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Tree museum will be a taste of paradise



In the 1970 Joni Mitchell classic, "Big Yellow Taxi," when they paved paradise and put up a parking lot, they took all the trees and put 'em in a tree museum.

Back then, that absurd notion was a metaphor for our destruction of the environment. But now, 45 years later, it might be a model for its preservation.

So before one cynically dismisses the idea of creating a New York state tree museum on the 60-acre Mohawk Harbor development and casino site in Schenectady, it might be wise to consider the many ways it could enhance our community.

Last week, Proctors CEO Philip Morris and Mac Sudduth, head of the miSci museum in Schenectady, pitched the idea of using the riverside development

site for an educational park featuring as many as 450 species of trees that grow in New York. The number and variety of trees, enhanced by educational materials and plaques, would not only improve the aesthetic beauty of the site, but would also entice students, environmentalists, and other outdoor enthusiasts to visit the property for learning and enjoyment.

The idea of a tree museum, while certainly rare, is not without precedent.

In 2009, Irish artist Katie Holten created a tree museum along a 4.5-mile stretch of the Grand Concourse in the heart of the Bronx. It features 100 native trees, a map and identifying markers, and an audio guide and tour that visitors can access from their cellphones. The guide features commentary about individual trees, ecology, the neighborhood, local history and recollections from residents, ecologists, gardeners and celebrities.

On a 2.5-acre parcel on the shores of Lake Zurich in Switzerland, noted landscape architect Enzo Enea uses 25 varieties of trees in his tree museum to demonstrate the artistic relationship between architecture and nature. (Photo is above.)

The Schenectady project could incorporate elements of these other tree museums as well as utilize miSci's expertise and resources to provide local residents, school kids, college students and other visitors to the site with a unique educational, artistic and recreational experience.

As opposed to paving paradise, Schenectady's new tree museum will create its own kind of paradise. And our city certainly can never have enough of that.