

Work can resume on Grand Island Welcome Center

Dave McKinley , WGRZ 11:09 PM. EDT October 19, 2017



GRAND ISLAND, NY – Work may resume as early as Friday on a new, state sponsored Welcome Center being built along I-190 just south of Whitehaven Road.

In an e-mail to 2 On Your Side, NYS Department of Environmental Conservation spokesperson Sean Maher confirmed that, “Construction was voluntarily halted to ensure the Stormwater General Permit was secured for this important project. With the permit now filed, work will resume as early as tomorrow and will not impact the completion date of August 2018.”

The New York State Thruway Authority is the lead agency on the \$25 million project, which was announced as part of the “Buffalo Billion” program by Governor Andrew Cuomo last year. It did not respond to an e-mail seeking comment.

According to viewers, work was progressing until a few days ago, when the machines on the site suddenly fell silent.

2 on Your Side visited the site on Thursday to find it void of any activity.

So far, land has been cleared and the footers for the foundation which from which the welcome center will rise are in place and visible.

From what Grand Island Supervisor Nathan McMurray understands, not much else is going on right now because all that could have been done on the project up to this point has been done.

“The first phase is done and, as I understand it, the second phase...the building construction phase, is going to be put out to bid,” said McMurray.

However, upon hearing that there may have also been concerns over a lack of permits to build the project on an existing wetland (something a contractor planning to bid on the contract to construct the center had also heard) McMurray also reached out to the Thruway Authority to see if there was anything to what he described as “rumors”.

“The lead state agency on this project has said that there's no negative environmental impact. I've seen the letter from the state to that effect,” said McMurray.

Meanwhile, there are other issues that could arise over what might be allowed inside the facility.

The state plans to include a “Taste New York” market, which highlights and sells products produced in New York State.

However, as we have reported [previously](#), this could fly in the face of federal laws prohibiting certain types of commercialization within rest stops (built after 1960) along the interstate highway system.

What is sometimes referred to as the “Route 66 Laws” were enacted when it was determined that an unintended side effect of the construction of the interstate highway system was that rest stops offering food and merchandise could harm local stores and shops.

Since the laws were enacted, only vending machines are allowed to dispense food at newly constructed rest stops and there are strict limitations on over the counter sales of other types of merchandise.

The majority of rest stops along the New York State Thruway, though, because of they were constructed prior to the enactment of the statutes, are grandfathered from such restrictions.

It's not clear if the new Grand Island welcome center could escape those restrictions, and the state is already mired in a separate dispute regarding its “I Love New York” tourism signs, which have been erected along the Thruway despite [admonishments from the Federal Highway Administration](#) that they do not conform to existing laws.