

LONG ISLAND

Mixed review for Jones Beach plan

BY JOAN GRALLA

joan.gralla@newsday.com

New York State's \$65 million improvement plan for Jones Beach, subject of a public forum last night in Nassau County, faced support from people pleased with the prospect of jitneys and more bike paths and pressure from union members who want local workers to fill construction jobs.

"Jones Beach will continue to be the people's park," said forum moderator Andy Beers, executive deputy commissioner of the State Office of Parks, Recreation & Historic Preservation.

Jones Beach was battered by super-storm Sandy, and the five-year restoration and upgrade should help it withstand future storms.

Dozens of union members were among the 200 or so people attending the meeting in the county legislative chamber in Mineola. Members of the public asked for specific amenities and alterations and union members called on officials to hire local workers to make those improvements. The project is expected to create more than 620 construction jobs.

Richard O'Kane, president of the Building & Construction Trades Council of Nassau and Suffolk Counties, said construction jobs should go to local workers whose employers have apprenticeship programs — and not workers from out of state.

"A lot of my members have been hurt by Hurricane Sandy and want to get back to work," he said.

Beers said that while all such projects are competitively bid and employers must pay prevailing wages, "I understand prevailing wages are not necessarily the same as union wages."

The forum was the first planned to discuss the Jones Beach project.

Barbara Fiegas, 58, of Lynbrook, a member of the Wantagh Bay Yacht Club, urged officials to accommodate boaters and others who would like to picnic on the beach or watch the sunset while dining.

Some speakers criticized the plan, saying it would bring in too many people and turn the beach they have loved since childhood into an amusement park.

"We grew up going there. We love it," said Maria Fucella, 53, of Levittown.

"Development is wonderful. . . . Overdevelopment is not a good idea. Lacrosse? Soccer? It's over the top. A zip line? It's too much."

George Kiesel, 56, of Freeport, said the restoration plan risked creating more suburban sprawl.

"Keep it simple, a clean beach, a place where people can see the moon and stars at night," he urged.

Speakers disagreed about providing access for all-terrain vehicles.

Plans to possibly add jitneys and bike paths were praised.

Adrienne Esposito, executive director of Citizens Campaign for the Environment, recommended banning plastic bags, showcasing local beer and wine, using more green energy, capturing rainwater — and dropping use of artificial turf.

"Other than that," she said, "we love it."