



Governor's Transparency Initiative

Lake George Park Commission Summary

October 2021

Background:

The Lake George Park Commission is a small NYS agency charged with the long term protection of Lake George and the safety of its users. The Commission maintains several regulatory and non-regulatory programs to achieve these goals, often operating in partnership with local municipalities and nonprofit organizations. To achieve its goals, the Commission actively works to outreach its many programs to the public and local elected leadership. Transparency of agency operations and initiatives is imperative to its success, and is at the forefront of operational management. The Commission is well known in its surrounding communities for being a highly responsive, highly transparent regionally-based agency. The agency prides itself on this aspect of its program.

Being a regulatory and public safety agency, the Commission always strives to inform its constituents of current policy, programs and activities. The more relevant information that is available to the public in an easy to access manner, the better the public can understand the importance of lake protection initiatives. This document will outline current Commission activities related to agency transparency and identify any areas where new actions can enhance current operations.

Transparency Initiatives:

1. Website: The Commission maintains a fully developed website through NYS IT. The site has up to date information on all Commission meetings, the status of permit applications received, marine patrol activities, invasive species management, boat and dock decal sales and much more. The site is updated on a real-time basis as items come up including meeting audio, video, minutes and outcomes. As questions or comments come up, the Commission has the ability to immediately address them in-house, or with assistance of

NYS IT.

- a. Opportunities: Keep seeking new ways to improve publicly available information on the Commission website.
2. Regulatory Database: Working with an outside contractor, the Commission created a new and comprehensive regulatory database of all current and past permits for thousands of docks, marinas and land use development activities. Over the past three years, the Commission has undertaken an extensive project to scan and catalog 35 years of regulatory records, permits and enforcement matters. Subsequently, its new regulatory database system (CitizenServe) has transformed the Commission's permitting program. The goal of this effort is to significantly streamline the agency's permitting activities and have all of these records more easily accessible to the public. This system is currently being finalized for public-facing use, and is expected to be a considerable step forward in how easily the public can submit application materials and access Commission records. This effort meets Executive Order 8.95 'Using Technology to Promote Transparency, Improve Government Performance and Enhance Citizen Engagement.'
 - a. Opportunities: When the system comes fully online, evaluate regularly for improvements and opportunities to expand accessibility for the public.
3. FOIL Requests: As a result of the Commission's current high level of transparency, the Commission receives a relatively modest amount of FOIL activity, i.e. less than 10 per year. Each FOIL is immediately logged, given to the Executive Director for review, then immediately provided to appropriate staff to fill within 48 hours' time. Most requests are filled within hours of receipt.
 - a. Opportunities: None, the Commission operates at a very responsive level currently.
4. Records Retention: As noted earlier, the Commission scanned 35 years of historic regulatory and programmatic files. In addition, the agency records retention officer actively manages any paper or electronic files annually to see what needs to be sent to the state archives.
 - a. Opportunities: None, current efforts have the agency operating at optimum level on records retention and public availability.
5. Community Meetings: The Commission's geographic authority encompasses nine towns over three counties. With such a relatively small area, the Commission actively engages community leaders and elected officials on a daily basis. Elected officials are encouraged to attend Commission meetings and events, and Commission staff attends local town hall meetings and nonprofit organization meetings on a regular basis. As the central agency for Lake George issues, the Commission is looked to for leadership on a wide array of issues,

and accessibility is key. Local leaders regularly contact the agency Director on his cell phone to resolve any issues in real time, regardless of day or time.

- a. Opportunities: There is always room for improvement in community relations. The Commission Director actively seeks input from community leaders and will continue to do so and even expand on proactive outreach.
6. Social Media: The Commission has never maintained a social media presence. Rather, the agency conducts its own outreach efforts through more traditional means, having excellent relationships with local newspapers, radio stations and local television. In addition, the Commission partners with the nonprofit Lake George Association to assist in providing the public with information of value. As noted earlier, all Commission programs are fully listed and described on its new comprehensive website. The Commission has considered the value of initiating activity on social media through Facebook or other means, but has limited staff and knowledge to do so effectively. As a regulatory and public safety agency with a police patrol, the Commission is also prone to negative posts from individuals who went afoul of regulations or public safety.
- a. Opportunities: With assistance, the Commission could administer the beginnings of a social media presence through Facebook or similar. Discussions would need to take place regarding the benefits versus detractions, and how such a site should be maintained.

Conclusion:

The Lake George Park Commission considers operational and programmatic transparency critically important to the success of its programs, and strives at all times to be as open and available as possible. Decisions are made daily on how to better outreach important information to local decision makers and the interested public. The Commission firmly believes that the agency is a representative part of the Lake George regional communities, which is confirmed through its existing partnerships with local municipalities and nonprofits. This level of trust and partnership can only be earned and maintained with actions that have the public interest always out front.