

RyePatch

Sustainable Playland Holds Walk-Through to Showcase Its Vision for Historic Park

The Rye-based non-profit held an event Saturday at Playland to show attendees what it envisions for preserving the park's historic integrity and making it a sustainable space.

By Michael Iachetta

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Credit Paul Moore

About 30 people attended a walkthrough of Playland Saturday in which the non-profit group [Sustainable Playland, Inc.](#) outlined its vision for transforming the historic park into a recreational and educational space that provides more access to the Long Island Sound.

Doug McKean, a well-known architect and third-generation Rye resident, led the walkthrough, directing a group of mostly Rye residents around the park. With the rides of the empty amusement park in the background, attendees walked by the swimming pool, the pier, and along the shoreline with the Edith Read Wildlife Sanctuary in the distance.

The walk-through is an outgrowth of Sustainable Playland's (SPI) ongoing efforts to be involved in the county's request for proposal process, which was issued last year in an effort to "re-invent Playland for the 21st century," County Executive Rob Astorino has said. March 10 is the due date for the proposals.

McKean, an SPI board member, wanted to make clear from the outset of Saturday's 10 a.m. walk-through that the group considers Playland the Central Park of Westchester—a national historic treasure that happens to be physically located in Rye—and any changes resulting from the RFP process will affect future generations well into the next century.

"So when we talk sustainable, we use the word in the sense that means any changes must take into consideration the people, the planet and fiscal responsibility," said McKean, whose 1979 master's thesis laid out a framework for Playland that resembles much of what SPI envisions for the historic park.

"SPI has been set up as a fiscally, ecologically and environmentally responsible non-profit corporation currently in the information gathering-process to come up with a public parkland solution to respond to the county's request for proposals to 're-invent Playland for the 21st century,'" McKean said.

"If our plan is accepted, SPI seeks to partner the skills of the private sector with Westchester County to implement the plan with governance and operations similar to the Central Park Conservancy," he said.

That means SPI would work to preserve historic rides, such as the famed Dragon Coaster, carousel and Kiddieland, as well as protect the shoreline. It would also use the main parking lot as a development site for additional recreational uses, and retain the integrity of the park's National Historic Landmark status, while restoring its original architectural design, McKean said.

As McKean talked, he walked around the park illustrating his points to a group that included Rye resident Jim Amico; Joy Reidenberg, president of the Friends of the Edith Read Wildlife Sanctuary; Caroline Walker, a member of the Rye Town Park Task Force; and Alicia Sternberg Llanos, whose late father, Paul, was one of the attorneys who led the community fight to block the proposed bridge from Rye to Oyster Bay, Long Island.

"It's important for an informed community to get involved," Llanos said.

"It is important to make sure the environment is protected as changes are made here," Reidenberg said.

They spoke as the group trailed along behind McKean, nodding in agreement as he pointed out how, for example, the Double Dip ride clashed with the historic pavillion, that the Burger King signs violated the integrity of the art deco and Spanish Pavillion architecture, and the flume rides blocked the views to the shoreline.

Ironically, McKean paused to deliver some of his insights by a sign that read: "Playland's Scared By the Sound," a holdover from the days of the Halloween Haunted House show last year.

But while Rye and its surrounding area isn't running "Scared by the Sound," there is concern about what the RFP could mean to the area, from a "Trump Theme Park" (Donald Trump's organization had a representative at an initial RFP informational meeting last year) to a housing project to a golf course. Despite the ongoing fears of a large-scale residential or commercial development being constructed at Playland, County Legislator Judy Myers said at a recent public forum that these things would be all but impossible because of the potential public outcry and an arduous process involving state approval.

"Whatever happens, the government process with the RFPs must be absolutely clear and transparent," said Dhurv Narain, a managing director at Goldman Sachs and one of the members of SPI's Board of Directors, a group that also includes TV journalist Bob Woodruff and Peter Rukeyser, managing director of UBS Financials Services.

McKean's firm, Design Constructs, a sustainable design consulting firm based in Rye, will be the lead consultant for Sustainable Playland's response to the county's request for proposals.

McKean, whose thesis plan encompassed a restoration of Playland's historic buildings and layout, as well as considerations for its environmental conditions, said he was concerned then—and now—that Playland was a historic resource that was losing its original reasons for being.

"Take the Pier Restaurant and Tiki Bar that opened during the summer with its palm trees and South Pacific theme," he said. "How difficult would it have been to make the décor consistent with the art deco and Spanish Pavillion original historic theme?"

"Even if all new buildings were built to the highest environmental standards, the problems of our inefficient existing building stock would persist," he said. "So without dealing with our existing buildings—like Playland's historic buildings—we are merely 'rearranging deck chairs on the Titanic.'"

"We don't want to lose all that is the best that Playland stands for, historically, architecturally and environmentally," McKean added. "This isn't about the 'Rye-ization' of Playland, it is the 'Westchester-ization' of Playland now and for future generations."

For more information: <http://www.sustainableplayland.org/>