



A rendering of West River Parkway Connector Park, provided by New York State Parks.

Grand Island parkway trail to break ground in April despite opposition

By [Nancy A. Fischer](#) | Published February 25, 2018 | Updated February 27, 2018

Despite a state plan to break ground on the \$2.5 million West River Parkway Trail on Grand Island in April, permanently closing the road to traffic, those who oppose it say they will continue their battle with state parks officials to stop it right up until the end.

One weekend ago, members of the West River Homeowners Association were still papering windshields with opposition fliers in a supermarket parking lot.

The plan is to use federal transportation dollars to close eight miles of West River Parkway, a seasonal road between Long and Oakfield roads, and convert it to a multiuse path. According to a state traffic study, the closure may divert some of this traffic to West River Road, which is much closer to homes, and has the potential to more than double traffic on the neighborhood street where the speed limit is 30 miles per hour. It also would make public riverfront property facing these homes, where some have put in docks and stairs to the waterfront, much more accessible to the public.

The fliers asked people to contact their local representatives in opposition to the parkway trail, and last week both state Sen. Chris Jacobs and Assemblyman Angelo Morinello issued letters to state parks Western District Director Mark W. Thomas asking for more transparency. Both have noted that their letters were in direct response to calls and emails both in favor of and against the parkway trail.

Neither representative asked for the project to be stopped, but asked instead for Thomas to reach out to stakeholders on issues such as as details on a future maintenance plan and assurances that it will be designated as a state parkway and will not be made available for any private development.

Both also asked for concerns to be resolved before construction begins.

"I feel like this is a foot in the door," said Grand Island Town Councilman Michael Madigan, who has strongly spoken out against the trail.

Supervisor Nathan McMurray, who has been a staunch supporter of the trail, said the two representatives have "opened up old wounds." He called the letters "blatantly political."

McMurray said officials have already been working on these issues, including naming and making the trail its own designated park and developing a maintenance plan. There have not been any plans or discussions of private development.

Thomas' office said they have had multiple town hall meetings in 2015 and 2016 to listen to the public. In 2016, the state Office of Parks, Recreation and Historic Preservation considered and then rejected an option to keep the parkway in place that would have put the trail between the parkway and homes, calling the plan more expensive and unsafe because trail users would be closer to traffic.

The first proposal to put in a bike path and walking trail was put forth in July 2013 as a joint application from the town and state parks to the Niagara River Greenway Commission. It proposed adding a multiuse connector trail between the parkway and the water.

Frank Greco, president of the West River Homeowners Association, said they feel lied to.

"The parkway is a scenic drive and it really is a jewel," said Greco. "It's a beautiful drive in the summer."

He said when the state took the land (to create the West River Parkway in 1955) residents were allowed to keep existing docks and stairs in place.

"These are not public. If you were to fall, you could sue me," said Greco of his own stairs down to the waterfront. "If you were to put in a dock, would you let everybody use it?"

"Nothing is a done deal," added Greco of the multiuse trail the state plans to build. "We are going to fight this until the very end."

But Thomas has noted in correspondence from August 2017 that their "public process is complete."

Liro Program and Construction Management is the construction manager and will oversee day-to-day work on the trail project, while state parks will focus on the operational detail of the trail, including maintenance of the eight miles of trail.

Work is expected to be completed in late fall 2018.