



NEW YORK STATE SENATOR

Mark Grisanti

Grisanti and Ryan Announce Legislation to Reform the Niagara River Greenway

MARK GRISANTI May 24, 2013

| ISSUE: **ENVIRONMENT**

| COMMITTEE: **ENVIRONMENTAL CONSERVATION**



New York State Senator Mark Grisanti (R, I - Buffalo) and New York State Assemblyman Sean Ryan (D, WF - Buffalo) announced today legislation to reform the Niagara River Greenway.

Created by state law in 2004, the Niagara River Greenway Plan was designed to improve the

waterfront along the Niagara River, in 13 municipalities, by "creating a linear system of parks, and conservation areas, linked by multi-use trails". A recently released report by the Partnership for the Public Good (PPG) has found that the Greenway Standing Committees, which determine funding for Greenway projects, have spent nearly \$50 million since 2004.

The PPG also found that \$23 million of that funding has gone toward projects that do not meet the original goal of the Niagara River Greenway Plan. Significant funding has been awarded to projects such as athletic fields, sidewalks, and festivals, which do not contribute to the adopted Greenway plan.

The legislation that Grisanti and Ryan announced requires that only projects that advance the Niagara River Greenway Plan, can be approved by the Greenway Standing Committees. The legislation will also refine the Greenway boundaries and definitions of projects that can be eligible for funding.

Specifically, the legislation says that eligible projects must be within the lands and waters as identified within the "Greenway Focus Area," which is already designated within the Niagara River Greenway Plan. As current law stands, the Greenway Focus Area is just a suggestion of where projects should be funded, and not a set boundary. In addition, within the tributaries of the Greenway Focus Area, only those projects which demonstrate a direct relationship to water quality improvement, ecosystem function, or trail connections, may be funded.

Senator Mark Grisanti said, "The Niagara River Greenway was created with the vision of creating an idyllic set of parks and trails for the region. While the Greenway has done many good works, it also has sometimes gone awry from its original intent. This legislation seeks to refocus the Greenway and help it to refocus on its original intent to ensure that the Greenway continues to serve a public benefit to the region."

Assemblyman Sean Ryan said, "The focus of the Greenway plan has drifted away in recent years, and our legislation is essential to bring the focus back to the original vision of creating a linear system of parks along the Niagara River. When people see projects miles away from the shoreline being funded, they are perplexed, and wonder why the focus is not on improving the shoreline of the Niagara River. We are proposing simple, common-sense reforms that will guide the Greenway Standing Committees to make good decisions regarding our valuable waterfront."

To announce the legislation, Grisanti and Ryan were joined by Sam Magavern of the Partnership for the Public Good, and Jill Jedlicka of Buffalo Niagara Riverkeeper.

Sam Magavern, Co-Director of the Partnership for the Public Good said, "It is great to see legislation proposed to get the Greenway back to its original purpose: creating a world-class system of parks, trails, and conservation areas along the Niagara River. The Greenway has amazing potential for this region, but to achieve that potential, we need to spend our Greenway money on the Greenway, not on other municipal projects," said Sam Magavern, co-director of the Partnership for the Public Good and lead author of the report, "The Niagara River Greenway: Fulfilling the Promise."

Jill Jedlicka, Executive Director of Buffalo Niagara Riverkeeper said, "We stand at a pivotal point in time - our community is recognizing that more often than not, the relicensing settlement funds are being invested in projects that are not consistent with the spirit and intent of the law, nor the vision of the Niagara Greenway. For several generations, poor

decisions and short-sighted waterfront development resulted in our communities to be severed from our river and lakes. The Niagara River Greenway is our best chance to redefine how our communities connect to the waterfront."