



REGIONAL PLAN ASSOCIATION, INC.

... a research and planning agency supported by voluntary membership to promote the coordinated development of the New York-New Jersey-Connecticut Metropolitan Region.

230 West 41st Street, New York 36, N.Y.

(Area Code 212) LOngacre 5-1714

NEWS RELEASE

FOR INFORMATION CALL WILLIAM B. SHORE
LOngacre 5-1714 or MEDford 1-0053 (home)

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BUY ALL UNDEVELOPED FIRE ISLAND, ALL ROCKAWAY POINT FOR PUBLIC.
REGIONAL PLAN URGES

All of Fire Island not now developed should be bought immediately for public beaches and all of Rockaway Point including Breezy Point and Fort Tilden should be acquired for public recreation, Regional Plan Association vice president Otto L. Nelson, Jr. recommended at the hearings today of the Temporary State Commission on Protection and Preservation of the Atlantic Shore Front held at Jones Beach.

Nelson said that all of these beaches would be needed by the metropolitan area's fast-growing population. Now is the time to buy them, he added, when the taxpayer is asked to invest in protecting them. Otherwise, Nelson pointed out, the public investment will benefit mainly private landholders.

Though accepting the need for some improved access to Fire Island, Regional Plan said debate over the appropriateness of a four-lane highway proposed by the State Commission should be postponed until the program of beach protection is adopted and the 17 miles of undeveloped beach are publicly acquired.

Nelson also called for study of the need for public beaches east of Fire Island from Moriches Inlet to Montauk Point.

Regional Plan is a 33-year-old civic organization planning for the three-state metropolitan area surrounding the Port of New York. The Association published a detailed Park, Recreation and Open Space Study in 1960 which was the basis of the recommendations made by Nelson today.

At the outset may I say that the Regional Plan Association is in complete accord with the purposes of the Temporary State Commission on Protection and Preservation of the Atlantic Shore Front as detailed in the law establishing the Commission. Further, much of the material in your June 25, 1962 report to the Governor and the Legislature of the State of New York is admirable. We applaud your declaration that

"Our ocean front is a very precious possession not only to local residents but to millions of our visitors. Its protection requires bold thinking and extraordinary measures.

"The state must look to the barrier beaches for recreation for the ten million people who will before long live on Long Island not to speak of metropolitan visitors."

We believe that in the Regional Plan Association's park studies you will find ample documentation to support such a forward-looking statement. We should like to see the Commission carry out its bold, general statement of purpose. Unfortunately, the Commission's detailed major recommendations fall short of this goal.

May I mention those parts of your report which the Regional Plan Association supports and which we hope will be carried out.

1. Vigorous and immediate steps should be taken to carry out the beach preservation program authorized by Congress and which appeared to be approved by inference in the Commission's report.
2. The Regional Plan Association supports the recommendations made by the Commission on flood beach zoning and such appropriate shore regulations as may be necessary to prevent subdivision and building close to high water in order to safeguard the public interest, health, and safety from the perils of shore front storm damage. As you know, flood plain zoning is in effect in many parts of the United States. The State of New York's

general city, town, and village laws were amended in 1956 to include floods among perils subject to police power regulation. While more specific wording may be desirable, flood beach zoning under reasonable regulations would seem to be available today at least in towns, villages, and cities without special charters. As regards the City of New York, it would seem that legislative amendment of its special charter may be necessary.

3. The Regional Plan Association supports the Commission's recommendation that there be a study of the North Shore of Long Island.

Next I would like to mention those parts of the Commission's report which the Regional Plan Association would respectfully ask the Commission to reconsider in the hope that you might change your present thinking.

1. The Regional Plan Association would like to persuade the Commission to change its thinking and plans with respect to Fire Island.

All of the remaining undeveloped shore front on Fire Island will be needed for public use certainly within the next generation. It should be acquired now.

Fire Island has a shore front of 30.7 miles, of which 18.2 miles are now under federal, state, county, or town ownership. 5.5 miles of shore front are now developed under private ownership. There remain 17 miles of shore front under private ownership but undeveloped. In our opinion these 17 miles of shore front should be acquired and placed under public ownership while this stretch of shore front is relatively inexpensive due to its present inaccessibility. As the Commission knows, this 17-mile stretch of shore front is not only inaccessible but its very existence is threatened by further beach erosion. If, however, substantial funds from federal, state and local taxpayers are used to protect this

shore front and to give this area easier accessibility, the land values will be enhanced tremendously. This enhancement of value, instead of accruing to the general public, will go as a substantial windfall to private owners or speculators.

If I may say so, I am surprised that Commissioner Moses is not championing the ownership of this 17-mile undeveloped stretch of shore front. I recall that on August 20, 1959, the occasion of the 30th anniversary of Jones Beach State Park and the 35th anniversary of the Long Island State Park Commission, Commissioner Moses took the Regional Plan Association to task for a study made in 1923 by Thomas Adams, a British planner, who recommended splitting up Jones Beach into minute subdivisions and selling the lots to cottagers. In 1938 Mr. Adams wrote to Commissioner Moses admitting he was in error and expressing his congratulations and admiration for what had been accomplished at Jones Beach. To whatever degree the Regional Plan Association supported Mr. Adams' view in 1923, we were in error then. In view of Commissioner Moses past championing of his many outstanding developments, such as Jones Beach, he seems strangely out of character in not insisting that this 17-mile undeveloped and inaccessible shore front be acquired and placed under public ownership. This is especially so because it will be public funds that will save this stretch from erosion and encroachment by the ocean and that will improve accessibility. We were glad to learn from the newspapers that Chairman Carlino and Commissioner Moses have agreed to amend the Commission's report to the extent of acquiring something over 4 miles of Fire Island beach as a public park. I respectfully urge the Commission, and Commissioner Moses in particular, to reconsider this question in the hope that you will conclude that all 17 miles of this undeveloped area be acquired immediately.

2. The Regional Plan Association questions the wisdom and desirability of combining the problem of the protection and preservation of the Atlantic shore front of the State of New York with the highway program. The Commission's report makes no case that the shore front boulevard is necessary to preserve the Fire Island beach. The report merely states that the boulevard does not conflict with the United States Army Engineers' beach and hurricane protection program authorized by Congress in 1960.

Let me emphasize that we recognize the importance of easy access to heavily used recreation areas. Recreational access to Fire Island is one thing; converting this narrow sliver of sand and dunes into a four-lane divided highway is quite another. This Commission has a tremendous task in working out a plan for the protection and preservation of the Atlantic shore front and in determining what areas ought to be acquired under public ownership, given the expenditure of substantial amounts of taxpayers' funds. After a long-term plan has been adopted for the protection and preservation of the Atlantic shore front and after the areas reserved for public use have been acquired, then the question of access can properly be considered. To inject this issue of access and highway routes is not only premature but also may imperil the entire program of beach protection and public acquisition.

3. In our opinion the Commission's report gives inadequate attention to the ocean front east of Moriches Inlet. There are 50 miles of ocean front between Fire Island and Montauk Point. As the Commission has pointed out in its report, the Atlantic Ocean beach front is a scarce resource. A determination needs to be made as to how much of this beach front should be placed under public ownership and what restrictions should be adopted for those areas that will be developed under private ownership.

Certainly this important area should not be permitted to go by default or be developed willy-nilly without regard to the future needs of the area.

4. The Regional Plan Association is disappointed in the Commission's recommendations concerning Breezy Point. The Regional Plan Association has long urged public ownership of the whole end of the Rockaway Peninsula west of ^{Jacob} Riis Park. This beach is within 20 miles of 10 million park-hungry people. They need all of it--both Fort Tilden, which the Commission also recommends for an ocean front park, and Breezy Point. All of the privately-owned land at Breezy Point should be acquired immediately. To soften the impact on the present owners of cottages in this area, they could be given a life tenure in their property. This would mean that individuals could be paid adequately for their property now and still be permitted to use it during their lifetime, after which the property would be devoted to public use. While this would take time, it would assure eventual use of this area by the public.

Yesterday's newspaper reports of Sunday's beach use underscore the need for substantial additions to public ocean front in the New York metropolitan area just to serve today's needs. The New York Times reported more than 1 3/4 million persons using beaches at Coney Island, the Rockaways, Atlantic Beach and Jones Beach, with cars turned away from Jacob Riis Park by noon.

Unless we act promptly to add to the 40 miles of public beach estimated in your report--which are inadequate for today--we never shall be able to afford enough ocean front for a population expected to increase by 6 million over the next generation. Based on our research, we conclude that all of Fire Island's undeveloped beach and all of Rockaway Point must be acquired now for the public. Nothing less will fit the needs of this greatest--and growing--metropolis.