

# Adirondack Park chair appointment coming soon?

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*Karen Feldman, pictured at a 2018 meeting, was the last acting chair of the Adirondack Park Agency's board. The post has been vacant since she resigned in 2019. Photo by Nancie Battaglia*

The [Adirondack Park Agency](#) is looking more depleted these days, a concern for both local government officials and environmental advocates as the park faces major issues like climate change, a shortage of affordable housing and more visitors.

On its eight-member board, the agency has one vacant position, two board members serving on expired terms and still no chair more than [two years after the last one resigned](#). Karen Feldman was the last interim chair of the

agency. She resigned in May 2019. But Gov. Andrew Cuomo's administration is working on appointing a chair, his office told the *Adirondack Explorer*.

"We are in the process of identifying and designating a new Chair of the Adirondack Park Agency and looking to make an announcement in the near future," said Haley Viccaro, spokesperson for the governor. Viccaro also highlighted that Cuomo "has made it a priority to support economic development and tourism in the area" and he "remains committed to protecting the Adirondacks."

So far, several advocacy groups have not heard talk of a chair appointment.

David Gibson, managing partner of Adirondack Wild: Friends of the Forest Preserve, said Cuomo could appoint a chair among the existing members at any time.

"I think the governor is satisfied with the status quo," Gibson added. "It's not a good situation. It's a rudderless APA."

Art Lussi and John Ernst are the two board members whose terms expired on June 30. Ernst had received no word on a reappointment, he said in an email. He said he would be glad to stay on the board if Cuomo wanted him. Lussi did not respond to an email requesting comment.

Viccaro said the two board members serving on expired terms may continue to serve.

There is also need for a new appointment after [Chad Dawson resigned from his APA](#) board seat last year. Dawson resigned after criticizing the state Department of Environmental Conservation for putting recreation over environmental protection, something the DEC countered was untrue.

Viccaro said any new appointments or reappointments must be confirmed by the state Senate. But the 2021 legislative session in Albany is over, at least for now.

During a panel discussion at an APA 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary symposium hosted by Adirondack Experience, local leaders and advocates were united in the call for a new agency board leader. They noted past, big-picture projects the APA once tackled, such as closing landfills in the park.

"We don't see that type of bold, proactive leadership recently," Peter Bauer, executive director of Protect the Adirondacks, said [during the virtual](#)

[symposium](#). Bauer said the APA is “poorly positioned to be a dynamic actor in terms of affordable housing (and) small business transitions,” and added that invasive species, forest preserve overuse and wildlife impacts are also of concern.

Bill Farber, chairman of the Hamilton County Board of Supervisors, called some of the APA’s past work “groundbreaking.” Now, Farber said during the symposium, the APA is “not adequately staffed or funded.”

“I’m not sure we’ve kept up with the planning,” Farber added. “The park agency needs

A past agency leader, Lani Ulrich, wondered how the APA would address “this huge time of transition” in the post-COVID period. Ulrich stepped down from her Adirondack Park chair post in May 2016.

“How are we going to educate our new Adirondack landowners?” Ulrich said.

Ulrich also said the agency should do more to work with people of color, with more interactions and outreach. While tourism and economic development have been a highlight for the Cuomo administration, Ulrich also noted that some communities do not want growth and are “fine being traditional bedroom communities.”

Bill McKibben, an international environmental advocate and leader of the climate organization [350.org](#), said the APA also needs to think about the park’s role in reducing greenhouse gas emissions and addressing climate change. The Adirondack Park, McKibben said, has always been interesting as a model for “where people and nature are figuring out how to make their living in more or less the same spot.”

“It’s the job of the APA to manage those tensions,” McKibben added, “not in a haphazard way over recent decades, responding to political pressures and not perhaps thinking as systematically or holistically as it could.”