



Parks officials reviewing proposal for trail system

Commissioner wants to confer with race director who suggested idea for 2 South Shore parks

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Park officials are reviewing a proposal to create a multi-use trail system in Wolfe's Pond and Long Pond parks -- an initiative its creator and Community Board 3 claim would enhance the Island's recreation and bring more people to the South Shore.

Matthew LeBow of Eltingville, race director of the New York Adventure Racing Association (NYARA), has proposed building a trail system in the Prince's Bay and Tottenville parks to be used by hikers, runners, mountain bikers, equestrians and cross-country skiers.

If approved by the city Parks Department, LeBow predicts ground-breaking could take place some time this summer.

"It has the potential to be positive," said Tom Paulo, borough parks commissioner, adding that he intends to discuss the proposal with LeBow by the middle of June. "What I want to pursue with him a bit more is details with the physical layout and how he foresees it being managed."

Parks would also have to take a closer look at the environmental impacts the project would have, Paulo said, adding that mountain biking -- currently not permitted in city parks -- would have to be approved as an acceptable form of recreation there.

LeBow has pledged that all the work would be completed by volunteers and the money for it collected through fund-raisers and donations, meaning the trail system would be built at virtually no cost to the cash-strapped city.

In addition to the trails, LeBow said he would plant a number of new trees, further enhancing an unused portion of the parks and limiting erosion.

His proposal calls for a building mapped trail system -- designed by the International Mountain Bike Association -- which would include loops of various distances and levels of difficulty, suitable for each sport. With about 400 acres of unused land in the two parks, there is a potential for up to 16 miles of trails, LeBow said.

The trails would likely bring recreation enthusiasts from around the country to the city, LeBow said, increasing tourism and creating a much-needed revenue stream for New York.

"We would be attracting hundreds of thousands of people that wouldn't come ordinarily," he said, adding that this would be the only place in the world where you could go mountain biking in the morning, kayak around the Statue of Liberty in the afternoon and catch a Broadway show at night.

"We could sell New York as the world's recreational city," he said.

John Donohue, who chairs Board 3's Parks and Recreation Committee, said he hopes Parks gives the green light to LeBow.

The committee and the full board unanimously approved his plans in March, stating that the proposal would help give a much-needed boost to the South Shore's recreational offerings.

"It would be very helpful," Donohue said. "It's something that's needed and it's something that would be used."

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