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Morning light at the abandoned Central Railroad of New Jersey Terminal Train Shed at Liberty State Park in Jersey City, which is set for restoration. Read about the project on page 6.

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Fighting to Preserve New Jersey's Municipalities

This month, *NJ Municipalities'* focus is on Historic Preservation and Planning. The stories throughout offer strategies and inspiration to protect and cherish the history that helps define communities. Meanwhile, a fight is on in Trenton to ensure a thriving future for municipalities.

local government employers and their employees can now expect for the 3rd time in 4 years a significant, double-digit increase in premiums, based on recent data.

Many employers have already left the systems. Often, those who have not are unable to do so because they don't have the number of employees to competitively bid on the marketplace. This is not sustainable. The State budget should provide relief in the short-term for what could be another staggering premium increase and reform in the long-term to address this chronic issue.

Affordable Housing. Over 430 municipalities met the January 31 deadline to submit a resolution of participation in the housing program. Previous budgets saw the end of the diversion of funds from the State Affordable Housing Trust Fund, but the current proposal diverts funding to the other programs and objectives. As hundreds of municipalities are planning on how to meet the State-imposed housing obligations, a diversion of the housing trust funds, shifts a greater financial burden on property taxpayers and should not be supported.

Be alert. The deadline for a balanced state budget is June 30. Please monitor alerts from the League and be in regular contact with your legislators on the State budget and other legislation, such as public notice requirements and preemption of local zoning. 🇯🇵

Michael Cerra

“
Meanwhile,
a fight is on
in Trenton
to ensure a
thriving future
for municipalities.”

The League has welcomed mayors and affiliates as they've dropped by our offices on their way to testify at budget hearings. I also provided testimony to the Assembly Budget Committee and the Senate Budget and Appropriations Committee. Here are some highlights.

Energy Tax Receipts Diversion. This funding was intended to be distributed back to municipalities for property tax relief. This year again, respectfully, we asked the members of these committees to, at least, begin to restore the over \$330 million that was diverted from these property tax relief programs going back over a decade. While the inclusion of the "Municipal Relief Fund," funded at \$75 million in FY23 and \$150 million in FY24, were positive developments making municipalities whole to the \$330 million they are cumulatively owed, its exclusion in FY25 and in the proposed FY26 budget is disappointing.

SHBP Increases. The continuing rate increases that are borne by local government employers and employees in the State Health Benefits Program is unsustainable. The increases over the past three plan years have been 16%, 7%, and 22%. As we approach Plan Year 2026,



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Journey to a New Life

Historic CRRNJ train shed on track to revitalization

*Jane Rosenblatt Birkhofer, Deputy Commissioner,
N.J. Department of Environmental Protection*



Standing at the entrance to the abandoned Central Railroad of New Jersey Terminal (CRRNJ) train shed at Liberty State Park in Jersey City, you can close your eyes and be transported back in time, imagining thousands of passengers bustling around you as they run to board trains bound for destinations across New Jersey and beyond.

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Journey to a New Life

Approximately 5 million visitors from around the world visit Liberty State Park each year, passing through the restored CRRNJ Terminal building, which lies just in front of the train shed and reopened to visitors in the 1980s. Today, many of these visitors take ferries from a restored historic ferry slip to visit Ellis Island and the Statue of Liberty national monuments.

Fun fact: Shortly after its closure, the train shed was used to film scenes for 1968's "Funny Girl," in which star Barbra Streisand is seen rushing along the platform and boarding a train car. Her performance would earn Streisand the Academy Award for Best Actress in 1969.

The 815-foot-long train shed, however, remains off-limits. Fencing surrounds the deteriorating structure. Weeds and vegetation grow with abandon in the 20 tracks once occupied by iron rails. Intricately designed columns and the still-standing train stops are covered in rust. Myriad sections of the roof are completely rotted away. And a layer of detritus lies over the entirety of its more than 300,000 square feet.

But that is about to change. In 2025, the N.J. Department of Environmental Protection is expected to complete designs for the restoration of approximately 60,000 square feet of the train shed that connects to the terminal



concourse. Early plans include dismantling parts of the historic shed, such as its cast-iron columns and steel roof framing, for restoration where possible. Eventually, the area will become a gathering and event space with seating, signage and artifacts for interpretive programming.

A Major Hub

Since Liberty State Park’s opening in 1976 as New Jersey’s bicentennial “gift to the nation,” the park has been undergoing development and revitalization. The original 1978 master plan for the park envisioned the train shed being restored as a gathering and market space. But as the park opened, the train shed was left untouched.

Designed by A. Lincoln Bush, the Central Railroad of New Jersey train shed is known as a Bush-type train shed (which allowed smoke/steam from the trains to escape it). Built in 1914, it is the third shed to occupy its site and the largest of its type to be constructed—the entire length of a train could fit beneath its roof. A major transportation hub, thousands of commuters used the trains to get to New York. Two-thirds of the estimated 12 to 17 million immigrants who entered the United States through Ellis Island also are believed to have boarded trains in the train shed as they made their way to settle in New Jersey towns or to travel to other states. The terminal operated until 1967 and was designated a National Historic Landmark in 1975.

The multimillion-dollar train shed rehabilitation project, which is expected to be completed in several phases over time, focuses on stabilizing and restoring the existing structure to reopen it to the public, while preserving its historic character. The work is part of the Liberty State Park Revitalization Program, which will bring more than 100 acres of active recreational, arts and cultural improvements to the park. A blueprint for the overall development effort touches most every corner of the park and includes creating a 5.6-mile trail network in the park’s interior, as well as athletic fields and courts in the Southern Athletics Hub; a fishing

pier, splash pad and a kayak launch at the park’s southern jetties; observation platforms and trail upgrades in the Richard J. Sullivan Natural Area; and dedicated bike lanes on Morris Pesin Drive, at the park’s southern end, and on Audrey Zapp Drive, at the north end, with multiuse athletic fields and play features in the Marina Green along the Audrey Zapp Drive corridor.

The sweeping park plan also includes natural landscapes that build resilience to flooding and climate change.

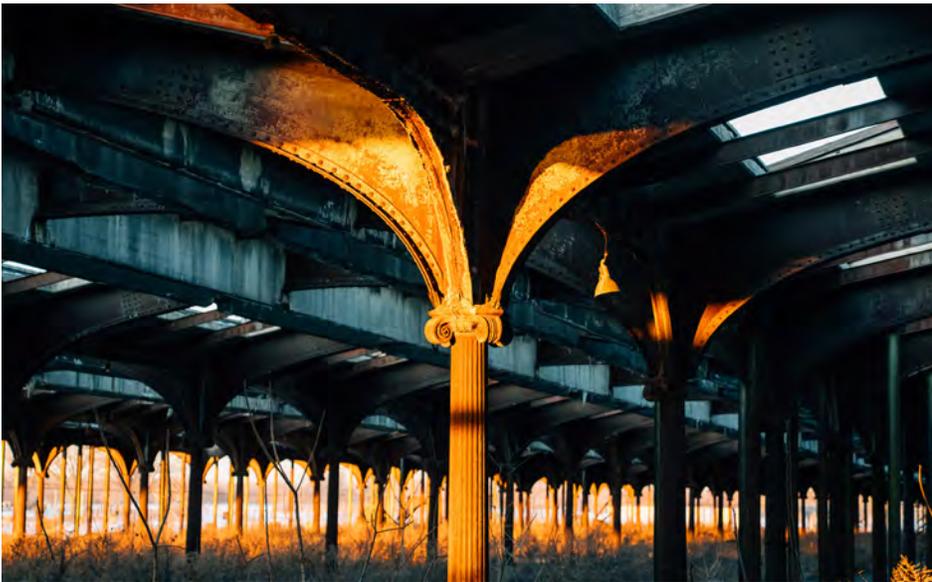
Public engagement has been a vital part of the process since 2020 when virtual meetings focused on the cleanup of the park’s interior. That engagement has since expanded to include in-person and online sessions, including open-house events at which



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Other elements of phase one include incorporating interpretive elements, such as period-appropriate historical exhibits and educational signage to enrich the visitor experience, creating ADA-compliant routes within the space, and building additional connections across platforms with walkways.

In 2025, DEP expects to continue the evaluation of the train shed's

existing conditions, including structural assessments, hazardous materials testing and environmental site investigations. As the first phase of the revitalization work progresses, the remainder of the train shed will be structurally reinforced, with a 50-foot buffer taken apart and stored for future restoration.

After sitting idle for decades, this project will bring life back to a

structure that once represented the first step into a new life for millions. The revitalization of the CRRNJ train shed will pay homage to its historic significance and meet modern needs—creating an incredible space for the public to explore and enjoy. 

Jane Rosenblatt Birkhofer is the Deputy Commissioner of the N.J. Department of Environmental Protection. She is principal adviser to Commissioner Shawn M. LaTourette and responsible for developing strategy and providing leadership for the implementation of priority policies and projects across DEP programs and subsidiary agencies.

LINKS:

- “Funny Girl” clip: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=-Yfh_CpA9Sk
- Liberty State Park Revitalization Program: <https://dep.nj.gov/revitalizelsp/>
- Liberty State Park Design Task Force: <https://dep.nj.gov/revitalizelsp/design-task-force/>



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