

From the Mayor's Desk...April 27, 2021

My Thoughts on Opening Matthiessen Park

At our last Monday, my colleagues on the Board of Trustees (“BOT”) and I voted to remove the residents-only restriction for those visiting Matthiessen Park. This restriction had been in place for decades, but we felt that with proper management and common-sense rules, the time was right to open-up our beautiful park to everyone. While there are residents who are very happy that Matthiessen is now open to all, I am aware that there are residents that did not want to see this change made. I thought it appropriate to share with you my personal thoughts on why I voted how I did.

I believe that the park was under-utilized and can accommodate more guests. While there was a gate attendant from Memorial Day to Labor Day, during the last several years, no one, regardless of residence status, was turned away from entering Matthiessen Park (not including large groups). Additionally, except for weekends from Memorial Day to Labor Day, the park did not have an attendant assigned (that was ~300 days a year). So, in my opinion, we have had a “soft open” of the park for the last several years and there have not been any issues. Being open to all, the park now qualifies for New York State and federal grant money. I am very excited by the possibilities that creates for to future improvements to Matthiessen, including a full renovation and expansion of the bathrooms, making the park more handicap accessible, adding a permanent stage, expanding the kayak racks, adding additional storage for the Recreation Department and building a permanent home for our fire boat and the Rivertowns police boat.

What's Next

As you likely know, Matthiessen Park is currently in the final stages of a significant renovation, including a new playground. If things go as planned, we will be able to open the park by early June. When Matthiessen re-opens, there will be updated rules in place, many of which were presented to and adopted by the BOT last Monday. However, we are still working on some other very important rules with our colleagues in the Recreation and Parks Advisory Committee and the Recreation and Parks staff. Among the most crucial rules remaining are how to deal with groups and allocating the limited resources like the barbeque grills and the picnic tables. I believe that successfully managing groups – both resident and non-resident – will be the key to making opening the park to all a success. One of the largest changes already adopted is allowing bicycles and other non-motorized vehicles in the park. This change led to the only rule that has caused some concern, namely not allowing dogs in the park when it first reopens. I have two great dogs myself and I consider them part of my family, so I understand why there is disappointment with this rule. I assure everyone that we will allow dogs back in the park as soon as we are confident of everyone's safety, including the dogs. We will be regularly reviewing all the rules to ensure that things are running as smoothly as possible, including looking at how the parking is working in the area. Your thoughts on these rules and other ideas for the park are most welcome. You can email me at the email address below to share them.

In closing, I want to thank all of those who took the time to write to the Board and show up at our meetings to express their views. The feedback was very valuable and much appreciated. For those of you who still have concerns, I am happy to personally meet with you to see what we can do to try and alleviate your fears.

Be well,

Brian C. Smith, Mayor
Village of Irvington, NY
bsmith@irvingtonny.gov