

LAKE GEORGE MIRROR.

Established 1880

"THE QUEEN OF AMERICAN LAKES"

\$50 For 1 Year

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State Agencies Invite Public Comment on Plan to Add Memorial Plaza to Battlefield Park



The APA and DEC are accepting comments about plans to reinter the soldiers' remains within a memorial plaza at Lake George Battlefield Park.

By Anthony F. Hall

Lake George's drive to honor the soldiers of the Continental Army who died at the smallpox hospital at Fort George in the first years of the American Revolution continues to gather momentum.

Following a discussion of the proposal at the January 11 meeting of the Adirondack Park Agency, the APA and the Department of Environmental Conservation opened a public hearing and announced that both agencies are accepting comments about plans to reinter the soldiers' remains within a memorial plaza at Lake George Battlefield Park.

The memorial would be situated on the east side of Fort George Road, within a short walk from the Lake George Battlefield Park Visitor Center.

The proposal requires the support of New York State, which has owned Battlefield Park since 1898 and whose Department of Environmental Conservation manages it as a historic site and public park, and the APA, which must approve any alterations to state-owned lands within the Adirondack Park, as prescribed by the State Land Master Plan, which the New York State legislature approved in 1972.

Both agencies will accept public comments through February 19, 2024.

The Boards of both the Village and the Town of Lake George have approved resolutions supporting "respectful reburials" of the remains.

The state Senate and the Assembly have also adopted

resolutions supporting reinterment in Battlefield Park.

Lake George officials have requested federal and state officials to intervene on behalf of the community with the U.S. Army.

“The U.S. Army wants to establish that the construction site in Lake George Village was a military cemetery before it can endorse the reinterment of the remains that were found there. We feel we have the documentation to prove that,” said Dan Barusch, the Lake George Planning Director who chairs a committee spearheading the effort.

According to the DEC, the

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Office of US Army Cemeteries does not oppose the burial of the Continental soldiers' remains in Battlefield Park, but has yet to formally endorse the proposal.

U.S. Senator Chuck Schumer, who visited the site in August, 2023, has said he has called upon the U.S. Army to facilitate the reinterment of the remains and perhaps contribute to the expense of creating a memorial plaza.

According to Dan Barusch, the “Repose of the Fallen,” as the memorial will be named, could cost as much as \$500,000.

Much, if not all of its costs, however, are likely to be funded by a \$10 million state Downtown Revitalization grant, awarded Lake George on December 27. As one of the revitalization plan's “anchor projects,” the memorial plaza helped Lake George secure the award.

Honoring Patriots Who Died at Lake George

According to Barusch, Battlefield Park is already the home of the nation's oldest, officially recognized monument honoring Unknown Soldiers.

Those remains – which, in all

likelihood, belong to American provincials who were fighting on behalf of the British king at the 1755 Battle of Lake George - were found during the construction of a road near Lake George in the 1930s and were reburied in the park at that time.

Some 75 years later, in February, 2019, Continental Army soldiers' remains were discovered at a construction site in Lake George Village.

According to Chuck Vandrei, the Environmental Conservation Department Historic Preservation Officer who briefed the APA about the project, the remains of 44 individuals were uncovered once officials halted construction at the site.

Additional remains were found in October, 2023 behind the Lobster Pot restaurant at the corner of Mohican and Canada Streets.

“There are consistencies between the burial of these skeletal remains and those found on Courtland Street in 2019, leading us to surmise that these, too, belonged to someone who died at Fort George,” said Dan Barusch.

“We think the entire ground

was a cemetery," he said.

In fact, Lake George Village may have been the site of the largest military cemetery in the original 13 colonies during the War of Independence.

The remains of those found at Courtland Street and near the restaurant will be among the first to be reinterred in the memorial plaza, which will be situated within 100 feet of the monument to the unknown soldiers who died at the 1755 Battle of Lake George.

"Repose of the Fallen"

According to the DEC, the proposed reinterment facility would comprise: granite columbarium structures to house remains; a walking path connected to the existing park path system; stone benches; low key landscaping with native plants; and interpretive panels.

According to John DiNuzzo, president of the Lake George Battlefield Alliance, the memorial plaza "will be a quiet, contemplative place where visitors can pay homage to the soldiers for the sacrifices they made for future generations. The setting will include informational signage that tells of the soldiers' plight during that pivotal year of 1776, when the United States formally came into being."

Comments may be submitted to: OINA@dec.ny.gov or SLMP_UMP_Comments@apa.ny.gov.

Dan Barusch said he anticipates a Memorial Day, 2025, dedication.