, and he requested that this laminated map be placed in the kiosk at the Fort Lee Historic Park to replace an older map which is in poor condition.

   Kevin Tremble reported that the Battlefield Protection Program of the National Park Service has awarded the Palisades Park Conservancy a $104,000 grant for a cultural landscape assessment of the Fort Lee Historic Park. He noted that a Request for Proposals has been sent out, with responses due at the end of November. In addition, he noted that the Conservancy has been recommended for a $50,000 grant from the New Jersey Historic Trust for a conditions assessment of the visitor center building, including its indoor and outdoor exhibits, as well as an application for
Kevin Tremble noted that the assessment of the Fort Lee Historic Park by the consultant engaged by the Crossroads of the American Revolution organization estimated the cost of needed repairs to the Fort Lee Historic Park at $600,000. Kevin Tremble stated that this figure does not appear to be realistic, and he pointed out that Chris Szeglin was not contacted at any point by the consultant. He commented that the only cost to the Commission of the grants would be the staff time required, although he noted that the Conservancy would have to fund the cost of the projects and then be reimbursed by the grants.

3. **Members’ Reports.** The following reports were presented:

   a. **Report on Trails in the Park.** Daniel Chazin reported that, this past Sunday, he led two hikes in the Park. The first hike, for the Men’s Club of his synagogue, was the loop hike south of State Line Lookout, which includes viewpoints over the Hudson River from Ruckman Point, the Women’s Federation Memorial, and several places in between. He noted that he was very surprised to find, upon his arrival at the Park about 9:15 a.m., that the parking lot was completely full and that arriving visitors were parking along the northern side of the entrance road. However, he pointed out, there was ample room for the members of his group to park, and the hike was very successful. He particularly noted that he was delighted by the remaining fall foliage, which afforded some great photos. He also commented that he found all of the trails to be in very good condition.

   Upon the group’s return to the trailhead, Daniel Chazin stated, he found that cars were parked along the northern side of the entrance road all the way up to the Parkway, and that cars were also parked on the southern side of the entrance road, despite clearly posted “No Parking on this Side” signs. He also noted that the Park Police had closed off the entrance road to the Lookout, since there was no room left for visitors to park.

   Daniel Chazin noted that the second hike, for his Boy Scout troop, was scheduled to begin at 12:30 p.m. Upon his arrival at the Park Headquarters in Alpine (where the hike would begin) about 12:00 noon, he found that all parking spaces were full, so he drove down to the Alpine Boat Basin, where he observed the same situation. He then returned to Park Headquarters where, after waiting a few minutes, he was able to take the spot of someone who was leaving. He noted that the other members of his troop were also able to find spots after a relatively short wait and that everyone enjoyed the hike (which proceeded south to the Huyler’s Landing Trail and then returned to Alpine via the Shore Trail). He also pointed out that his group stopped at the Kearney House, where they were greeted by Eric Nelsen, who had opened the windows of the house so that everyone could look inside.

   Daniel Chazin concluded by quoting from a letter he recently received from the
Mohonk Preserve, which commented that “as the pandemic spreads . . . , many people are faced with two choices: stay home or take a walk,” resulting in “an overwhelming surge in visitation that continues to this day.”

Martha Lieblich pointed out that this past Sunday was an unusually warm day for November, which undoubtedly contributed to the unusually high visitation to the Park.

b. Multi-Use Path along Hudson Terrace. Daniel Chazin reported that he has yet not consulted Transportation Alternatives regarding the proposed establishment of separate lanes for bicyclists and pedestrians on the multi-use path along Hudson Terrace. Discussion on this matter was postponed to the next meeting.

4. Fire at Park Headquarters in Alpine. Chris Szeglin reported that the architect has shared with the staff a preliminary concept for the reconstruction of the Alpine Headquarters, but he noted that modifications will have to be made to the plan to take account of the needs of the staff and the Park police. He expressed the hope that revised plans would be available by the next CAC meeting. Chris Szeglin also reported that the cleaning of all items in the north wing has been completed, with invoices for the work having been submitted to risk management, and that work is advancing to repair the damage to the basement of the building.

5. Scenic Byway Map Grant Status. Chris Szeglin reported that he has not had the time to make much progress on this grant.

6. Budget. Chris Szeglin reported that we are still waiting to hear from Trenton regarding the final budget for the coming fiscal year. He noted that the Park has not yet received information regarding funding for the coming year from the Corporate Business Tax (CBT), and he pointed out that, in the past, the Park has received about $500,000 annually from the CBT, which is used for capital improvements and a portion of operating expenses. Finally, Chris Szeglin stated that he is working with Colette Green (the Commission’s Comptroller) on improving the budget reporting for the New Jersey Section of the Park.

Kevin Tremble commented that this is a tough time for everyone and stated that he appreciates the hard work by the staff of the Park.

7. Park Response to the COVID-19 Pandemic. Chris Szeglin reported that, due to the high number of visitors to the Park this year, the season for collection of parking fees at the boat basins was extended until October 12th. He pointed out, however, that it was not possible to retain seasonal employees beyond that date, and he noted that it requires eight people to collect parking fees at the three areas where fees are collected. Chris Szeglin noted that the staff is actively considering implementing, throughout the Park, a metered parking system similar to that in effect at the Fort Lee Historic Park. It was agreed that this would be discussed further at the next CAC meeting.
Chris Szeglin noted that three outdoor Port-a-Johns have been placed at the State Line Lookout, but he pointed out that it would be cost-prohibitive to have these units serviced each weekend. Daniel Chazin noted that two members of his group used these Port-a-Johns on Sunday, and he stated that he did not receive any complaints about their condition.

8. Tropical Storm Isaias Damage at Fort Lee Historic Park. Chris Szeglin stated that the staff is continuing to work on clearing up the storm damage from Tropical Storm Isaias, although he is not yet certain whether the Park will be reimbursed from FEMA for its expenses in this regard.

9. Scenic View Clearance at Fort Lee Historic Park. Chris Szeglin stated that he has added clearing the main battery vista at the Fort Lee Historic Park as priority work for this winter.

10. Alpine Approach Road. Daniel Chazin pointed out that there is an orange barrier along the side of the Alpine Approach Road, and he questioned when the damage to the stone parapet behind this barrier would be repaired. Chris Szeglin stated that repair of the damage to the stone parapet behind the orange barrier is on his list of needed work, but that it is a complicated job since it also involves repairs to a stone wall below the level of the road.

11. Commission Meeting. Kevin Tremble announced that the next Commission meeting will be held this coming Monday via Zoom. He pointed out that all participants need to register for the meeting by contacting Liz Van Houten.

12. Date of Next Meeting. The next CAC meeting will be held at 1:30 p.m. on Thursday, December 10th. Daniel Chazin suggested that, if possible, the meeting be held via Zoom rather than as a conference call.

13. The meeting was adjourned at 2:28 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,

Daniel D. Chazin
Secretary