

Molinaro objects to Gov.'s Greenway merger

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The governor's plan to place Hudson River Valley Greenway programs under the auspices of the Department of State has drawn sharp criticism from an assemblyman who represents a region deeply invested in the Greenway style of land-use planning.

The proposed merger is included in Gov. David A. Paterson's Executive Budget proposal, and a spokesman for the Division of the Budget is offering assurances that "the important work" now done by Greenway Conservancy and Greenway Council staff would continue without interruption.

Division spokesman Matt Anderson said the state could expect to save \$1.1 million under the governor's plan to hand the administration of both the Greenway and the Northeastern Queens Nature and Historical Preserve Commission over to the State Department.

Assemblyman Marcus Molinaro, R-Tivoli, sent a letter to Gov. David A. Paterson in December airing his concerns over the plan to transfer the Hudson River Valley Greenway Communities Council and Hudson River Valley Greenway Heritage Conservancy's liabilities, assets and responsibilities to New York's State Department.

Since the Greenway was established, wrote the assemblyman, municipalities and organizations in the Hudson Valley have worked successfully with the Greenway Council and Greenway Conservancy staff.

"For more than a decade, as village of Tivoli mayor and Dutchess County legislator, I saw first hand the tremendous benefits these relationships had on the residents of the entire Hudson Valley. And as a member of the Assembly representing the 103rd District — in the heart of 'Greenway country' — I have been wholeheartedly supportive of projects started under the aegis of the council and conservancy," Molinaro wrote.

Begun during Gov. Mario Cuomo's administration during the early 1990s and fostered under Gov. George E. Pataki's leadership, the Hudson River Valley Greenway is a state-sponsored program created, according to the organization's Web site "to facilitate the development of a voluntary regional strategy for preserving scenic, natural, historic, cultural and recreational resources while encouraging compatible economic development and maintaining the tradition of home rule for land use decision-making."

The Greenway Act created two components: the Greenway Communities Council and the Greenway Conservancy.

The conservancy, according to the Web site, is a public benefit corporation that "works with local governments, organizations and individuals to establish a Hudson River Valley trail system, promote the Hudson River Valley as a single tourism destination area, assist in the preservation of agriculture and, with the Council, works with communities to strengthen state agency cooperation with local governments."

The council, according to its Web site, is a state agency that "works with local and county governments to enhance local land use planning and create a voluntary regional planning compact for the Hudson River Valley." Through the council, Greenway participants receive grants and technical assistance needed to "develop a vision for their future and tools to achieve it by balancing economic development and resource protection objectives."

The Greenway area, which has been expanded on a number of occasions, stretches from Washington and Saratoga counties to Manhattan and the Bronx. With the addition of Washington County into the designated Greenway area in July, there are currently 320 communities eligible to participate in the program. To date, 250 communities have passed resolutions in support of the Greenway, and 56 communities within Dutchess, Putnam and Westchester counties, including the counties themselves, have adopted Greenway Compact plans that are used to guide zoning and other land-use regulations in the region.

Dutchess County, where Molinaro resides, was the first county to adopt a Greenway Compact.

"The Greenway's success in spurring inter-municipal cooperation and regional planning is a model for cost savings and consolidation at the local level," wrote the assemblyman in his letter to the governor. "Eliminating their independence to work with municipalities, skeptical of state interference, will significantly setback these efforts and diminish your stated desire to further local government sharing."

Molinaro also argued that having government, environmental, business and civic stakeholders involved in a decision-making process that requires state and local officials to sit at the table with those stakeholders "is a model recognized and emulated around the globe.

Anderson, when asked how the State Department would be expected to work with the 320 Greenway communities that Molinaro raised concerns about, said the operational structure of the program would be determined by the department, "but the important work would continue uninterrupted."

In his letter to the governor, Molinaro wrote, "The bottom line is I do not believe that a budget savings of less than \$100,000 ... is sufficient reason for elimination of these highly functional and successful organizations shifting the responsibility to DOS. Doing so would significantly limit the state's ability to work with our local partners, hamper economic development and environmental stewardship

in the valley and would signal the state's abandonment of seeking consensus in order to confront the myriad challenges throughout the Hudson River Valley."

The \$1.1 million in possible savings, according to Anderson, would be realized through the laying off of seven people and "administrative efficiencies" that would occur by placing both Greenway components and the Northeastern Queens Nature and Historical Preserve Commission under the control of the Department of State.

"In these difficult fiscal times, with revenues plummeting, we need to look for greater efficiencies in our operations," Anderson said. "But we will ensure that even after this merger, the important work of the Hudson Valley Greenway will continue uninterrupted through a seamless transition."

Anderson, when asked how the governor's office would be responding to Molino's letter, said, "we always look forward to a constructive dialogue about the state budget."

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