

NCPR
November 10, 2011

Ulrich tapped as first woman to chair Adirondack Park Agency

Governor Andrew Cuomo made history yesterday when he chose Lani Ulrich as the first woman ever to lead the Adirondack Park Agency. The Old Forge resident takes over immediately and will guide the APA as it makes a decision on the controversial Adirondack Club and Resort project in Tupper Lake.

The governor also made history by picking a St. Lawrence County resident to sit on the commission for the first time. Sherman Craig is a woodworker and former teacher from Wanakena. As Brian Mann reports, yesterday's announcement leaves a couple of big unanswered questions.

Audio:

<http://www.northcountrypublicradio.org/news/audio/111110bmulrich.mp3?download>

After months of silence, Governor Andrew Cuomo revealed yesterday morning on the public radio program Capital Pressroom that his pick for a Park Agency chair was about to happen.

“We did a series of interviews last week,” Cuomo said. “We’ll have an announcement imminent on the APA.”

Later in the day, the governor formally named Lani Ulrich from Old Forge, whose name had been circulating for weeks as a likely candidate.

Ulrich has served as a rank-and-file member of the APA board for seven years and helped found the Adirondack Common Ground Alliance, but couldn't be reached yesterday for a comment.

But at a gathering last month, hosted by Adirondack Life magazine and North Country Public Radio, she argued that the APA has been improving ties with local government leaders.

“You’re going to hear much more positive comments from local town leaders about the Agency, much more frequently than you did five years ago,” Ulrich argued.

“There is a new day, I believe. Can it get better? Absolutely. Are there conversation that can happen, are there Pandora’s boxes that we can open? I think so.”

Ulrich also defended the Agency’s role as a regulatory board, charged with shaping development inside the blue line. She says that’s a job that more local leaders have come to appreciate.

“Some towns are really very pleased to have someone else deal with some of their business developers within their community. Instead of having to be the bad guy to say 'No' to some kinds of development that's undesirable to them. And some don't have the depth of legal support and planning support to deal with some of the bigger projects. And they are very, very happy to not be the one who has to say No. And that's something that's hard for some of our community leaders to say.”

Because she's already a member of the APA board, Ulrich won't need confirmation by the state Senate.

But she was already seen as the consensus candidate, drawing praise from across the Park's political spectrum. Here's state Senator Betty Little:

“I applaud the governor on it. I think she will make an excellent chair. Lani is a person who listens to others, who has a real knack for bringing people together. I think she will be very balanced.”

That view was echoed by environmental leaders such as John Sheehan with the Adirondack Council, who pointed to Ulrich's work with a group that has tried to build consensus in the Park.

“Work that she's done on the Common Ground Alliance has really given her an opportunity to work with both local government and environmental interests and try to find some middle area for everybody to draft a common agenda. So that's been good experience for what is generally a pretty contentious job.”

Governor Cuomo also named Wanakena resident Sherman Craig to the board. He's a woodworker, a former educator, a member of the Adirondack Mountain Club and a local businessman.

In an interview last night with North Country Public Radio, Craig said he felt that the APA could find a balanced approach to environmental protection and support for Park communities.

“I feel strongly we can,” Craig said. “I feel strongly about the value of the Park, the importance of the forest preserve and the importance of a fair living for my neighbors.”

Craig will need confirmation when the state Senate reconvenes in January. One unanswered question is whether he'll be allowed to cast votes on major projects before that happens.

This month, the APA begins a three-month process that will lead to a final decision on the Adirondack Club and Resort project in Tupper Lake – one of the biggest decisions in the agency's history.

The Council's John Sheehan says it was important that the governor make this announcement before the Big Tupper review got underway.

“It’s good timing that the governor got this appointment done now. Because this is just time when we need to see some additional faces and a full set of commissioners at the Park Agency,” Sheehan said.

One other unanswered question involves the fate of other sitting commissioners – including Lake Placid’s Arthur Lussi — whose official terms have expired.

Lussi has made it clear that he’d like to be tapped for a second term on the board, but the governor gave no hint Wednesday about the likelihood of reappointments.