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Speakers at Germantown Rally Share Concerns Over Amtrak Proposal

GERMANTOWN—State Senator Kathy Marchione on Sunday urged Gov. Andrew Cuomo to get involved in the controversial proposal by Amtrak to install gates and fences aiming to block citizens from miles of traditionally accessible Hudson River shore.

“When I go back to my office tomorrow, I believe that this should rise to the governor’s level,” Marchione said at Sunday’s Fight-the-Fences rally in Germantown. “I am going to take this message to our governor, who I believe will, and should, be willing to listen and stand with us on this issue.”

Speaking on a podium in front of the Hudson River and Catskill Mountains, Marchione said Amtrak’s proposal makes no sense. “This would be the wrong project in the wrong place for the wrong reasons. There is strong, principled local opposition to this misguided project, put forth by Amtrak—and you can certainly tell that by the number of people who are here on a Sunday afternoon. This project contains countless negative impacts on Columbia County’s special way of life. I share all of these concerns.”

Members of Germantown’s Waterfront Advisory Committee organized the rally held at Ernest R. Lasher, Jr. Memorial Park. In a town of fewer than 2,000 residents, the rally drew about 150 people, many of whom filled out postcards to comment on the Amtrak proposal to the New York State Department of State.

Assemblymember Didi Barrett cited the waterfront advisory committee’s recently-completed study, which was submitted for final review in March 2018 to the New York State Department of State and town board, and said, “This completely flies in the face of what Germantown is planning.”

Barrett added: “We need to insist there be a public meeting. If Germantown is the only town that wants to have one, then I think Supervisor Beauiry is happy to host a meeting here with Amtrak. Our voices deserve to be heard—your voices deserve to be heard. And the centuries of access to the Hudson River generations of families have enjoyed is part of why we live here.”

Barrett urged people to comment on the proposal to the state. “Let’s keep our Hudson River free and accessible and don’t fence us in,” she said.



Germantown Supervisor Robert Beaury outlined the ways in which he said Amtrak's proposal goes against New York State's coastal management policy. "The Hudson River has sustained this community in many ways for a very long time," Beaury said. "It has and continues to provide jobs, trade, food and recreation. We do not take the river for granted. It is priceless. ... Amtrak wants to keep those it calls trespassers and vehicular traffic off the railroad's right-of-way. We are not trespassers. This river is an important part of the fabric of our community and we have a right to be here."

People are "more likely to get hurt or killed by a speeding Amtrak train if you're a passenger on one," Beaury said. "We can all agree that safety is of primary importance. But let's first identify a problem and then propose a sensible fix. Not everything done in the name of safety makes it safer. ... Amtrak's proposal is a solution in search of a problem. To my knowledge there is no problem along the rails in Germantown."

Jen Crawford, chairperson of the Germantown Waterfront Advisory Committee, explained what Germantown stands to lose if Amtrak's proposal is green-lighted.

"There is a path connecting this park to Cheviot Park and farther south that's a popular destination for fishermen, duck hunters, dog walkers, joggers, and others. In between these crossings is a small town-owned parcel that we hope to turn into a primitive campsite. The path is owned by CSX and leased by Amtrak, and has been owned by various rail entities for decades. It has also been used by the general public for decades—it has been used safely for decades—and its users have been protected by the Germantown Fire Department for decades. As a part of our local waterfront revitalization study, we hope to one day formalize that path into a public riverwalk park that connects Ernest R. Lasher Jr. Memorial Park to Cheviot Park and to the ice dock parcel in between. We also hope to connect the riverwalk park to the town's central sidewalk system via a pedestrian crossing or overpass at Lower Main Street."

Jeff Anzevino, director of land use advocacy, applauded Germantown citizens' passion and their love for the Hudson River.

"A lot of people have worked really hard over these past thirty or forty years to make the river something we can be proud of, something we want to be a part of, and something that brings life to our communities," Anzevino said. "Scenic Hudson stands with everyone here in opposing the gates and will do everything we can to make sure that doesn't happen."

Former Germantown Supervisor George Sharpe stressed the bipartisan nature of opposition to Amtrak's proposal. "We do not want to lose access to our 'poor persons' park'—our beautiful



Hudson River. Our rights should never be diminished. If you give them an inch and they put concrete in some place, they're just going to keep coming back year after year to expand."

"I have been an active firefighter for over fifty years," Sharpe added. "And I have witnessed the emergency rescue road used hundreds of times to help people."

Sharpe said boater registration numbers are up and that he has seen rescues of boaters, train passengers and others that were dependent upon first responders being able to access the shoreline road. "The path to continued safety is to leave things as they are now. Facts speak loudly. Things are working just fine here."

"One last opinion," Sharpe said, "when our young children and youth are out fishing along the shores of our river, with mom and dad, aunts and uncles, grandparents, they are not at home popping illegal drugs."

Phil Williams, treasurer of the Germantown Sportsmen's Association and a member of the Germantown Waterfront Advisory Committee said sportsmen will generally support reasonable proposals. But, he said, "The proposal we received is neither reasonable nor is it clear. So we hope that we can get some better answers so we can continue to enjoy the river."

Jen Benson, outreach coordinator for Riverkeeper, urged people to take the time to comment to the state before the comment period closes on May 1. "Folks from all communities from New York City all the way up to beyond Albany go down to the river for inspiration, for solace and to ground themselves," Benson said.

Vincent Dubois, president of the Rip Van Winkle chapter of Trout Unlimited, said there's a lot of people who depend on the shoreline road along the river for fishing access to fish for striped bass and to scap-net for herring. "If this is closed off, a lot of people aren't going to eat—that's the way it is, if people don't get fresh fish. And it only happens in the spring—herring and stripers and shad come up into the river to spawn. This a real great spawning grounds. ... This is a freedom that we have to protect. Everybody has a right to be here."

Gareth Rhodes, a candidate for the NY-19 congressional district, also attended the rally and spoke with residents.

In the hours following the rally, members of Germantown's waterfront advisory committee were finalizing its second of four 'white papers,' to send to the NYS Department of State. This white paper outlines the state's coastal management policies the committee believes Amtrak's proposal goes against.



WATERFRONT ADVISORY COMMITTEE

Town of Germantown, NY

GermantownWaterfrontCommittee@gmail.com

And, like the speakers, committee members urge citizens to send comments to the state before May 1, when the comment period is scheduled to come to a close, by emailing cr@dos.ny.gov using the subject line "F-2018-0060" (and to also c.c. gates@gtel.net on the comment email, so Germantown has a record of your comments).

Comments by postal mail can be sent to "New York State Department of State, CR F-2018-0060, Office of Planning, Development & Community Infrastructure, One Commerce Plaza, 99 Washington Avenue, Albany, New York 12231." So the town has a record, please mail a duplicate of comments to "Amtrak Gates Comments, Town Hall, 50 Palatine Park Road, Germantown, New York 12526."

The committee wishes to thank all who helped volunteer and spread the word and all who attended the rally. Special thanks to Joyce Vale and Pulcher Transportation for bus services, as well as to law enforcement, town officials, and to the musicians, including members of the Tin Horn Uprising, and to the speakers.



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