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Adirondack Park Agency Approves Plan to Add Memorial Plaza to Battlefield Park

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The new memorial is expected to be situated near existing monuments

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.

At its April 18 meeting in Ray Brook, NY, the Adirondack Park Agency determined that plans to reinter the soldiers' remains within a memorial plaza at Lake George Battlefield Park did not conflict with the state-owned park's existing management plan.

The memorial is expected to 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 accepted public comments through February 19, 2024.

According to the APA, forty-one letters and emails were received by the two agencies during the comment period.

Nearly all who wrote supported the plans to reinter the soldiers' remains in Battlefield Park.

One commenter, however, preferred the National Cemetery in Saratoga as the soldiers' final resting place; another said taxpayer dollars should not be spent on burying "a bunch of white guys who were unhappy with King George."

Among those who urged the APA to approve the plans were: Jeff Brozyna, past president of the Lake George Land Conservancy; Dr. Lyn Karih Hohmann, past president of the Lake George Battlefield Alliance, who was involved with the recovery of the remains; military historian Douglas R. Cubbison; Gary Moon, vice-president of the Lake George Historical Association; and Lake George Municipal Historian Margaret Mannix.

Former Caldwell-Lake George Librarian Marie Ellsworth said she "was not enthused by the plans" as proposed. "I think the plans look like an effort to provide a pretty area for visitors to sit and admire the lake, and a place for joggers rather than a serious memorial and cemetery for veterans. The benches don't even face the containers with the remains," she wrote.

Lake George Planning and Zoning Director Dan Barusch said that Ellsworth's suggestion that the benches face the memorial "was a good comment" and would be incorporated into the final plans.

According to Barusch, the “Repose of the Fallen,” as the memorial will be named, could cost as much as \$500,000. He said a fund-raising campaign is expected to commence before Memorial Day.

It is hoped that a substantial portion of the costs will be funded by a \$10 million state Downtown Revitalization grant, awarded Lake George on December 27, officials say.

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 of the monument to the unknown soldiers who died at the 1755 Battle of Lake George.